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## Organizing the Self-Employed: Theoretical Considerations and Empirical Findings

**ABSTRACT** ■ Trade unions across Europe have pursued various strategies in their attempt to revitalize. Austria's largest trade union has chosen to broaden its membership base by organizing and representing new membership groups such as dependent self-employed workers. We argue that this new category of workers poses a distinct challenge to a union's identity, since their heterogeneous and highly individualized working conditions contribute to very individualistic personality traits. This article draws a picture of identity conceptions, normative orientations and prospective behaviour of dependent self-employed workers towards unions and suggests union strategies to deal with them.

**KEYWORDS:** Austria ■ organizing ■ self-employment ■ trade unions ■ union revitalizing

### Introduction

In recent decades, industrial restructuring and company downsizing have been associated with systematic attempts to reduce labour costs. Increasingly, employers have been replacing directly employed staff with workers who are legally self-employed but in fact wholly dependent on the company (Barley and Kunda, 2004; Keller and Seifert, 2004). As yet the extent of this employment relationship is still rather limited: in Austria, Germany and Denmark, dependent self-employment is estimated to account for only 1 to 2 percent of the total workforce, though Italy is an outlier with 11 percent.<sup>1</sup> However, this trend poses a distinct challenge to trade unions' identities for reasons set out below. Dependent self-employed people usually have one client and they generate their whole income from this employment (and accordingly business) relationship (Blaschke, 2002: 529). However, while there exists a state of economic dependence, there is no subordinate status in the legal sense (Perulli, 2003: 6). Some states, like Austria, have a legally defined concept

of dependent self-employment, while in many others the status is well-known and discussed. However, one must strictly differentiate this form of work from so-called 'spurious' self-employment, where a worker may claim to be self-employed in order to avoid tax or social security contributions but is actually a dependent employee according to the definitions in national law (Perulli, 2003: 15).

'Genuine' dependent self-employed workers come close to the ideal type of the future worker proposed by Voß and Pongratz (1998; Pongratz and Voß, 2003), the 'entreplooyee' (*Arbeitskraftunternehmer*), in that their heterogeneous and highly individualized working conditions contribute to very individualistic personality traits. In consequence, they may be expected to be less inclined than other employees to join a trade union. Moreover, in many countries unions have resisted the emergence of new employment types such as dependent self-employment (Goslinga and Sverke, 2003), and have failed or refused to recruit such workers, at least until recently.

Against this background, this article discusses a new category of union membership covering dependent self-employed members, and links it to the organizational capacities and willingness of trade unions to attract and retain this group. We are particularly interested in the individual as well as collective identities of dependent self-employed workers and how these shape their attitudes towards unions, on the one hand, and in unions' responses to these identities, on the other. In this regard, we go beyond a strand of literature on organizational commitment (Goslinga and Sverke, 2003: 295–6; Meyer and Allen, 1997) that refers to union commitment as the psychological bond between individuals and their union. Researchers, for instance, statistically evaluate union commitment to determine differences between traditional and 'atypical' workers in terms of membership turnover and union participation. In contrast, we utilize a qualitative approach to develop a broader concept of identities and the related attitudes and behaviour of dependent self-employed workers towards unions.

While a number of scholars agree on the problems concerning the integration of increasingly heterogeneous constituencies into the union movement (Dølvik and Waddington, 2002; Gottschall and Kroos, 2003; Keller, 2001), so far there exist no empirical studies focusing on the identity concepts of dependent self-employed union members. We attempt to fill this gap by presenting an ideal-typical concept of self-employed members' identities, obtained from exploratory field research on the one hand, and theoretical exploration of Weber's action theories and of literature on identity construction on the other, as a basis for further research.

Field research was conducted within the Austrian *Gewerkschaft der Privatgestellten* (GPA, Union of Salaried Employees). The union,

which is the largest of the 13 affiliates of the Austrian union confederation ÖGB and organizes salaried staff across the private sector, has established a special section called *Interessengemeinschaft work@flex* (IG work@flex). This is a representation structure supplementing the union's existing sectoral groupings, created to pursue the special interests of dependent self-employed people working under a contract for services.

The article starts with an overview of trade union behaviour towards atypical employees in general, and the dependent self-employed in particular, and continues with a detailed description of our field research methods, enriched with a secondary analysis of Micro-census data on dependent self-employed workers provided by *Statistik Austria* (the central organization of the public social insurance system) (2004). Thereafter, we give a definition of dependent self-employment, which we operationalize for our selected case, and present data on the incidence of the dependent self-employed people and their unionization rate. In order to locate our exploratory field research in a broader analytical framework, we focus on some theoretical perspectives. Finally, we present the results of our analysis and propose an ideal-typology of dependent self-employed union members' identities and related motives and behaviour.

## Trade Unions and Dependent Self-Employed Workers

Most European trade unions have suffered substantial declines in membership rates since the early 1980s (Ebbinghaus and Visser, 2000; Pernicka, 2005; Traxler et al., 2001). This has in turn triggered an extensive debate within and outside trade unions on strategies to revitalize national labour organizations (Frege and Kelly, 2004). Current research centres primarily on explaining national differences in union responses to global decline. The most prominent explanatory variables are industrial relations institutions, state and employer strategies, union structures and identities (Behrens et al., 2003; Frege and Kelly, 2003; Hyman, 1994, 1996). While Anglo-Saxon unions, for instance, are heavily dependent on membership recruitment and organizing 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: 28). Established institutions, like sectoral bargaining, the statutory system of works councils or labour law in general, provide structural power resources and legitimacy to unions irrespective of their membership rates, at least in the short and medium term. However, for some years now, the largest Austrian and German unions have also seen the need to dedicate increasing resources to organizing new member groups. In order to offset the problem of membership losses, some have opened their doors to

formerly excluded groups of atypical employees (Behrens et al., 2003; Pernicka, 2005).

Such organizing strategies sometimes appear to be taken opportunistically and reactively (Hyman, 1996: 73). Hence, they seem to be merely a result of adaptation processes to external changes rather than of autonomous deliberative action by officers and activists. This points to a problematic relationship between recruitment strategies and union identities. In systems-theoretical terms, the distinctive identity of an organization or system derives from selecting and filtering a limited amount of information from an over-complex environment (Luhmann, 1984). From this perspective, unions are self-referential systems that assure their reproduction by broadening the scope of their domain in order to tackle membership losses. However, in Luhmann's theory the reproduction of organizational identities is neither differentiated further nor do individual actors play any role in these processes. In contrast to this theoretical position, empirical observations show that the transformation of union identities is a highly contested field of social interactions. Therefore, and in contrast to the homeostatic perception of organizations and their external environment held by the systems theory, we regard union identities as being formed and reproduced by individual actors and/or groups. In line with a constructivist argument, which takes identity to be an emerging effect of ongoing relations rather than an internal, pre-given essence, we assume individuals take an active and constructive part in the development of both individual and collective identities (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Jensen and Westenholz, 2004). Hence we are particularly interested in the processes of interaction between new member groups, such as the dependent self-employed workers investigated here, and existing union officers, staff members and the unions' external environment. We assume that this interaction plays a crucial role in maintaining and even transforming union identities.

## Methodology

As mentioned earlier, in this study we combined exploratory participant observation and statistical data analysis with theoretical exploration in order to approach the research question. Participant observation is a field strategy that utilizes documentary analysis, interviews with interviewees and informants, direct participation and observation as well as introspection (Denzin, 1989: 157–8). This method in particular enabled us to generate data on the identity conceptions, normative orientations and behaviour of dependent self-employed workers towards trade unions. We chose a relatively narrow field of observation for pragmatic reasons. However, this approach provided us with insights into the active

construction of decisions, documents and texts, and, hence, individual and group actions, including non-verbal behaviour. The author is aware of the bias produced by the deliberate selection of the case and the respondents, limiting our perspective to dependent self-employed union members while excluding non-members from our investigation. However, our question is focused on the attitudes and motives which lead dependent self-employed workers to join trade unions, which we assume to be revealed by the chosen research setting. In order to give an overview of the broad characteristics (economic sector, age, gender) and spread of dependent self-employed workers in Austria, we utilized secondary data drawn from GPA member statistics and the Micro-census of the second quarter of 2004 by *Statistik Austria*. The exploratory fieldwork at the GPA was carried out in two consecutive phases. In May 2002 we began the participant observation, which lasted two and a half years. In autumn 2004, we additionally conducted three in-depth interviews with dependent self-employed union members and one interview with an official of IG work@flex, and interviewed three staff members of the GPA who are in charge of self-employed members at different levels of the union organization. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

We gained research access in the following way: after the GPA had set up the special section for dependent self-employed workers in 2001, a federal committee (*Bundesausschuss*) was elected in May 2002 by those GPA members who had subscribed to the group. The author of the article was herself a candidate, and held the position of a federal committee member for two and a half years, for the first year as its chairperson. The tasks of the *Bundesausschuss* include the delegation of members to the GPA federal and regional committees and the external representation of the dependent self-employed workers' interests. After a few months, a relationship of mutual trust had developed. As the author felt that the situation was a very good setting for participant observation, she let the other group members know that she would like to use her role also for purposes of research. In the course of her investigation, the author took part in numerous internal discussion forums, collected published data from official GPA committees like the federal forum (*Bundesforum*) and executive board (*Bundesvorstand*), and attended regular meetings with ordinary members of the self-employed section. She took notes of most of her observations and informal discussions.

## Dependent Self-Employment and Union Membership

In Austria, dependent self-employment falls only partly under a legal definition, and estimations of the number of dependent self-employed workers are therefore difficult. However, there are two statutory

employment relationships in Austria that come close to our definition of this group: the so-called 'new self-employed' (*neue Selbstständige*) and 'freelance contractors' (*freie Dienstnehmer*). According to census data from *Statistik Austria*, in 2004 there were on average 69,220 people (of whom 56 percent were women) employed under a freelance contract. Of these, 44,278 (of whom 59 percent were women) earned less than €323.46 per month. In the same year there were 33,151 'new self-employed', of whom 39 percent were women.

Using slightly different data from *Statistik Austria*, we take the Micro-census data for the second quarter of 2004 that do not level out fluctuations in the number of workers over the year.

As can be seen in Table 1, age is significantly related to the numbers of dependent self-employed persons in Austria. The proportion is at its peak relatively early in individuals' occupational careers (freelance contracts, 4 percent at 20–29 years; 'new self-employed', 2.6 percent aged 35–39), then falls continually until the statutory pension age of 60 years (women) and 65 years (men) when there is a sharp rise (60–64 years: freelance contracts, 12.6 percent; 'new self-employed', 5.2 percent). This pattern might reflect underlying power relationships between capital and labour: both beginners and older people face reduced chances of being engaged under a standard employment contract. On the one hand, employers wish to reduce personnel costs and to maximize the period of probation by offering dependent employment relationships to younger people; on the other, they avoid engaging older people on the assumption that they are more likely to become sick and are less productive.

**TABLE 1. 'New Self-Employed' and Freelance Contracts by Age and Gender, Second Quarter 2004 (% of Total Employment)**

Age groups	'New self-employed'			Freelance		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
15–19	0.3	0.6	0.9	0.7	1.7	2.4
20–24	0.3	0.1	0.4	1.7	2.3	4.0
25–29	1.0	0.4	1.4	2.4	1.6	4.0
30–34	1.2	0.7	1.9	1.1	1.1	2.2
35–39	1.3	1.3	2.6	0.4	0.9	1.3
40–44	0.9	1.4	2.3	0.3	1.1	1.4
45–49	1.2	0.6	1.8	0.3	1.5	1.8
50–54	1.0	0.5	1.5	0.2	2.1	2.3
55–59	1.2	0.9	2.1	0.8	4.4	5.2
60–64	2.4	2.8	5.2	4.0	8.6	12.6
65+	4.2	0.0	4.2	14.7	5.0	19.7

Source: *Statistik Austria* Micro-census; own calculations.

However, it should also be mentioned that people of retirement age often voluntarily choose such a contract as a flexible means of earning extra money to supplement their pension.

Table 2 shows the heterogeneity of dependent self-employment: almost all sectors of the economy exhibit at least a small proportion of these employment contracts, with a concentration in the service sector. This is also reflected in Table 3, which shows self-employed union

**TABLE 2. 'New Self-Employed' and Freelance Contracts by Sector (% of Total Employment Sector)**

Employment sector	'New self-employed'	Freelance
Manufacturing	0.4	1.0
Construction	0.8	0.5
Wholesale and retail trade, etc.	1.0	1.1
Hotels and restaurants	1.2	0.9
Transport, storage and communication	0.9	0.9
Financial intermediation	0.2	1.5
Real estate, renting and business activities, consulting	3.0	2.7
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	0.6	0.4
Education	0.9	1.6
Health and social work	0.9	1.4
Other community, social and personal service activities	1.7	4.6
Total	1.0	1.4

Note: These data are rough estimators only, since the subgroups of specific branches and the number of respondents are rather small.

Source: as Table 1.

**TABLE 3. Self-Employed GPA Members in Selected Economic Branches, February 2004 (% of All Self-Employed Union Members Who Specified Their Branch of Activity)**

Employment sector	Self-employed members
Manufacturing	7.5
Construction	0.0
Wholesale and Retail Trade	2.5
Communication	8.3
Business Services and other Trade Services	42.5
Research/Education and Culture	15.8
Health and Social Services	10.8

Source: GPA database, own calculations.



members by selected sub-departments (economic branches) of the GPA. The diversity of branches and sectors where dependent self-employed persons work, as well as their engagement in many cases at several work sites and their often flexible working-time arrangements render their organization and effective interest representation rather difficult. Since the heterogeneity of their employment conditions might lead to a fragmentation of interests among the dependent self-employed workers as well as between them and dependent employees in the same sector, we also expect mutual solidarity to decrease. In 2004, there were 703 registered union members, or about 0.3 percent of all GPA members, in the IG work@flex (GPA, 2005).

## Theoretical Perspectives

The individual and collective identities of newly dependent self-employed workers, and hence their normative orientations towards collective interest representation, are assumed to change in parallel with their labour market situation (Voß and Pongratz, 1998: 152–3). Since their altered status often follows the outsourcing of previously direct employment, dependent self-employed persons are expected to manage their own labour power and to bear the risk of market failure, even if they continue to provide their services for the same company. In accordance with these characteristics, we suppose that dependent self-employed workers tend to internalize individualistic orientations and to prefer self- rather than collective representation of their interests. Moreover, the formation of individualistic, utilitarian orientations among the dependent self-employed might represent only the prototype of a more general trend within the labour force, that could threaten to undermine traditional views of solidarity and trade union democracy (Valkenburg, 1996: 91). Since unions, as associations of the relatively powerless (in contrast to the employers), cannot derive significant power resources by simply adding up their members' individual resources and identities, they need to create a non-utilitarian collective identity (Offe and Wiesenthal, 1980: 78) in order to maintain their existence as collective organizations in the long run. Hence, apart from the structural employment situation, the crucial factors in determining whether dependent self-employed workers join or refrain from joining a union are, on the one hand, their individual self-perception towards unions and their recognition by others (identity), and, on the other, the workers' and unions' capacity and willingness to amalgamate individual identities and hence interests to form a collective identity.

Since traditional identities based on social classes, family, gender and so on have been diluted, collective as well as individual identities need to

be transformed or even newly constructed (Beck, 2003: 115ff; Jensen and Westenholz, 2004: 4). However, in contrast to a radical post-modernist reading, which assumes identities to depend exclusively on immediate interaction with people and physical surroundings (Jensen and Westenholz, 2004: 4), we suppose that socialization and former experiences with unions still play a crucial but diminishing role in determining one's identity. Social identity formation is always a matter of political struggle for recognition (Eickelpasch and Rademacher, 2004: 12), in particular when it comes to a relatively powerless group within the labour force like the dependent self-employed.

Moreover, social as well as individual identities have lost their monolithic form in favour of a more pluralist one (Welsch, 1990: 181) and are always threatened with loss of relevance as a result of massive changes in external conditions. Dependent self-employed workers, who are permanently exposed to the risks of market fluctuations, face a specific form of internal struggle of identity formation. Since their employment contract blurs the traditional dividing line between capital and labour, they may either create an identity as 'entrepreneur' or take up the identity of an economically dependent employee. In the latter case, we assume a more union-friendly orientation than in the former. In the course of our exploratory research, we were therefore looking for the individual and collective identities of our focused group, their subsequent motives and their behaviour towards unions.

## Field Research Findings

The GPA launched a large-scale reform of its organization in June 2000, aimed both at establishing a modern and flexible structure so that the union could react faster to new developments in the labour market, and at recruiting new social groups such as dependent self-employed workers. The most important structural changes included replacing the previous six sections (for trade and industry, commerce, money and credit, insurance, social insurance and agriculture) and more than 200 subunits by 24 sectoral groupings, and the establishment of special sections called *Interessengemeinschaften* (IGs). The latter are designed to organize and react flexibly to the needs of special groups of trade union members: for instance, dependent self-employed, temporary agency workers or IT staff, whose interests cut across branches and geographical divisions. The union also established a system of 'issue platforms' (*Themenplattformen*) designed to provide ordinary union members with the means to participate in discussions on specific issues, such as working-time and work-life-balance (GPA, 2000; Pernicka, 2005: 215).

The officers of the federal and local committees of the IGs are either

works councillors or ordinary union members. In this regard, the GPA policy approach aims both to recruit and to support members within and beyond the level of the company. Like the sectoral groupings, the IGs elect some of their members as delegates to various decision-making bodies of the GPA, such as the federal executive board. Since the number of delegates sent by any committee is determined by its relative membership strength, and the IGs are still rather small compared with the sectoral groupings, their decision-making influence is also very limited so far. However, the approach to encourage intra-organizational participation by ordinary union members represents a major paradigm shift for the GPA, whose elected officers were traditionally recruited almost exclusively from works councillors.

As noted in the introduction, in 2001 the GPA set up an IG for dependent self-employed workers, IG work@flex. In May 2002, its federal committee (*Bundesausschuss*) was elected by those GPA members who joined the group. In May 2002, when the seven elected officers came together formally to constitute their group and took up their positions on the federal committee, they became fully aware of the heterogeneity of their individual characteristics as well as of their employment conditions. The group consisted of a call-centre agent, a bicycle messenger and a media observer, who were all working under freelance contracts, and two further education instructors engaged under contracts to perform specific tasks. Two committee members, a works councillor and a social researcher (the author of this article), had a dependent employment relationship. Both stated that they had decided to run for election for reasons of personal interest in the subject matter and a strong feeling of solidarity with dependent self-employed persons.

It is important to note that the majority of officers were between 25 and 35 years old, while the works councillor and one further education instructor were more than 45 years old when they joined the federal committee. There was an almost equal gender distribution. Turnover among the self-employed officers was considerable; in the first two and a half years, only the participant observer had continuous membership of the committee. However, at least three officers were university students whose membership ended when they finished their studies and commenced standard employment. This is consistent with the fact that people who have just started their occupational careers are among those most likely to become dependent self-employees. Hence, the younger cohorts especially expected their atypical employment relationship to be of only limited duration.

Since nobody except the works councillor had any experience as an officer of a trade union, it was difficult to create a stable self-perception as union representative. However, nobody realized at first that members of the recently established IG broke a tradition of the GPA dating back

to the beginning of the labour movement in Austria. With only a few exceptions at regional level, elected officers were always exclusively drawn from among works councillors.

The works council is the main representative body at company level in Austria (as in Germany): its consultation and codetermination rights in social, staff and economic matters are legally prescribed by the Work Constitution Act (*Arbeitsverfassungsgesetz*). Formally separate from the works councils, the trade unions have the right of employee representation outside the firm. Despite this dual-channel system of interest representation, the majority of union officers are recruited from among works councillors (Traxler et al., 2000: 85–6).

Since the existing labour law does not allow dependent self-employed workers to be elected as works councillors, the officers were (apart from the exception mentioned earlier) ordinary members only. Hence, their interests and needs vis-a-vis the union were relatively novel, and there existed no tradition to integrate them. Moreover, there was some scepticism concerning self-employed members among trade union staff and officers who represented the interests of members with standard employment relationships in traditional sectors. Some of them believed that self-employed members might threaten the position of their main constituents as well as their own position within the GPA. Works councillors who become elected officers have already gained knowledge of the union's internal structures and decision-making processes and are also sensitized to the interests of the permanent staff. However, the lack of such experience in the case of dependent self-employed officers has triggered struggles for identity formation within the union organization (Pernicka, 2005: 219) that have continued until today. It remains to be seen whether or not members of this group might gain the same recognition within the organization as works councillors.

As mentioned earlier, officers of the IGs were also expected to meet their rank-and-file members regularly and hence represent the interests of dependent self-employed workers. For this purpose, once a month the officers got together with ordinary union members and non-members in order to communicate their ideas and decisions and gather information on the needs and interests of their constituents. After some meetings, it turned out that the heterogeneity of individual backgrounds and working conditions largely limited the capacity to reconcile their interests. However, some of the dependent self-employed workers stated that they had felt very isolated and lonely before coming to the meetings, but then became aware that their employment situation was not an individual exception.

It is important to note that most of the dependent self-employed members and non-members wished to improve their social situation, and agreed on the political demand put forward by the union officers to

extend social and labour law to include this group of workers as well. This revealed that those dependent self-employed workers who attended the union meetings were worse off than ordinary employees and some faced precarious conditions in terms of income and working arrangements. However, most people attended the meetings when particular services like tax advice were being offered. The majority of union members who subscribed to IG work@flex did not show up at these meetings, which might be explained by a multitude of reasons. Some explicitly told us that there were timing conflicts because of their flexible work schedule, which was mainly determined by external conditions rather than their own decisions. Others might not have been interested in this kind of membership activism and were content to be 'passive' members. However, there was also some evidence that the heterogeneity of dependent self-employment relationships prevented the officers from meeting the differing interests and needs of their constituents, and hence from motivating them to attend the meetings.

In summary, we can draw a rough picture of the self-perceptions and orientations of the union officers as well as of the dependent self-employed rank-and-file union members. This in turn provides the basis for an analytical typology of motives and behaviour of such members towards trade unions, which can be used to inform further research (see Table 4). A common dichotomy is between two groups of orientations, individualistic and collective (Hyman, 1996: 69). In the light of what Beck (2003) calls reflexive modernity, we do not define individualistic orientations only as 'egoism', but include in the definition also the increasing autonomy and reflexivity of individuals. Therefore, those with individualistic orientations are likely to seek independently to choose from a set of alternative possibilities in order to achieve their personal goals. This normative orientation corresponds to a self-perception as a self-determined individual, who might of course decide to become part of a larger collective as well. However, collectivity is then no longer given by tradition, homogeneity of interests or collective affection, but is created by autonomous decisions to join and even engage in a group or organization (Zoll, 1996: 82). Our observation and interviews support these theoretical assumptions in that some elected officials repeatedly stated that they had decided to become an active union member, but, at the same time, pointed out that this engagement would certainly be time-limited. Since they expected their employment situation to change in the near future, their identity as union officers was also only temporary.

Both types of orientation might lead individuals to join a union, but their actual behaviour largely depends on their underlying motives. According to our empirical observations, we suggest a distinction between three ideal-typical groups of motives for workers to join, or

TABLE 4. Individualistic and Collectivist Orientations

Individualistic orientation	Collectivist orientation
Personal identity is self-determined and autonomous	Personal identity is collectively determined
Collectivity depends on autonomous decisions (e.g. becoming a union member in order to make use of specific facilities such as representation before the Labour Court)	Collectivity as given by tradition, homogeneity of interests or collective affectivity (e.g. joining a trade union for reasons of family tradition)

indeed actively engage in, a union. These are: rational calculation, normative engagement and ‘affectual’ orientation respectively. While the first type (rational calculation) corresponds to an individualistic orientation, normative engagement and emotional affectivity towards labour organizations rest upon identities as collectively determined individuals. It is important to note that these motivations to join and engage in a union movement are socially created ideal types and are unlikely to be found in pure form in ‘reality’. Particular actors will, rather, show combinations of different motives of behaviour.

### Rational Calculation

The ideal type of this group is the so-called ‘homo economicus’, who decides whether or not to become a union member with regard to his/her cost–benefit ratio. He/she shows a rational orientation to a system of discrete individual ends; in Weber’s terms (1980: 12), this is *zweckrational* behaviour. A self-employed person, for instance, joining a union in order to seek legal advice or representation before the courts might be economically better off than a non-member who consults a private lawyer. In this regard, the attraction and compliance of (new) union members can be achieved by a union through the provision of legal services, job-specific information and so on.

However, from a functionalist perspective, union membership might also be a source of individual social capital and political power in that ‘social-structural resources facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure’ (Coleman, 1994: 302). Unions might respond to this kind of motive in two different ways: first, by enabling dependent self-employed members to participate in all decision-making bodies within the union; second, like the GPA, by introducing meetings to provide a platform for mutual exchange of relevant information among the rank-and-file members.

### Normative Engagement

Our notion of 'normative engagement' subsumes two different motives, namely what Weber (1980: 12–3) called 'value rational' (*wertrational*) and 'traditional'. In our context, value rationality means having a rational belief in the absolute value of trade union membership and thus joining the union irrespective of any material consequences (Offe and Wiesen-thal, 1980). In contrast to the value-rational motive, traditional motives and behaviour are dictated by customs or beliefs which become habitual and unquestioned. In this regard, the actor simply obeys reflexes that have become entrenched by conditioning. However, in both cases, persons joining and/or actively engaging in a trade union are seen as collectively rather than self-determined. Underlying orientations stem from primary (family) and/or tertiary socializing (education, occupation, proximity of unions and so on). However, while dependent employees are expected to create a feeling of solidarity by their regular communication and social interaction at their workplaces, dependent self-employed persons are less likely to interact with each other at enterprise level because of their flexible work arrangements. In addition, dependent self-employment relationships are supposed to undermine the major condition on which the institution of works councils is based, 'namely the existence of a workforce in the full sense of a social collective, on which the representation and integration of the works council have rested so far' (Kotthoff, 1998: 98). This situation forces unions to look for alternative approaches in order to create a kind of collective identity and hence a motivation to join.

### Emotional Affectivity

We choose the term emotional affectivity to denote what Weber classified as affectual orientation, especially emotional, determined by the specific affects and states of feeling of the actor (1980: 12). As regards our question, we assume that people might choose to join a trade union when emotionally affected by some kinds of events triggering feelings of collective affectivity and hence solidarity. Therefore, collective actors are required to use macrosocial relations in order to create a kind of identification with certain issues, and hence solidarity with those affected above the level of the company. An example of the successful pursuit of this strategy involved a group of dependent self-employed bicycle couriers who went on strike against wage cuts. The GPA succeeded in motivating a relatively large group of union members and non-members to act in solidarity with them and take part in the demonstrations in front of the company. As a consequence, there was some increase in the recruitment of dependent self-employed workers (GPA, 2005).

The policy approach adopted by the GPA and also by the German union *ver.di* (Pernicka, 2005) to recruiting and supporting new groups of members came close to the Anglo-American 'organizing model' (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1998; Waddington, 2000). However, the intra-organizational participation of ordinary union members went beyond this conception and represented a major paradigm shift for the GPA, whose elected officers were traditionally recruited almost exclusively from among works councillors.

In contrast to a mere concentration on the provision of services to new union member groups adopted for instance by SIF, its Swedish counterpart, the 'participation approach' of the GPA aims to both recruit and support additional members and also to create solidarity between new and already existing member groups. However, the inclusion of dependent self-employed workers within union structures and decision-making processes poses a challenge to its ability to transform diverse interests and identities into a collective identity. No such problems seem to be faced by the Italian freelance union NIDIL for instance, which was founded by the confederation CGIL (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*) in order to exclusively pursue atypical employees' interests (Pedersini, 2002). However, the organizational demarcation of members with traditional employment relationships from new member groups might prevent unions from creating a collective identity and hence solidarity between workers, thus weakening the labour movement as a whole and the trade unions in particular.

## Conclusions

From our exploratory fieldwork within the Austrian GPA and our theoretical exploration we have derived a typology of identities of dependent self-employed union members and their associated motives towards trade unions. This typology can be used for further qualitative research on new member groups. The major focus of the article has been on dependent self-employed workers, who above all atypical employees challenge present unions' identities as collective organizations of producers. However, their primarily individualistic orientations represent only the prototype of a more general trend within the labour force that threatens to undermine traditional views of solidarity and trade union democracy. A growing proportion of the workforce is supposed to have an identity as a self-determined and autonomous individual rather than one collectively shaped by traditions or norms.

Moreover, dependent self-employed workers tend to have only limited personal contacts with other workers or works councillors, because of the flexible conditions of their employment. This in turn reduces their



chances of becoming socialized into the collective and of feeling solidarity with other employees at the workplace. Apart from rational calculation and normative engagement, we therefore introduced a third type of motivational orientation towards unions, namely emotional affectivity. In this orientation, collective actors are induced to use macrosocial relations in order to create a kind of identification with certain issues and hence solidarity with the people involved above the level of the company. Both types, rational calculation and emotional affectivity, play the major role when it comes to recruiting and retaining dependent self-employed people and similar workers as union members. However, rational calculation as well as emotional affectivity may often be only short-lived. Hence the question remains: how can unions safeguard their existence as collective organizations in the long run?

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## NOTE

- 1 Data are derived from different sources, such as EIRO (2002), Muratote and Lombardia (2003) and Pernicka et al. (2005).

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