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The Union is a Means, but also a Goal in Itself: A study of how Dutch unions justify the use of different strategies to achieve organisational and policy goals

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The Union is a Means, but also a Goal in Itself

A study of how Dutch unions justify the use of different strategies to achieve organisational and policy goals



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Abstract

This thesis explores how unions in the Netherlands justify their chosen strategies to achieve their goals. Organisational pressure and their institutional role as labour representation has created a situation in the Netherlands where unions have the need to pursue organisational goals next to policy goals. Through interviews with board members of the two largest Dutch trade unions, supplemented with data from newspaper interviews, this thesis analyses the strategic choices made by them. It shows that the larger union (FNV) follows the proposed expectations by pushing for organisational growth to maintain union influence and uses outsider strategies, in the form of campaigns, to appeal to potential members. CNV takes a different approach, focussing on providing services to their members to persuade people to join. This focus on collective or individual advocacy could be a trend, however more research is needed to confirm this. This study also found that both unions still heavily rely on insider strategies in pursuit of their policy goals. However, unions have less trust in the institutions through which this dialogue is facilitated. This can be accounted for through overuse of the advisory body and lack of implementation of the advisory opinions by the government.

Introduction

Trade unions are interest groups that facilitate several functions. They represent and support workers, and they defend the rights of all working people (Ewing, 2005). To achieve these goals, a union has, like any other interest group, two different kinds of strategies it can utilize. Insider strategies, such as lobbying, require the union to have privileged access to policy makers (Binderkrantz, 2005). Outsider strategies, which includes strikes and campaigns, depend on pressure and societal support to achieve change (Akkerman et al., 1995).

Unions across Europe have been losing members (Vandaele, 2019), while being dependant on their members for representing the union in the workplace (Hyman, 2002). Due to this organisational pressure, their choice of which strategies to use has changed, and achieving their policy goals might not be the prevailing factor anymore. However, the choice to rely on outsider strategies such as activism, to attract members while pursuing policy goals, can also be detrimental, as it might make them seem less reliable, which can weaken the union's position at the negotiation table (Grant, 2001, p. 343).

This research looks at these different strategies with the goal to understand how union leadership justifies strategies to pursue either policy (changes in public policy) or organisational (survival and growth) goals. The research question is therefore: *“How do Dutch trade unions justify between insider and outsider strategies to pursue its policy and organisational goals?”*.

The expectation is that policy goals are still best achieved through insider strategies, but that to mobilize and incentivize people to become members of a trade union, outsider strategies are used to pursue organisational goals and to an extent replace insider strategies. A literature review of the position of trade unions will be conducted as well, to show the framework in which these organisations operate.

Concerning the case selection, the Netherlands is a useful, typical case due to its high levels of corporatism and its corporatist institutions. In this research the focus will be on the two largest unions in the Netherlands, the FNV (*Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging*) and CNV (*Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond*). These cases have been selected because of their positions in various institutionalized bodies and their still large but dwindling membership.

This research will consist of an evaluation of theory on interest groups, insider and outsider strategies and socialization, a discussion on why the Netherlands and its unions were chosen as the case for this research and an explanation of the choice for interviews as a research method. These interviews, in addition to an analysis of newspaper interviews, will be analysed and discussed to answer certain expectations as worded in the theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework found below discusses the theories at the foundation of this thesis. First the relevant literature concerning policy and organisational goals will be discussed, including a debate within trade union literature concerning goal maximisation. Furthermore, the different strategies as referred to in the research question are discussed. Then the theories will be combined and the relationship between these goals and strategies will be considered. Finally, some theory concerning socialization and the expectations of this research will be elaborated upon.

Different Goals of Unions: Policy and Organisational Goals

The following section will discuss the goals a union sets for themselves and classifies them in either of two ways; policy goals, which focus on what the union wants to influence, and organisational goals, which focus on the survival and growth of the union. A discussion within literature concerning maximisation of these goals is also included.

Trade unions differentiate themselves from other interest groups through being membership-dependant organisations, not only for their financial situation¹ but also as the organisational structure is based on outreach through its members (Hyman, 2002). While other groups also often have members or supporters, trade unions gain their legitimacy partially from how representative they are, making it a priority (Culpepper & Regan, 2014). However, even though membership is in decline, trade unions do still fulfil their traditional roles. This is because their role as social actors is rooted in institutions (Schamp, 2012).

¹ Looking for example at FNV, the largest Dutch union, membership dues account for just shy of 70% of total revenue (FNV, 2019).

In their role as social actors, it is therefore not so much their legitimacy towards employers and the government, as much as it is their legitimacy towards their (potential) member base, in how well people still think the unions represent them, that is the focus of this argument (Dufour & Hege, 2010).

An important difference between ‘normal’ interest groups and unions is that their policy goals are twofold and play out on different levels, on one hand the broader socio-economic issues and the sector-specific employment related issues. Important to note is that these sector-specific negotiations do influence the reasoning for possible organisational goals, as union density is seen as an important legitimizing factor (De Beer, 2016). In the literature concerning union behaviour, few formal models include organisational goals, because recognition of these goals may pose challenges for established models as they mostly present themselves as principal-agent problems between members and leadership (Borland, 1986; Gahan, 2002; Pemberton, 1988). Examples of this concern if members or ordinary employees feel represented by union leadership and negotiators, and if they are still able to do so due to factors such as dwindling membership. This focus on growth, or a higher union density as mentioned by both De Beer and what is implied in most of these principal-agent problems, is what is called organisational goals. Organisational goals concern membership growth, but also growth of the volunteer base, diversification of its base and other subjects related to the strengthening of the organisation to maintain connection and relevance with its base of working people.

All interest groups, including unions, want to achieve certain policy goals. Policy goals are what the union wants to influence, to change in public policy. Unions generally focus on increasing protections for working people, both where it comes to working conditions, labour market position, and social security (Ewing, 2005).

However, the focus of unions differs based on the institutional context (level of corporatism) and the level of power of the union (Gahan, 2002). In pluralist countries there is a narrow focus on employment and wages as these are the only achievable goals, whereas in countries where unions have a more institutionalized role and are therefore more influential, unions can act on a broader policy basis².

Within the discussion of policy and organisational goals, a discussion concerning maximization is relevant. Interest groups are seen in literature as policy maximisers (Berry & Wilcox, 2018, p. 47; Brunell, 2005, p. 683). However, regarding unions it is important to include what has become known in literature as the Ross-Dunlop debate. Dunlop argues in favour of the economic model, where maximisation of wages is the standard case (Borland, 1986; Dunlop, 1944). This is often used by economists to argue union behaviour (Turnbull, 1988). Ross on the other hand argues in his ‘political model of union goals’ that: *“The formal rationale of the union is to augment the economic welfare of its members; but a more vital institutional objective – survival and growth of the organisation – will take precedence whenever it comes into conflict with the formal purpose”* (Ross, 1947). The main argument by Ross is that any analysis needs to include organisational, political and institutional goals, and that therefore unions cannot be seen as maximisers (Gahan, 2002; Kelly, 2002).

Turnbull (1988) argues that union goals are derived from group processes as well as the social and economic context instead of models which derive union objectives and preferences from the utility functions of its members, and that determining a utility function which meets the requirements of standard utility analysis is therefore very difficult (Gahan, 2002; Turnbull, 1988).

² More on pluralism and corporatism can be found under case selection

Furthermore it is argued that due to the changing membership composition of unions their goals can shift, which makes standard utility analysis impossible as it requires stable preferences (Gahan, 2002). A contrary argument is made by Borland (1986), who argues that it is possible to include these different goals and see unions as rational actors, however that there are multiple rationalities that need to be taken into account in union decision-making processes (Borland, 1986; Gahan, 2002).

For this research this debate is relevant as it shows two different schools of thought. Unions can be policy maximisers who focus on achieving their policy goals. However, as Ross suggests, the survival and growth of the organization will take precedence, which discounts the earlier statement. This research will evaluate how union leadership values these goals and how they act upon their analysis of these goals.

Insiders and Outsiders: Groups and Strategies

This section concerns how unions can act and discusses the relevant literature on types of interest groups and strategies, differentiating them between insiders (those with access to lobby) and outsiders (those who depend on influencing public opinion). Established literature on insider and outsider strategies mostly originates from interest group theory, which unions are a part of (Berry & Wilcox, 2018).

Insider and outsider strategies are strategies used by respectively 'insider groups' and 'outsider groups', to describe how these groups try to attain their goals. Insider groups can be defined as having some form of established access to the government and are willing and wanted participants in some form of consultation process (Maloney et al., 1994). 'Outsider groups' are more detached from this process, due to lack of access or unwillingness to compromise, and therefore need to turn to direct action to achieve their goals.

However, it should not be implied that insider groups cannot use direct action or outsider groups completely ignore insider strategies. Pressure groups have seen that direct action can work and produce results which their supporters approve of (Grant, 2001), while almost all groups use some form of lobbying and can therefore not fully be classified as outsider groups (Page, 1999). All different sorts of groups tend to use a mixture of both insider and outsider strategies, such as direct lobbying with parliamentarians or media campaigns, to achieve their goals (Binderkrantz, 2005).

Firstly, it is important to define the different strategies that can be used. Insider strategies include all forms of influencing that uses privileged access to the government and policy makers to attain certain policy goals. These can be institutional, such as through advisory committees, or more unofficial, such as direct lobbying with members of parliament. The common denominator is that insider strategies depend on privileged access, and thus acquiescence of the person or institution one wants to influence. While some forms require little privileged access, the most efficient forms can be found in corporatist countries, where using institutionalized organisations which formally advise the government, organizations can have considerable influence.

Outsider strategies include all forms of pressure building without (privileged) access, with the goal of gaining broad popular support and/or media attention in order to influence policy makers (Maloney et al., 1994). Examples of this include protests and media campaigns (Binderkrantz, 2005). Next to this, unions can employ the use of strikes and walkouts as economic pressure in order to pursue opponents, although this is mostly used in labour disputes (Kelly, 2006).

Use of different strategies to pursue different goals

This section covers the position of unions in relation to which strategies are used to pursue certain goals. In countries with a corporatist institutional framework, insider strategies tend to be the preferred mode of pursuing policy goals as they tend to be more effective (Weiler & Brändli, 2015). In corporatist countries, unions use insider strategies because the institutions that facilitate this have historically grown to provide unions with this opportunity (Schamp, 2012). Research by Binderkrantz (2005) states that occupying a privileged position vis-à-vis public decision-makers is highly correlated with the use of both administrative strategies (contact with government and ministers) as well as parliamentary strategies (contact with members of parliament and parliamentary committees). Therefore, literature suggests that unions prefer insider strategies to pursue policy goals.

Outsider strategies can be used to demonstrate high levels of activity towards (potential) members (Binderkrantz, 2005). Due to dwindling union membership in European trade unions, an upcoming strategy of using outsider strategies to gain members (thus pursuing organisational goals) is the use of 'organizing'. This tactic originated in the United States, which is used due to low union density there, and focusses on actively recruiting people into the union through campaigns and mobilization strategies (Hyman, 2002). Especially young people and workers in job sectors with low union density are targeted in this approach (Gajewska & Niesyto, 2009). These mobilization strategies can take different approaches, however at the centre is a combination of the tactic of 'member-wooing' (incentivizing people to become members) with campaign politics, where people are mobilized and engaged through campaigns created by the union (Gajewska & Niesyto, 2009). This linkage of member-wooing and campaign politics is the main linkage between outsider strategies (the campaign politics) and organisational goals (mobilising new members, or the 'member-wooing').

To gain new members, one must actively engage them. In countries with organisational pressure, but also in those with more secure unions, the need to revitalize the membership for public action in order to stay recognized by the government and employers is a necessity for unions to keep their privileged position (Ibsen & Tapia, 2017). Furthermore, unions frame themselves as cause groups, campaigning for broader social values to attract new people (Valentini et al., 2020).

Concerning counterfactuals; how outsider strategies are utilized for policy goals or insider strategies for organisational goals. Direct action is a well-used tool by unions and other interest groups, with the goal of achieving policy change through public pressure (Grant, 2001). Utilizing insider strategies for organisational goals concerns more of the broader question concerning the success of a union. If a union is successful in achieving its policy goals, this can in turn benefit its organisational goals (Teulings & Hartog, 1998b). Next to achieving its policy goals, union focus has partially shifted towards retaining rights (Schamp, 2012). The necessity of this is that if the union is unsuccessful in retaining its rights, this will have a negative impact on organisational goals.

The main question is, what is the main goal that is served by which strategy? As mentioned above, there is a need for organisational growth as a focus in reaction to organisational pressure. Organizing and other forms of mobilization are seen as the main way of doing that. While in the end policy goals remain important and in the long-term take centre stage, in individual projects, organisational goals can become dominant.

The socialization of insider strategies

While unions may change tactics based on their preferred goals, other forces could also be at work. Socialization is that through the internalisation of certain values, norms and behaviours people integrate certain perceptions (Fullagar et al., 1994, p. 518). Regarding unions, the interest is in how union leadership is socialized by elite contacts. In corporatist countries where insider strategies are a highly used tool by organizations such as unions, both the leadership of trade unions and employers' organizations may be socialized to negotiate instead of using outsider strategies. Corporatism in itself requires some form of socialization (Jensen, 2011, pp. 173–174). This is because these institutions are dependent on cooperation by all parties, and this has led to a determined status quo. What this research needs to determine is if this situation impacts the decision-making of union leadership when deciding what is in the best interest of the union itself.

Role behaviour of union leadership can be split into three parts: personal preference, institutional norms, and risk aversion. Preference is dependent on experiences from an individual, which must be accounted for but is not subject to a theoretical framework *per se*. Norms are centred around the idea that these are the ways things are done. This can be seen in how tripartite institutions are structured, which promotes trust, transparency and sustainability between members (Fashoyin, 2004). Over time this creates a norm to which partners acquiesce.

Another part of the socialization of leadership stems from the issue of risk aversion. In corporatist countries, this mostly materializes around the fear of exclusion (Grant, 2001). As influence is so tied to these institutionalized forms of negotiation, being excluded from them will have major effects on future negotiations.

This plays a role both in preferring insider strategies as well as not giving up on them in favour of other options, as one might not be allowed back at the table. This losing of reputation as an ‘honest agent’ is a realistic fear (Teulings & Hartog, 1998a). Union leadership needs to take this into account, and this creates a ‘preferred method’ of conducting business.

The expectations in this research

The main assumption in this research concerns that groups tend to use insider strategies to pursue policy goals while using outsider strategies to pursue organisational goals. These are therefore two of the expectations in this research. A third expectation concerns the socialization of union leadership, as this might skew the first two expectations based on how union leadership behaves.

These are therefore the three expectations:

- 1) *Trade union leadership justifies insider strategies through policy goals (Policy Expectation)*
- 2) *Trade union leadership justifies outsider strategies through organisational goals (Organisational Expectation)*
- 3) *Trade union leaders justify insider strategies over outsider strategies when dealing with the government through how they are socialized (Socialization Expectation)*

The policy and organisational expectations concern the main part of this research as mentioned above. The focus here is that unions both have policy and organisational goals, and they justify the use of certain strategies based on which goal they want to achieve most.

The question this research wants to answer is how that decision is made and how union leadership balances between the two.

The third expectation, the Socialization Expectation, concerns the position of trade union leaders in how they approach negotiations. Due to the institutionalized way the insider strategies are conducted as well as through norms and how they think they should act (role behaviour), they will prefer insider strategies in relation to the government. Because of the institutionalized way these trade unions interact with the government it is seen as the 'proper' way to conduct policy discussions. Because of this, it might also make outsider strategies less attractive, in order to keep their position within these institutions secure (Grant, 2001).

In this research, the focus lies on why union leadership makes certain choices. The core idea is that lobbying is most fit for policy goals and mobilization is best fit for organisational goals. While the first has been a subject of a lot of research, the second is not, which is the gap in the literature that this research will try to fill. The third expectation is important because it might act as a spoiler effect on the earlier expectations and must be accounted for.

Case Selection

In the case selection below possible countries to research will be delineated. After this the specific unions within that country are analysed, although both viable cases are used. Finally, specific cases of union behaviour are selected to be used within the interviews as conduits to measure union behaviour.

Country

In this section, the country selection is elaborated upon. For this research, only countries who utilize the 'Continental European System' as described by Hall (1994)³ are considered.

Furthermore, similarities in how the economy functions (also in relation to the EEA) and a strong legislative core for employee protections which allows for unions to function and have an established union presence are considered. Effectively this delineates the region of western Europe, apart from the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Next to these general criteria, this research takes a typical-case approach to its case selection.

A country needs to conform to certain specific criteria: The country needs to 1) be democratic corporatist and 2) contain unions that are under organisational pressure due to lowering membership. This combination, which positions the unions as having both the ability to pursue policy goals and the need to pursue organisational goals, are the requirements needed for this study.

³ The Continental system, the Anglo-Saxon system and the Nordic system are three systems described by Hall (1994) to describe what role unions have. The continental system includes high government influence, a framework for negotiation between employer and employee organisations and works with collective bargaining agreements. The Nordic system includes the collective bargaining agreements without the government interference, while the Anglo-Saxon system is more laissez-faire (Hall, 1994).

Democratic corporatism has two distinct meanings. One refers to a system where interest groups are organized into national, specialized and hierarchical organisations, while the other refers to the incorporation of interest groups into the process of policy formation and implementation (Lijphart & Crepaz, 1991). This research focusses on the second definition, although as Lijphart and Crepaz state, the former, narrow definition of corporatism is often necessary for the latter to occur. When looking at different systems, Lehbruch (1984) differentiates between pluralist systems and corporatist systems. Pluralist systems are focussed on lobby groups and without any institutionalization and corporatism, while corporatist systems are defined either as a system with centralized interest organisations, a system where organisations enjoy privileged access to the government or as a structured social partnership between labour and business aimed at regulating conflicts between these groups. It can and often is a combination of these three (Lehbruch, 1984).

When looking at different levels of corporatism, Jahn (2016) notes that countries are not stably corporatist, but that there is no large decline or rise either. Rather, corporatism follows a more cyclical trend with periods of strong and weak corporatism. Countries can be categorized into three levels based on how strong corporatist arrangements are. In western Europe, low levels of corporatism can be found in the UK, France and Ireland, medium corporatism in Denmark, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and strong corporatism in Austria, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden (Jahn, 2016, p. 65). For this research countries with high levels of corporatism are needed, as this is a necessity for countries to pursue and achieve policy goals through insider strategies (*see table 1*) viably and actively.

Unions have been declining across western Europe (Vandaele, 2019), although the levels differ. There is still a high level of union density in the Nordic countries and Belgium⁵, while in France only 11% of the population is unionized. However, the latter can be attributed to a lack of established unions instead of just organisational pressure. In the countries of Austria, Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands union density is middling, and the declining membership alludes to organisational pressure. As Ireland proscribes to a different system as described by Hall (1994), they can be left outside of consideration.

Country	Proportion of employees in union ⁴	Level of corporatism mean levels (Jahn 2016)
Finland	74%	0.99 (Medium)
Sweden	70%	1.26 (High)
Denmark	67%	0.68 (Medium)
Norway	52%	1.03 (High)
Belgium	50%	1.21 (High)
Luxembourg	41%	0.24 (Medium)
Ireland	29%	-0.46 (Low)
Austria	28%	2.06 (High)
UK	26%	-1.33 (Low)
Netherlands	20%	1.08 (High)
Germany	18%	1.01 (High)
France	11%	-0.23 (Low)

Table 1. Union density and level of corporatism in selected European countries

⁴ Data from report by ETUI and Labour Research Department, based on multiple sources including the ICTWWS database by J. Visser (Fulton, 2015; OECD- AIAS, 2021).

⁵This can to quite an extent be attributed to the use of the 'Ghent System' in these countries. The 'Ghent System' is a system where unions are the mainstream form of unemployment assurance, or in some other forms are legally responsible for the administration and distribution of unemployment benefits. Countries that use the Ghent System include Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Iceland, and have a very high union member density compared to other European countries (Van Rie et al., 2011). Belgium has a structure where the government still plays a major role, which classifies it as a quasi-Ghent system, and to some extent lessens the effect of the Ghent system, although it still contributes (Schamp, 2012).

Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands all fit the prerequisites of being a continental system, with a high level of corporatism and where unions endure organisational pressure due to waning membership. All three countries are therefore good candidates for this study. Due to the size, scope, and feasibility of this study the choice was made to focus on the Netherlands, however follow-up comparative studies could evaluate the results of this study with Germany and Austria to determine if there is a Europe-wide (or at least continental-system wide) trend.

Unions in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, there are multiple unions of different sizes, of which two are of adequate size that are useful for this research. These are the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (*Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging, FNV*) and the Christian National Trade Union

Federation (*Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond, CNV*). The FNV is the best case as it has both the largest number of members and has the most influential positions in organisations such as the SER, while the CNV is second in both factors.

The difference in size also has repercussions on both their differing financial position and ability to mobilize for large campaigns.

Union	Ideology ⁶	Membership ⁷	SER Seats ⁸
FNV	Social-democratic	916.000	8
CNV	Christian-Social	225.000	2
VCP	Professionals ⁹	163.000	1

Table 2. Ideology, membership, and SER seats of Dutch trade unions

⁶ (Akkerman et al., 1995)

⁷ (CBS, 2021)

⁸ (SER, 2021)

⁹ The VCP's predecessor MHP was explicitly created as a union without ideological link, with the focus on representing professional and managerial staff (VCP, 2021).

These differences in position can have effects on how the different unions are able to utilize outsider strategies for organisational goals.

As this research is exploratory, it compares the two largest unions in the Netherlands, FNV and CNV, to see how the leadership of both unions justify certain decisions concerning the use of insider and outsider strategies and what they see as their policy and organisational goals. The main ideological variation between these two unions is that the CNV is more constructive, or less willing to resort to more extreme measures such as strikes compared to FNV. This shows the christian-social CNV as somewhat more centrist compared to the social-democratic FNV (Akkerman et al., 1995)¹⁰. This can influence how willing they are to use outsider strategies at all.

Another difference to consider is the difference in organization structure. The FNV (mostly) consists of one union, divided up into branches (sectors), while the CNV is split into three sub-unions. These are CNV Connectief (Public Sector), CNV Vakmensen (Private Sector) and CNV Jongeren (Youth Wing). The former two are then also split into different branches, similarly to FNV. Within the boards of these unions, this differs in that most CNV Vakcentrale board members often chair one of the sub-unions or a (large) sector within one of those sub-unions. Within the FNV board, the positions are elected, which lessens this direct link with the sectors, although the executive board (of which there are 7, including the chair), is supplemented by a group of non-executive board members who have the specific task of representing the different sectors. For this research, only executive board members were interviewed.

¹⁰ This is confirmed in interviews with CNV board members, such as Anneke Westerlaken, who argues that their base “is less willing to and also calls less for the union to protest”.

Specific Cases: Higher Minimum Wage & Platform Economy

In this section, two cases are discussed that are to be used during the interviews. For this, two different cases were needed, one in which outsider strategies were utilized and one in which insider strategies were the prevalent option. Furthermore, these cases needed to be recent enough for the interviewees to be involved or at least aware of the decisions made regarding these subjects. For the insider strategies a SER advice was chosen as it also gives insights in how union leadership sees the SER and if they see the institution as a preferred method of achieving policy goals.

The first case concerns minimum wage. This case is one where the FNV chose a very clear outsider strategy and created a large campaign, #Voor14. CNV also argues for a higher minimum wage, but has not publicly argued in support of the #Voor14 campaign (Verhaar, 2019). The campaign has become quite successful, as most political parties included it in their 2021 election manifestos (Bruinsma, 2021). Additionally, there is an interesting history where the government used to pressure the unions to include lower scales in their collective bargaining agreements in order to create low-paying jobs, which might have soured an insider strategy path (de Beer et al., 2017). This is therefore an interesting case to evaluate how the two unions try to achieve a certain goal through different means and different strategies.

The second case concerns the subject of the platform economy. A SER advice concerning this was published in October 2020, which was, jointly with employers, submitted to the government (SER, 2020). While the unions have taken a joint approach here in the social-economic council, the main difference here lies in that it is a specific case that was conducted using insider strategies, namely the negotiations in the SER which produced this advice.

Additionally, the FNV also started several lawsuits regarding employment practices by platform economy providers (Rözer et al., 2021), which can be seen as the use of an outsider strategy. In specific cases such as with the take-out app Deliveroo, there were also some organizing efforts (Changour & Hoogendoorn, 2017). This makes the case somewhat convoluted, however the focus during the interviews will be on the preparation before and process in the SER.

With these cases this research mainly looks at the movement towards the approach taken at the start of the process and how these decisions are justified, and not the process itself. This is because after these decisions, most direct involvement is devolved to either organisers (outsider strategies) or negotiators and policy officers (insider strategies).

Method

The research consists of purposely sampled, semi-structured interviews conducted with leadership from both FNV and CNV. Specific people were interviewed to discuss their insights, and as the expectations focus on the choices made by trade union leadership, it is necessary to interview the respective boards of these two trade unions. For the semi-structured interviews, the two cases discussed in the case selection are utilized in addition to general questions about how the union leadership analyses situations and how they decide to act on these. Important to note is that all interviews were conducted in Dutch and that therefore all quotes used in this thesis are technically paraphrased as they were translated by the author.

When looking at alternative forms of data collection compared to interviews, there are few options. As the research consists of elite interviews with a very select group of people, survey research is not a reliable alternative, both due to its rigidity and the need to gain in-depth insights that can only be done by interviews. An alternative option is content analysis.

Union leaders give interviews to newspapers in which they communicate union policy or at least the frame the union wants to represent, towards the populace. This is insufficient to base this entire research on due to the interviews being heavily edited by newspapers as well as interviewees having an agenda when presenting their arguments to the media.

However, newspaper interviews can be used as an additional source of data to supplement the conducted interviews. These are evaluated using the same technique and codebook (see *appendix A*). The search strategy for these newspaper articles consisted of a wide net within Dutch newspaper publications and mainly focussed on interview topics instead of only using select newspapers and were found using NexisLexis.

The codebook found in *appendix A*, as based on the theory by DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2011), is designed to evaluate and analyse both the in-person interviews and the supplemental newspaper interviews. The codebook functions as a simplified operationalization and will mainly be used to pick up on certain reactions within an interview and show how they relate to the core concepts. These concepts are insider and outsider strategies, policy and organisational goals and certain forms of role behaviour and norms when looking at socialization. Answers given by the interviewees can be gauged based on this codebook and their position can be inferred and compared with both the other interviews and the newspaper interviews to give a fuller picture.

For the interviews 3 board members of both FNV and CNV were interviewed, including the chairs of both organisations (list can be found in *appendix B*). The interview protocol used can be found in *appendix C*.

Results and Analysis

Since 2019 the largest trade union of the Netherlands, FNV, has been campaigning for what they call ‘a liveable wage’ of 14 euros per hour. This campaign, called ‘Voor14’, had initial success, with support from leftist parties and attention in the media (Verhaar, 2019). Board member Bas van Weegberg summarized the campaign as such: *“A necessary campaign [...] with a good strategy that started small, with volunteer groups and small protests, after which the campaign was broadened to a national level”*. FNV Chairman Tuur Elzinga described the campaign’s goals *“our organizing campaign was inspired by the United States. We could not use a different method to reach people, such as unionizing at work, as most of these people earn minimum wage. And why would you become a member of a union if most people in the sector earn minimum wage anyways?”*.

When looking at this case, it shows that FNV tries to achieve both policy and organisational goals through outsider strategies. The Voor14 campaign had the policy goal of raising the minimum wage while having the organisational goal of reaching out to new target audiences to gain members in these underrepresented groups they could not reach otherwise.

Interestingly, in this case, FNV leadership is happy about the extent of how policy goals were reached, while their organisational goals “were not sufficiently met”¹¹. Internally this also shows a debate within the largest union in the Netherlands, as there is no consensus on if a campaign is still successful if it only meets its policy goals¹². FNV general secretary Bart Plaatje stated in Trouw: *“We need to grow and become stronger as a union”*¹³, which shows that union growth is an important focus of union leadership.

¹¹ Bas van Weegberg, interview by author, 18 November 2021

¹² Van Weegberg argues it is but acknowledges that there are different opinions within FNV.

¹³ *“FNV kiest met nieuw bestuur óók voor jongeren en arbeidsmigranten”*, Interview with Bas van Weegberg and Bart Plaatje, Trouw, 16 June 2021

The CNV's role in this campaign was limited, as chairman Piet Fortuin argued that the unions have their own campaigns, and while CNV also believes in raising the minimum wage, they have a different way to go about it. More poignantly, while Fortuin states he also believes that organizing can be effective, he is not as convinced as his FNV counterparts. He gives a clear evaluation on what he believes are difficulties related to this tactic when trying to engage new members: *“Does it make sense to set up a large campaign, to very quickly, very hastily gain 10.000 new members, if you lose 5.000 of them next year? The question is if that is smart, because you need to keep that [campaign] motor running”*. This shows that CNV is not a real believer in gaining ‘sustainable members’ through this method. This is supported by comments by Anneke Westerlaken, who states that she does not like to talk about campaigns, but more about providing services to attract new members.

This view by CNV shows that they approach the issue of dwindling membership very differently. In union terms this can be qualified as the IBB-focussed approach instead of the FNV who depends more on a CBB-focussed approach¹⁴. When discussing the individual approach Fortuin does state that services should be substantial to their members and trying to win people over with discounts (which is often also part of IBB) is not the right way.

This difference in approach is crucial in how to analyse the different behaviours of the unions, as campaigns are inherently focussed on collective advocacy, and the Organisational Expectation as phrased in this research assumes that unions focus on collective advocacy above individual advocacy.

¹⁴ IBB, or Individual advocacy, and CBB, or collective advocacy, are terms used in Dutch trade unions to define their actions. Individual advocacy focusses on supporting individual members, with legal support, career advice and help with taxes for example. Collective advocacy focusses on collective labour agreements, campaigns, and other broader lobby activities by the union.

The other case discussed with the interviewees concerns the SER-advice on the platform economy, published in October of 2020. This advisory opinion was requested through a motion adopted by the Dutch lower house in November 2018¹⁵ and brought to the SER in early 2019¹⁶. This subject concerns the influx of online companies such as meal delivery or freelance work apps in the hospitality business¹⁷, who skirted labour laws by arguing employees were self-employed (Rözer et al., 2021).

The advisory opinion took 2 years to complete, and leadership in both unions regard the SER as being sluggish, such as CNV board member Feitsma saying that *“the SER is sometimes too bureaucratic, too slow”*. This is echoed by her FNV colleagues. Fortuin however remarked that because the SER works towards a consensus, this advisory opinion is a broadly agreed-upon document, and because the different partners agree to it, it can be more influential in creating a fair playground. FNV’s van Weegberg concurs, arguing that *“A SER advice is a confirmation of an issue, which we can use in our broader lobbying efforts”*. In a more general remark on the SER, Kitty Jong from FNV argues against this though, saying *“The SER does not, within this political climate, have the standing it once had. We do a lot of work in the SER [...], and it has potential, but the impact of advisory opinions is way too small, while we make compromises that limit our own ability to act”*. This is one of several issues that bother the unions when dealing with the SER. However, all board members do agree the SER is still valuable for tackling large issues.

¹⁵ *Motie van het lid Gijs van Dijk c.s. over een SER-verkenning naar de platformeconomie*, 29 November 2018.

¹⁶ Within the SER there are two forms of advisory opinions, a *‘verkenning’* and a *‘advies’*, the former being more of an exploratory nature and the latter being one with more substantial recommendations. This advice was a *verkenning* as requested by the Tweede Kamer. After the motion was adopted, it was added to the ‘cabinet letter’ towards the SER, which is the list of requested topics from the government to write advisory opinions about.

¹⁷ Online company Temper argued they were a ‘mediation platform’ instead of an employment agency. FNV went to court and argued successfully this was not the case (De Vries, 2021). Similar cases showed the need for a consistent view on these online companies, as suggested by the SER advice (SER, 2020).

In broader terms both unions act as expected when pursuing policy goals. CNV chair Piet Fortuin summarizes this as follows: *“We are not only a union, but we are also a lobby office”*. This argument is, in different forms, posited by both unions. The interviews show that policy goals are often achieved through insider strategies, may they be lobbying to politicians or advisory opinions in the SER, and this is reflected in the interviews. It is important to note that when outsider strategies such as campaigns are used, these also include policy goals. FNV vice-chair Jong, among others at the FNV, puts these parallel to its organisational goals, while CNV chair Fortuin argues to keep policy and organisational goals strictly separate, stating *“membership growth as a secondary goal makes it impure. You need to be razor-sharp [singular] in what your goals are”*.

The expectation concerning that union leadership is socialized to prefer insider strategies over outsider strategies when dealing with the government, can also be confirmed. There is an intense lobby relationship between unions and the government. Bas van Weegberg from FNV notes that there are close relations between board members and people at different government departments, mostly at the ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. However, he too has contacts at multiple government departments, even though he acknowledges these ties are not as strong as with the ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.

Almost all interviewees spoke about their experiences during the current COVID-19 pandemic and how there was very close contact in creating different policies, including the NOW and TOZO support packages presented by the government in 2020¹⁸. Former chair Han Busker also argued that the FNV was able to work proactively and successfully with the government in this period¹⁹.

¹⁸ Kitty Jong, interview by author, 24 November 2021

¹⁹ *‘We hebben veel bereikt in moeilijke omstandigheden’*. Han Busker and Zakaria Boufangacha, FNV (internal publication), 30 October 2020

This shows that when dealing with the government, especially through informal or formal lobbying efforts, is the preferred method. This is less the case when discussing institutionalized versions of insider strategies, such as the advisory opinions by the Social Economic Council (SER). Here the interviews show frustration from union leadership about the quantity of (small) advisory opinions²⁰, about the lack of implementation²¹ or the opinion that the SER has lost influence in recent years²². Interviews in newspapers show a somewhat different result, with union leadership

The expectations concerning how unions approach their organisational goals were mixed, as the Dutch unions approach dwindling membership figures, but also membership itself, very differently. Partially this can be explained through differences in organisational structure, financial situation, and size, but at the core this is a difference in vision. FNV has put organisational goals front and centre. Van Weeberg states that “[*Because such a large part of our membership is elderly*], 90% of our efforts should be focussed on gaining [*new members*]”. Furthermore, van Weeberg states that in a recent speech to members, Chairman Tuur Elzinga said that gaining new members is the top priority²³. Elzinga himself also clearly states that campaigns are to engage new members and target audiences using organising, and thus clearly states the use of outsider strategies to engage new members. CNV on the other hand focusses on providing services for its members to court them to join the union. Anneke Westerlaken from CNV argues that “[*both unions*] have a different point of departure. [*FNV*] puts the institution [*of the union*] before its political clout”. Bas van Weeberg implicitly agrees with this, saying “[*without union power there is no political clout, no way of pursuing our policy goals*]”. This difference in views will be discussed later.

²⁰ Bas van Weeberg, interview by author, 18 November 2021

²¹ Anneke Westerlaken, interview by author, 1 December 2021

²² Kitty Jong, interview by author, 24 November 2021

²³ The full quote being: “[*Gaining members are priority number 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 and 10*]”

Discussion

The results of this research have shown that the focus on organisational growth due to organisational pressure is very high within both FNV and CNV. This is partially due to union leadership fearing it might lose influence due to organisational pressure. However, the use of insider strategies to pursue policy goals continues unabated due the unions' privileged access and institutional position in the Netherlands. This fear, combined with unions being member-dependant for their outreach in the workforce, has moved unions to act to focus more on organisational goals.

However, both unions treat this issue very differently, with FNV using campaigns to organize people while CNV tries to target groups with specific services instead. This differing focus shows how FNV chooses to prioritize collective advocacy where CNV chooses to focus on individual advocacy. This CBB-IBB²⁴ divide shows two different approaches to how unions can function. The Organisational expectation in this research is dependent on the assumption that a union takes a CBB-focussed approach, however CNV shows that this does not necessarily has to be the case, as they present themselves as (partially) a service-based organization.

Unions are in its nature organisations with a collective purpose, to represent and support working people (Ewing, 2005). In that regard they also provided services to their members. This waned when governments started to provide these services (such as unemployment benefits). While services are still used by all unions to some extent and often as a supplemental recruitment tool (Ewing, 2005; Hyman, 2002), CNV shows it can also be utilized as a main focus, and shows a possible transition for unions to a service-based, or at least service-focussed, organization.

²⁴ CBB (*Collectieve Belangenbehartiging*) = collective advocacy,
IBB (*Individuele Belangenbehartiging*) = Individual advocacy.

FNV focusses on the use of organizing to mobilize and recruit new members, with a heavily campaign centred recruitment strategy. However, the continuing need for organisational growth can make future campaigns even more organisational focussed than they currently are. Organisational pressure can lead to organizers and campaign leads being pushed for higher membership targets, but this can lead to what CNV chairman Piet Fortuin calls ‘non-durable members’, who leave after a campaign wraps up and they are no longer engaged. This could be a negative result of this move towards pushing for membership targets to be included within campaigns.

The interviews show that insider strategies such as lobbying have remained very strong and both unions are still able to gain access and influence the government through insider strategies. However, the corporatist institutionalized lane, most importantly the SER, has lost some of its usefulness in the unions’ view. While still hailed as important and valuable by some²⁵, others argue its efficacy and influence. One board member even suggested it could become ‘A paper tiger’²⁶. Anneke Westerlaken argued that many of the advisory opinions written by the SER are not implemented, and this weakens the SER. The question is if this is due to the current political climate, as suggested by FNV vice-chair Kitty Jong, or if there is a larger declining trend, as some interviewees seem to suggest.

A secondary issue to this is another comment made by Jong, stating that “*we make compromises [within the SER] that limit our own ability to act*”. This is supplemented with a statement by Van Weegberg, who argues “*It is all good fun to make centralized agreements, however on the decentralized levels you hear that groups, such as LTO, do not feel bound to [...] advisory opinions. Ingrid Thijssen [Chairwoman of VNO-NCW, largest employer organisation in the Netherlands] can easily say one thing, and at the same time her members*

²⁵ Including both chairmen, Tuur Elzinga and Piet Fortuin

²⁶ Bas van Weegberg, interview by author, 18 November 2021

do the opposite, while we order our negotiators to comply with the agreements. What is the worth of such a centralized advice? ”. This shows a different argument, which concerns compliance with agreements made in the SER. While the advisory opinions are directed at the government, they are also guidelines for negotiating parties. If this understanding of compliance is undermined, this could very well infringe on not only the efficacy, but also the trust that unions are willing to put in the Social Economic Council.

In conclusion, the institutionalized forms of insider strategies seem to be weakening somewhat, while this is replaced by more informal, but still privileged, negotiations to lobby the government in pursuing certain policy goals. At the same time, the unions are struggling with dwindling membership figures, but take vastly different approaches in how to turn this tide. This could show two different forms of approach that could be broader trends across trade unions overall on how to deal with organisational pressure.

Limitations of Research

Concerning the limitations of this research, it must be noted that the generalizability of this study is relatively low due to the inherent differences in how FNV and CNV approach organisational goals. While some conclusions concerning how unions utilize insider and outsider strategies can be applied on a larger scale, this needs to be confirmed through comparative research in countries with similar situations, mainly Austria and Germany. This could increase the generalizability of the research and provide context for the two possible models of union organization as observed in this research.

A second limitation concerns the case selection, and more specifically the interview topics. While all interviewees were involved or at least aware of the minimum wage campaign and could field responses on this topic, the same could not be said concerning the platform economy case. Due to how different portfolios are distributed within union boards, this case was insufficient to analyse the decisions made in this track. To correct this, similar cases (other SER-tracks) were used in the interviews to fill this gap. A final limitation in this research was the need for online interviews instead of in-person interviewing due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, although the use of video conferencing minimised this issue.

Conclusion

*“The union is a means, but also a goal in itself”*²⁷. This quote by FNV board member Bas van Weegberg summarizes the findings of this research quite succinctly, although it opens the door for different answers on how this goal is to be reached. Unions in the Netherlands have been under heavy organisational pressure and have been put into a position where they must not only translate policy goals, and thus be a means, but unionize for their own survival. As Ross (1947) states, whenever survival comes in conflict with its formal purpose, survival will win out. Union leadership partially goes along with this argument, as more focus is put on organisational goals. While the why of it is interesting research on its own, this research focussed on the equally interesting question of how.

With CNV and FNV showing different tactics in dealing with organisational pressure, one can speculate there are two observed models, a collectivist, and an individualist model.

Where the collectivist approach uses organizing and other outsider strategies to mobilize and unite people through campaigns and bind themselves to the union through this, the CNV’s individualist approach focusses more on becoming a service-based organization that focusses on providing meaningful support for individual union members. Both unions differ in multiple ways, such as size and ideology. The question remains what, if any of these differences are the defining characteristic that decides which approach a union will take.

While two different behaviours were observed, the idea that possible models can explain the differing behaviours of the two unions is speculative and needs to be further researched to gain any merit. What is clear is that unions are multi-faceted organisations that cannot simply be seen as maximisers, as economists would likely want to see it²⁸.

²⁷ Bas van Weegberg, interview by author, 18 November 2021

²⁸ As argued by Turnbull (1988)

Concerning the pursuit of policy goals, unions are still influential groups that pursue a myriad of policy goals, and these are mostly conducted through insider strategies. However, the Dutch case, with its high level of corporatism and specific institutions to cater to these insider strategies, has started to show some cracks. The Social Economic Council (SER) has weakened somewhat in the eyes of the unions through different factors, including overuse and the lack of implementation of the advisory opinions by the government. Therefore, while union leadership was and is socialized to utilize insider strategies, this does not necessarily translate into being socialized to use institutionalized insider strategies.

In conclusion, unions are changing to adapt to their circumstances, albeit in different ways. However, it remains to be seen if these shifts in focus will fulfil their goal of strengthening the unions and restoring their long-term influence through membership when unions themselves lose faith in the institutional instruments that currently give the unions their privileged standing.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Codebook

Code		Description	Example
Use of Insider Strategies		When discussing the use of lobbying, meetings with political parties or parliamentarians, SER meetings, other meetings (StvdA, SBB, etc.).	We met at the SER to discuss an advisory opinion concerning a higher minimum wage
Use of Outsider Strategies		When discussing the use of campaigns, protests, strikes, organizing and other group mobilization efforts.	We started organizing a local campaign and started recruiting volunteers to organize local activities and protests
Policy Goals	Law changes	When discussing improvements or changes in (labour) laws	We want to heighten the minimum wage to 14 euros
	Funding increases	new funding for public sector jobs	The education sector needs more funding to hire new people as to lessen the workload
Organisational Goals	Membership growth	Membership goals, expected new members	We expect to gain 100 new members with this campaign
	Diversification	Attract new people, attract young members, women, minorities	We expect to reach young people with our cooperation with student unions
	Strengthening and motivating volunteer base	Recruiting active members, mobilizing membership, being active within the union	We engage volunteers on all issues before deciding on a strategy
Socialization	Preference	Good relations, past experiences	I believe there is a lot to gain by negotiating with the government
	Norms	Tradition, standard practice	It is standard practice to first negotiate before striking
	Risks	Difficulty future negotiations, activists playing a polarizing role, fear of losing spot at table	If we walk away now, we might not be part of any agreement!

Codebook format as exemplified in DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2011)

Appendix B: List of Interviewees

Interviewee	Title	Union
Tuur Elzinga	Voorzitter/ Chair	FNV
Kitty Jong	Vicevoorzitter/ Vice-Chair	FNV
Bas van Weegberg	Dagelijks Bestuurslid/ Executive Board Member	FNV
Piet Fortuin	Voorzitter/ Chair	CNV
Anneke Westerlaken	Bestuurslid vakcentrale, voorzitter Zorg & Welzijn/ Board Member and Chair Zorg & Welzijn	CNV
Justine Feitsma	Bestuurslid vakcentrale, voorzitter CNV Jongeren/ Board Member and Chair Youth Wing	CNV

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

START

Hartelijk dank voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek. Ik wil graag met u spreken over hoe strategische beslissingen tot stand komen en hoe doelen worden beoordeeld binnen de vakbond. Dit interview is onderdeel van mijn scriptieonderzoek voor mijn master Political Science aan de Universiteit Leiden. Ons gesprek duurt ongeveer 60 minuten, afhankelijk van uw antwoorden.

VERTROUWELIJKHEID

Ik ga vanzelfsprekend vertrouwelijk en zorgvuldig om met uw antwoorden. Wat betreft het refereren aan uw antwoorden in mijn onderzoek kan wat mij betreft een van twee dingen worden afgesproken. Allereerst kan ik u met naam en toenaam citeren, waar relevant. Of ik kan u aanduiden als 'een bestuurslid van FNV/CNV'.

Welke optie heeft uw voorkeur?

- Citeren met naam
- Aanduiding op basis van functie

Voor de transparantie van ons onderzoek voegen we een overzicht bij van geïnterviewde bestuursleden. Bent u daarmee akkoord?

- Ja
- Nee. In dat geval zullen we uw naam niet vermelden in deze lijst, maar alleen de interviewdatum en gelieerde vakbond.

OPNAME

Graag zou ik ons gesprek opnemen om de nuances van uw antwoorden beter te kunnen verwerken in ons onderzoek. Vanzelfsprekend zal ik deze opnames alleen gebruiken voor dit onderzoek; de opnames en eventuele transcripten zullen niet worden gepubliceerd.

Bent u hiermee akkoord?

- Ja
- Nee

Warming-up vragen

- Hoe bent u zelf actief geworden voor de vakbond?

Vragen aangaande cases (zelfde vragen beide cases)

- Hoe heeft het bestuur het onderwerp beoordeeld?
- Welke factoren speelde er mee voor er gekozen werd voor campagne dan wel lobby?
- Wat verwachtte het bestuur te bereiken met de gekozen strategie?
- Had de gekozen strategie secundaire doeleinden?
- Hoe meet het bestuur het succes van een gekozen strategie?
- Specifiek platformeconomie:
 - hoe kijkt u terug op dit SER-advies?
- Specifiek minimumloon:
 - Hoe kijkt u naar de #voor14 campagne van FNV (ook voor CNV, hoe wordt van buiten beoordeeld)
 - Geloof u dat de doelen uitgezet in de campagne haalbaar zijn?
 - Waarom is gekozen voor een campagne i.p.v. een ander middel?

Vragen aangaande socialisatie

- Wat zijn uw ervaringen binnen de SER? (ook SER-jongerenplatform voor Justine en Bas)
- Hoe ziet u de rol van de vakbond binnen de SER?
- Hoe is de samenwerking met werkgevers en kroonleden?
- Wat vindt u van hoe SER-adviezen worden aangevraagd via ministerraad of Kamer?
- Wat verwacht u te bereiken binnen een SER-advies?
- Heeft u een voorkeur om beleidsdoelen op een bepaalde manier te behalen?

Algemene interviewvragen

- Hoe kijkt u naar de staat van uw vakbond m.b.t. relatie tot de overheid?
- Hoe kijkt u naar de staat van uw vakbond m.b.t. krimpende ledenaantallen?
- In hoeverre maakt het bestuur strategische keuzes op de basis van onderwerp?
- Welke andere factoren weegt het bestuur mee wanneer het strategische keuzes maakt?
- Welke doelen hebben prioriteit met relatie tot besluitvorming?
- Wanneer wordt er gekozen voor een campagne op te zetten over een bepaald onderwerp?
 - Welke doelen stippelt het bestuur uit voor een campagne?
- Wanneer wordt gekozen om een niet-gevraagd advies te schrijven in de SER?
 - Waar denkt het bestuur aan bij het uitbrengen van een SER-advies?

Cooling-Down vragen

- Wat zou je veranderen aan de (positie van de) vakbond?