

Female representation in the decision-making structures of trade unions: The influences of sector, status and qualification

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Abstract

This article investigates women's representation in the decision-making bodies of trade unions and the influences of sector, employee status and qualification. Since it can be assumed that external and internal factors have an effect on the structures and make-up of an organization, it follows that characteristics of both the members and the domain – such as sector, employee status and qualification – also influence the structures and make-up of trade unions and thus the degree of women's participation in decision-making bodies. The study includes all Austrian and most of the German trade unions. Data are drawn from documentary material of the unions and expert interviews with union officials. The analysis shows that the services sector in combination with a blue-collar status produces a negative effect on women's participation in unions' decision-making structures, while higher qualification has a positive effect.

Keywords

Gender, participation, trade unions

Introduction

The participation of women is important for the decision-making bodies of trade unions: since trade unions are democratic organizations, they are required to ensure that each of the various groups may equally participate in the

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decision-making process (cf. Atkeson and Carrillo, 2007). Furthermore, the presence of women in decision-making bodies is considered to be an important precondition for the pursuit of women's interests. However, as McBride (2001: 180) argues in her case study on the British UNISON, the representation of women is not sufficient in itself to ensure that women's concerns are addressed. Several studies in the field of collective bargaining come to the same conclusion and have identified several additional factors that are crucial. Among them are links between union equality structures and collective bargaining (Briskin, 2014) and the presence of feminists in union leadership together with internal democratic structures, where feminism can be widely disseminated (Williamson, 2012). Yet the evidence suggests that the presence of women in the bargaining process is necessary, important or at least beneficial to achieving outcomes that benefit women (Cooper, 2012: 141–144; Dickens, 2000: 203–205; Heery, 2006: 533; Heery and Kelly, 1988: 493–497).

The adequacy of women's participation in the decision-making structure of a trade union is usually assessed by comparing the proportion of women in bodies and higher positions to their proportion among members. Women's representation is judged to be adequate when it equals their share of members, that is, when they achieve proportional representation. In the past, women were usually underrepresented in decision-making bodies; while this situation has improved, women are still not always represented according to their proportion among members (e.g. Dean, 2006: 7). The extent of female representation in decision-making bodies (such as the executive council) and positions varies between unions. The aim of this article is to contribute to explaining these differences at the meso level of the organization.

So far, there have been few examinations of the degree of female representation and its respective determinants in which more than a few trade unions are compared. Rare works point to the importance of women's structures¹ for improving female representation (Braithwaite and Byrne, 1994; Healy and Kirton, 2000), but do not consider other external or internal situational factors (factors on the meso level of the organization). Such factors were included in the work by Ledwith and Colgan (2002), who focussed their research on factors affecting trade union democracy (without, however, mentioning female representation). On the basis of country reports, including a larger number of unions, they came to the conclusion that union democracy seemed to be fostered by certain conditions such as a high female share in membership, public sector unionism, membership of white-collar service sector and highly qualified workers, separate structures for women, existence of other diversity groups among other factors (2002: 21–22). It remains unclear whether Ledwith and Colgan (2002) included participation in decision-making structures as a criterion in their analysis. If women's participation is seen as an aspect of union democracy, the factors identified as favourable for union democracy can be equally regarded as beneficial to the representation of women in decision-making structures. The study by Parker (2009) is another rare work examining the effects of several meso-level factors, although the dependent variable of this investigation is not women's participation, but the presence (or absence) of a

women's group. In the quantitative analysis of 56 UK trade unions, the size of the union (or the number of female members) and the female share in membership had statistically significant effects on the presence (or absence) of a women's group, while characteristics of sectoral coverage (single vs multiple; public, private or mixed sectors) had no significant effect on the presence of a women's group.

There are various case studies which give valuable insights on the micro level into the processes leading to female participation in the decision-making structures of trade unions. However, they do not contribute to an explanation of the effects of external or internal situational factors (factors on the meso level). The only situational factor which shows up in these research works are women's structures: several qualitative studies have (as with the quantitative studies by Braithwaite and Byrne, 1994 and Healy and Kirton, 2000) revealed that women's structures contribute to an increased female presence in decision-making structures (e.g. Kirton and Healy, 2004; Parker and Foley, 2010). Other qualitative research findings point to the significance of female role models for the participation of women in trade unions (e.g. Heery and Kelly, 1988; Kirton and Healy, 1999). The case studies by Healy and Kirton (Kirton, 2005; Kirton and Healy, 1999, 2004) examine the influences on women's union participation (including holding office) and locate the influences on the micro level (e.g. work experience). McBride and Waddington (2009) investigate how the merger process has led to improvements in women's representation in selected merged unions. Starting from the premise of female underrepresentation, another strand of literature discusses possible mechanisms and strategies to increase women's representation (e.g. Briskin, 2011; Cockburn, 1996; Trebilcock, 1991). Cooper's (2012) work on the experiences of women union officials highlights mechanisms which lead to women's exclusion from important positions and the relevance of the persisting 'masculinist' union culture. Her study differs from the others mentioned by being qualitative and at the same time covering a broader range of (Australian) unions. A comparison of the accounts of women from different kinds of unions could shed some light on the relevance of factors on the meso level of the organization; however, there have not been reports to date on such an analysis.

Existing case studies as well as the rare comparative studies do not provide any explanations for differences in the degree of women's participation in decision-making structures between unions, which arise primarily from dissimilarities in external or internal situational factors (factors on the meso level). The only differences which can be accounted for result from disparities in women's structures. Furthermore, case studies of one or two unions hardly allow any generalization to a wider population of unions. Ledwith and Colgan (2002) examine a larger number of unions and refer to both internal and external factors, but do not explicitly refer to participation in decision-making structures. This article will address these research gaps and examine how certain external and internal situational factors – sector, qualification and employee status – exert an influence on the degree of women's representation.

The representation of women has been examined in a more comprehensive empirical research project investigating the situation of women in Austrian and German trade unions (Blaschke, 2008). Characteristics of the unions' members and the domain (sector, employee status, qualification level) were one set of factors considered to provide potential explanations for any differences between trade unions. The present article shows which of these particular characteristics exert an influence on the degree of female representation in decision-making bodies and peak positions, and determines whether this influence is positive or negative. The analysis is based on data from all Austrian and most German trade unions. Finally, I will discuss processes on the micro level which may have led to the observed associations.

Theoretical framework

The study is based on the assumption that the structures and make-up of an organization are influenced by external and internal factors; it draws on an adaptation of the sociological model developed by Endruweit (2004: 95–97; see Blaschke, 2011: 422–423). According to this model, the organizational structures comprise the pattern of order, the formal structure, the actual structure, the authority structure, the communication structure and others (Endruweit, 2004: 146–198). The so-called 'internal situational factors' exert an influence on the organizational structures, the members of the organization are a part of them. The environmental factors that may influence the organization are called 'external situational factors'. The environment exerts its influence on the organization in various ways; one is via the members who bring their attitudes, values and modes of behaviour into the organization. In such a case, the influencing factors may be regarded as either external or internal; they will be considered as internal for the purpose of this study.

On the basis of this general model, a further model has been developed, which is specifically tailored to the research question – explaining differences in the situation of women of which female representation in decision-making structures is one aspect. The numbers and shares of women in bodies and positions constitute a part of the actual structure of trade unions. Thus, the representation of women in decision-making structures belongs to the organizational structures. The factors possibly influencing female representation, which are presented in the next section, have been classified according to the model; they constitute internal or external situational factors or aspects of the organizational structures.

Selection of factors for the empirical analysis

The choice of factors that may possibly contribute to explaining the differences between unions has mainly been of an exploratory character, as there are scarcely any studies which have systematically compared the effects of internal and external situational factors on the degree of female representation in decision-making

structures or on other aspects of the situation of women in trade unions for a larger number of unions. Factors were chosen for investigation in the empirical study, if they were relevant or could be derived from previous research on the situation of women in trade unions or related research questions, or if they were named as relevant for explaining differences between unions in the first union documents analysed.

A few factors meeting the criteria had to be dropped because they were not applicable to the Austrian and German context or because their inclusion would have gone beyond the feasibility of the study. The first group of these factors comprises those which are more or less equal for all investigated unions: the presence of a women's structure, the period of the union's founding,² various aspects of the union system, the industrial relations regime, exposure to legal regulations and other factors on the macro level. The second group contains changes in the number of available seats in union bodies (data were not available) and trade union culture. The evaluation of a trade union's culture requires comprehensive qualitative data collection which was not possible for the number of unions investigated (22) because of restricted resources. Insofar as union culture is determined by other factors (such as the sector), the effects of union culture are included in the effects of these other factors. In accordance with the exploratory nature of the study, the research process was open to the discovery of additional explanatory factors. Here, among others, events leading to path dependence (Mahoney, 2000) might show up.

This article will discuss the effects of the following subset of factors: sector, employee status and level of qualification. These three categories refer to a union's domain (the potential members) as well as to its members. While constituting external factors in relation to the domain, they represent internal factors when referring to the members. On the grounds of plausibility, I assume that in the case of trade unions the environment exerts its influence to a large extent via the members (thus via internal factors). However, the environment may also act in the manner of purely external factors, for example, when posing specific tasks or exerting pressure to conform to specific norms. Owing to lack of data, it was not possible to differentiate between the structure of the members and the structure of the domain. Due to the principle of industrial unionism in the countries examined, the composition of members and potential members in respect to sector, employee status and qualification does not differ on a rough scale (which was used for the analysis). Therefore, the available values of sector, employee status and level of qualification have been used as external (domain) and internal factors (members) at the same time.

Further factors that have been included in the larger study are the female share of members, the total number of female trade union members, union size (measured in terms of the number of members), the characteristics (including activities) of the union's women's structure and the existence of statutory rules governing the representation of women. Among them, the following show an influence on female representation in bodies or (peak) positions: union size, female share in

membership, level of activities within the women's structure to raise women's participation and strict quota rules (Blaschke, 2011).

The choice of sector, employee status and qualification level as potentially relevant factors draws both on existing research on trade unions in general – sector and employee status are important aspects with regard to various topics³ and there are hints that the qualification level is also important⁴ – and on the study conducted by Ledwith and Colgan (2002). By positing a resemblance between participation in trade unions and political participation, the assumption of a positive influence of higher qualification is further supported by Hoecker's research on political participation in Germany, according to which qualification has a positive impact on women's participation in elections, political parties and parliament (1995: 33–34).

Having based their analysis on country reports, Ledwith and Colgan come to the conclusion that union democracy seems to be fostered by certain conditions, among them 'public sector unions' and 'white-collar, service sector and (...) highly qualified workers' (Ledwith and Colgan, 2002: 22). However, their findings cannot be used to formulate exact hypotheses with regard to the research question of this study, since the authors do not provide an account of how they carried out their comparative analysis, and it remains unclear to what extent the issue of representation in decision-making structures was considered. Therefore, I did not aim to test hypotheses derived from their research, but used it instead as guiding assumptions. Each of the three factors – sector, employee status, qualification level – is seen as potentially influencing the degree of female representation in decision-making structures. Furthermore, the analysis investigated any association of factor values with the degree of female representation.

Ledwith and Colgan (2002) do not discuss the processes at the micro level which (could) have led to the reported effects. However, factors should only be included in an analysis when assumptions about them have been made to justify their inclusion. Some assumptions are possible on the grounds of plausibility, studies in other fields and a first analysis of documents. For reasons of space they cannot be presented here, but the processes possibly underlying the observed effects will be discussed in full detail later. The assumptions which can be set up do not cover every factor specification and are partly conflicting; this supports the rationale for taking a more exploratory approach rather than one of testing hypotheses. Data providing information about processes at the micro level were gathered systematically only for a few aspects, as they did not constitute the focus of this research project: the experts interviewed were asked about their views on the reasons for female underrepresentation in union bodies, works councils as well as among union officers in their union.

Research design

The analysis was carried out in two phases taking place at two different levels. Two countries were chosen; the first analytical process was located at the country level, where trade unions were compared within each country. Differences in the value of

the dependent variable showing any associations with the potentially explaining variables were examined. In the second phase, the results from the two countries were compared, in order to discover whether the associations found in one country could also be observed in the other country and may thus be generalized. Several hypotheses can be put forward as a result of this paired comparison and may be tested and modified by future research in other countries. The aim of the research was the detection of regularities on the meso level of the organization and the establishment of hypotheses for future research. This required an approach corresponding to the quantitative paradigm of social research and data collection for (nearly) all unions in the selected countries, as drawing a sample would not have been adequate given their small number.

The two countries chosen were Austria and Germany, and the study used a replication logic for their comparison (cf. Rokkan, 1968: 19–20; Yin, 1989: 53–54). This means that two cases are selected which closely resemble each other in relevant circumstances and should therefore show similar patterns. A country's trade union system, its industrial relations system and various societal conditions may exert an influence on the situation of women in trade unions. When trade unions are compared within a country, these macro factors are not relevant. However, when patterns between countries are compared in a search for regularities, these potentially influential factors have to be kept constant.

The country with most similarity to Austria in terms of potentially relevant factors on the macro level is Germany. In both countries, collective bargaining predominates at the industry level; the industry agreements are often (Germany) or sometimes (Austria) negotiated at the regional level. In Austria, employment conditions of the public sector are regulated by law for all employees and in Germany for those with tenure. European framework agreements, directives and legislation constitute an additional level to the national level of regulation. At company level, works councils are the only employee representation structure (single channel representation). Even though the works councils are nominally independent from the union, they perform important representative and recruiting functions for the unions on the shop floor; in addition, the majority of lay representatives and union officers come from among the works councils. There is only one trade union federation (Austria) or one dominant federation (Germany); they are unitary federations and their associates are industrial unions (in Austria with the exception of a separate white-collar union). Union membership and density have been falling and overall union density for women is lower than for men. In 2003, female union density in Austria was 24.6%, as against 42.7% for men; in Germany the figures were 15.6% and 29.5%, respectively (Visser, 2010). The social partners play a strong role in public policy making.

Austria and Germany resemble each other not only in the characteristics of their trade union and industrial relations systems, but also in important dimensions of the societal environment in which the unions act (for details see Blaschke, 2011: 426). In sum, the similarities between Austria and Germany are much stronger than their dissimilarities, and there is no other country which Austria resembles more

closely than Germany in regard to the aforementioned factors. However, despite the similarities between Austria and Germany, there exist some disparities which may potentially lead to differences in the situation of women in trade unions (e.g. the member unions of the ÖGB (Austrian Trade Union Confederation) are formally subdivisions of the federation and are therefore less independent than the member unions of the DGB (German Confederation of Trade Unions)). Furthermore, there are a few dissimilarities which restrict the possibility of comparing the results from the individual countries. This applies mainly to differences in domain demarcation. For example, the degree to which the secondary and tertiary sectors are separately organized varies; the same applies to the public and private sectors as well as to blue-collar and white-collar workers.

Data and methods

The question of whether the degree of female representation in a union body can be considered adequate depends on the share of women among members, which, however, differs strongly across trade unions. The relative degree of female representation is thus measured by comparing the share of women in a body or type of position with that of women among members ('relative share of women'); the value 1 applies when women are represented according to their share among members (proportional representation). The analysis includes the following bodies and positions: president and vice presidents, heads at the regional level (*Länder*), heads at the branch level, executive council, federal board, delegates to the union congress, delegates of the union to the congress of the federation, representatives of the union on the board/committee of the federation, trade union officers and works councils (members and chairpersons – as noted earlier, works councils members were included because they constitute an important reservoir for lay representatives as well as union officers, and because of their representative and recruiting functions for the unions).

The industrial domains of the unions (often comprising several industries) were grouped into the following sectors: primary sector, secondary sector, tertiary private sector (named 'services sector' in the text) and public sector. The employee status comprises both blue-collar and white-collar status (in the private sector) and employment in the public sector. These three groups differ from each other in legal terms and in terms of collective agreements.⁵ In the public sector, employee status and sector cannot be separated; thus every public sector union was also categorized as a public employee union. Possible differences between public sector unions with members of different levels of qualification were considered in the analysis by the examination of subgroups. When showing similar domains with respect to industry and employee status, single Austrian unions were compared with single German unions.

The unions were categorized according to the composition of their membership. With respect to sector and employee status, each union was subsumed under the category to which the large majority (more than 75%) of their members belonged (see Tables 1 and 2). Only very few cases had to be classified as mixed. Regarding

Table 1. Relative shares^a of women in bodies and positions of Austrian trade unions (2004).

Union (of)	Total membership (in 1000) ^b	Female share in membership ^b	Union bodies, average ^c	Works councils	Works council chairpersons	Union officers
<i>Blue-collar secondary sector unions:</i>						
Agricultural, food, beverage and tobacco workers	38	22.9	0.40	0.93	0.23	0.43
Chemical workers	33	14.2	0.47	0.71	0.51	0.90
Printing, journalism and paper	18	18.7	0.49	0.67	0.46	0.49
Metal and textile workers	205	17.5	0.78	0.91	0.65	0.86
Construction and wood workers	150	4.3	0.64	0.92	0.42	0.77
Average (blue-collar secondary sector)			0.56	0.83	0.45	0.69
<i>Blue-collar private tertiary sector unions:</i>						
Commerce, transport and traffic workers	34	36.9	0.44	0.70	0.48	0.51
Hotel, restaurant and personal services workers	49	73.8	0.45	0.78	0.63	0.47
Average (blue-collar private tertiary sector)			0.44	0.74	0.55	0.49
<i>White-collar private sector union:</i>						
Salaried private sector employees ^{d,e}	286	43.7	0.85	0.97	0.77	0.79
<i>Mixed union (female white-collar, private tertiary sector):</i>						
Arts, media, sports and freelancers ^f	12	31.6	0.64	0.81	0.40	0.63
<i>Public sector unions:</i>						
Public employees ^g	229	48.8	0.27	0.94	0.63	0.55
Municipal workers ^h	173	51.4	0.47	0.57	0.57	0.43
Postal and telegraph workers	67	24.1	0.46	0.53	0.19	n.a.

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Union (of)	Total membership (in 1000) ^b	Female share in membership ^b	Union bodies, average ^c	Works councils	Works council chairpersons	Union officers
Railway workers	93	6.3	0.92	0.57	0.12	n.a.
Average (public sector)			0.53	0.65	0.38	0.49
Total average			0.56	0.77	0.47	0.62

n.a.: not available/not applicable.

^aThe relative share of women is the share of women in a body/position divided by the share of women among members. This measure has the value 1 when women are represented according to their share among members; it has a value < 1 when women are underrepresented and a value > 1 when women are overrepresented.

^b2003.

^cMean of the relative shares of women in the following bodies: executive council, federal board, delegates to union congress, delegates to congress of the federation and representatives on the board of the federation; values > 1.2 were truncated in order to reduce the influence of outliers.

^dAll private industries, qualification of members above average, large proportion of female members in private tertiary sector.

^eUnion with strict women's quota.

^fPrivate tertiary sector and public sector; blue-collar, white-collar and public employees, qualification of members probably a little above average, majority of female members white-collar workers in private tertiary sector; qualification above average (more than the qualification of male members).

^gQualification of members above average.

^hQualification of members above average, but less than in the Union of Public Employees.

Table 2. Relative shares^a of women in bodies and positions of German trade unions (2004).

Union (of)	Total membership (in 1000) ^b	Female share in membership ^b	Union bodies, average ^c	Works councils	Works council chairpersons	Union officers
<i>Blue-collar secondary sector unions:</i>						
Mining, chemical and energy	801	19.2	1.17	1.28	n.a. ^d	0.91
Metalworkers ^e	2525	18.5	1.10	1.12	0.69	1.06
Average (blue-collar secondary sector) ^f			1.13	1.16	—	0.99
<i>Blue-collar secondary and private tertiary sector union:</i>						
Food, beverages and catering ^g	237	39.9	0.77	0.82	0.65	0.71
<i>Blue-collar secondary sector union, majority of female minority blue-collar private tertiary sector:</i>						
Construction, agriculture and environment	461	14.3	0.47	1.38	0.77	0.65
<i>Tertiary sector union (public and private):</i>						
United services ^{e,h}	2614	49.7	1.02	n.a.	n.a. ^d	0.70
<i>Public sector unions:</i>						
Education and science ⁱ	261	68.3	0.85	0.90	0.80	0.66

(continued)

Table 2. Continued

Union (of)	Total membership (in 1000) ^b	Female share in membership ^b	Union bodies, average ^c	Works councils	Works council chairpersons	Union officers
Police	181	20.0	0.89	n.a. ^d	n.a. ^d	1.00
Railway workers ^e	283	20.6	1.04	n.a.	n.a. ^d	0.45
German civil servants' association ⁱ	381	30.3	0.44	1.09	n.a. ^d	0.86
Average (public sector)			0.81	0.99	0.80	0.74
Total average ^f			0.86	1.06	0.73	0.78

n.a.: not available.
^aSee Table 1, note a.
^b2003.
^cMean of the relative shares of women in the following bodies: executive council, federal board, delegates to union congress (except German Civil Servants' Association), delegates to congress of the federation and representatives on the committee of the federation (except German Civil Servants' Association); values > 1.2 were truncated in order to reduce the influence of outliers.
^dWomen are underrepresented.
^eUnion with strict women's quota.
^fValues > 1.2 were truncated in order to reduce the influence of outliers.
^gStrict gender quota has been adopted, but is not applied yet.
^hMixed union, blue-collar, white-collar and public employees, private and public tertiary sector, qualification heterogeneous, female members mainly white-collar and public employees.
ⁱQualification of members above average.

qualification, the average qualification level of the members of each union was estimated as 'higher' or 'lower'. These estimates were based on the characteristics of the occupations in the respective industries and on the (dominant) employee status.⁶ Sector, qualification and employee status correlate to a certain extent, so that, for example, members of white-collar trade unions tend to be more highly qualified than members of blue-collar unions. Therefore, the effects of different factors cannot always be entirely separated. Owing to differences in domain demarcation, some combinations of sector, employee status and qualification that are found among Austrian unions do not exist in Germany and vice versa.

For collecting data, the research project used expert interviews, documentary material from the unions (including trade unions' internet sites) and requests via email and phone; in Austria two group discussions with works councils were carried out as a supplement. In all Austrian and German trade unions, at least one expert interview with one of the leading officers or functionaries of the women's department was conducted. The data were gathered in the second half of 2003 and in 2004. The point of reference is usually the first half of 2004. For a few bodies and positions earlier data were included in the analysis as well: this was done with regard to the executive council and the position of the (vice)president(s) in order to ascertain the development of female presence since 1945; earlier data have also been included for the delegates to the federation's congress to determine how the relative share of women has developed since the early 1980s.

The sole Austrian trade union federation, the ÖGB, embraces all unions. The dominant federation in Germany is the DGB, which comprises the large majority of trade union members (more than 80% in 2004). All member unions of the ÖGB (13 members in 2004) and all member unions of the DGB (8 in 2004) were included in the research project. The analysis also included the German Civil Servants' Association (DBB) and the German Union of Salaried Employees – the latter with regard to earlier data (it merged with other unions in 2001). As the DBB is much smaller and less encompassing than the DGB, it was treated as an entity – although it is a federation, it will be subsumed under the term 'trade union' for reasons of readability.

The data collected are mainly quantitative and refer to the meso level of the organization. The qualitative data referring to the micro level supplement the quantitative findings and will be referred to in the last section. The data analysis used descriptive statistics including cross tabulations and scatter plots.⁷ Whenever possible, the analysis takes into account the influence of intervening factors: on the one hand those constituting the focus of this article, and on the other hand union size and female share in membership, which are, as mentioned, factors included in the larger study exerting an influence on female representation. The influences of other relevant factors – the level of activities of the women's structure to raise women's participation and strict quota rules – could not be considered, because they themselves are influenced by situational factors and the small number of cases did not allow any form of analysis that can cope with endogeneity.

The influence of intervening factors was considered by complementing bivariate analysis with the comparison of subgroups (e.g. public sector unions with a higher share of female members and public sector unions with a lower female share in members), whenever the number of cases was sufficient. For this purpose three-way cross tabulations were used (comparisons were made within and across tables); for the analysis of the relative shares, absolute figures and measures derived from them (categories and position in relation to the average) were employed. As the number of cases in the three-way analysis was very small, the comparison of subgroups with the help of cross tables was more adequate than comparing the means of the subgroups. The influence of a factor was assessed according to the results of the comparisons. Due to the small number of cases, often only one intervening factor at a time could be considered and partly the number of cases was not even sufficient for this approach. Correspondingly, multivariate analysis was not possible owing to the small number of cases. For reasons of space, the description of the findings concentrates on clear-cut results which occur in both countries. Ambiguous findings are not presented in detail.

Results

Concerning the impact of sector, the analysis has shown that the services sector (private services) exerts a negative influence when combined with blue-collar status: in all blue-collar unions of the services sector, the relative shares of women in trade union bodies (majority of the five bodies examined – executive council, etc. – as well as average of bodies) and among union officers lie below average (see Tables 1 and 2; for more detailed data, see Blaschke, 2008). However, owing to the specifics of domain demarcation in Germany – there is only one union for comparison where only the female members are primarily blue-collar services sector workers – this conclusion needs to be interpreted with some caution. The findings allow the following hypothesis to be formulated: in blue-collar unions of the services sector women tend to be underrepresented in union bodies and among union officers. No valid conclusion is possible concerning the effects of the services sector in combination with white-collar status due to lack of cases.

The secondary sector in combination with blue-collar status does not show an effect (i.e. there is no effect of the same kind in both countries – see Tables 1 and 2). As there is no white-collar, secondary sector union, nothing can be said about the effect of the secondary sector in combination with white-collar status. The public sector also has no effect. It has to be noted that the proportion of women in public sector union bodies varies considerably in both countries (see Tables 1 and 2).

An influence of a single industry can be observed in the case of the railway industry: the representation of women in trade union bodies tends to be higher in trade unions of the railway industry than in comparable unions (i.e. unions which are similar in other influential factors such as sector, qualification level, union size or the share of women among members) (see Tables 1 and 2). For any of the five union bodies examined, the Austrian Railway Workers' Union

(GdE) shows a much higher female representation than the Union of Postal and Telegraph Workers (which is comparable in respect to sector, qualification and size); it shows a higher average female representation than the Construction and Wood Workers' Union (which is comparable in respect to the female share in membership); and for four of the five bodies female representation in the GdE lies above the total average. The German Railway Workers' Union (TRANSNET) shows a higher female representation than the Police Union (which is comparable in respect to sector, qualification, female share in membership and size) for four of the five examined union bodies, and for four of the five bodies female representation in TRANSNET lies above the total average. The hypothesis may thus be formulated that the representation of women in union bodies is higher in the railway industry's trade unions.

As has been illustrated, the influence of blue-collar status depends on the sector. With regard to the other categories of employee status, the study has shown the following: as public sector and public employee status coincide, the reported absence of an influence on female representation also applies to the status of public employee. No conclusion is possible regarding the influence of white-collar status.

Similarly, because of the correlation between white-collar status and higher qualification, it is not possible to determine whether employee status has an effect on the first occurrence of a woman as (vice-)president. It should be mentioned that the employee status influences another issue which is relevant for the representation of women: blue-collar unions adopted strict women's quotas later than white-collar unions (no conclusion is possible on the state of public sector unions). In Austria (in 2004) only the sole white-collar private sector union has a strict quota rule. In Germany, one of the two white-collar unions which existed in the 1990s adopted a strict women's quota and did this already in 1991; while among the four blue-collar unions that had remained after a wave of mergers at the end of the 1990s, only one had a quota rule which was adopted as late as 1999 (in 2003 another blue-collar union followed).

The qualification level does not have any observable impact on female representation in union bodies, works councils or among union officers (see Tables 1 and 2). However, qualification does seem to have an impact on the presence of women in peak positions: on average, women are elected for president or vice president earlier in unions with a higher qualification level than in other unions. In Germany, the first four unions were the Union of Education and Science and three predecessors of the United Services Union (for detailed data, see Blaschke, 2008). In 1990, four of the six unions with higher qualification levels had at that time or had in the past a female (vice-)president, but none of the unions with a lower qualification level had a woman in such a position.⁸ In Austria, the positive influence of the qualification level is only small: in 1990 two of the four unions with a higher qualification level and four of the other 11 unions had a female (vice-)president. The following hypothesis may be thus derived: a woman is more likely to be elected for president or vice president in unions with higher qualified members than in other unions.

The analysis found no influences of sector, employee status or qualification on the degree of female representation in works councils. A seemingly negative influence of the public sector in combination with lower qualification on female representation among works council chairpersons (see Table 1, there are no data for Germany) can be considered to be spurious: it is more likely that the low female representation is an effect of the low female share in membership in these unions (when the female share in membership is low, women are less often elected for solitary peak positions – see Blaschke, 2011: 434). No effects of sector, status or qualification could be observed for the presence of female heads at regional and branch levels, for the development of the female shares among congress delegates since 1980 or on the development of female presence in the executive council apart from the position of a (vice-)president (on the data, see Blaschke, 2008).

In the course of both analysis and interpretation, a further internal factor has materialized which seems to have an influence on female representation in decision-making structures and which is also related to the characteristics of the members and the domain: the political orientation⁹ in combination with a specific domain, namely the public sector. In public sector unions with a conservative political orientation (the Austrian Union of Public Employees and the German DBB), women are integrated into the decision-making structures to a lesser degree than in other unions (which are social-democratically orientated public and private sector unions). Another relevant factor which has emerged is the competition for the leading role within the union movement: unions competing for the leading role in the union movement show a tendency towards higher relative shares of women in bodies and positions (Blaschke, 2011: 433–435).

Discussion and conclusions

The findings on the influences of sector, employee status and qualification level correspond only partly with those found in the area of internal union democracy by Ledwith and Colgan (2002: 21–22). Contrary to their results, the tertiary sector does not show any positive effect in this study, neither do the private services alone or the public sector. The private tertiary sector combined with blue-collar status has a negative influence on the representation of women in union bodies and among union officers. The qualification level, listed as a factor of positive influence by Ledwith and Colgan, shows to be relevant only for one indicator, namely the first time a woman became president or vice president.

These discrepancies may be due to various reasons: first, Ledwith and Colgan do not define ‘internal union democracy’, so it remains unclear to what extent the term captures proportional representation in union bodies and positions; second, different domain demarcations may lead to different conclusions; and third, there may be differences between countries (Ledwith and Colgan carried out a comparative inspection of countries, with Austria not being covered).

The model from which the analysis started turned out to be a useful basis. Several potentially influential factors were classified within the model and included

in the analysis. This article has shown the results for a subset of factors – sector, employee status and qualification, the findings having allowed a specification of the factors' influences on the representation of women. The fact that blue-collar status shows a negative effect in combination with the services sector but not with the secondary sector demonstrates that the influence of a factor may depend on the specific value of another factor. The analysis has revealed another influential factor on female representation, which is related (as are sector, employee status and qualification) to the characteristics of the members and the domain: the political orientation in combination with a specific domain (the public sector). The results show that a factor of relevance may have an influence on female representation only in certain instances, for example, either in union bodies or in peak positions. Thus, it is necessary to take a differentiated approach both in the analysis of a factor's effects on female representation and in the formulation of hypotheses.

Data on the processes which underlie the observed effects of sector, employee status and qualification level were gathered systematically only for a few aspects and in a more exploratory than comprehensive way (one expert per union was asked for information and not all of them responded); nevertheless, the empirical material permits the formulation of several assumptions about these processes. Results of other studies and arguments of plausibility suggest further suppositions.

Which are the possible processes leading to the negative effect of the services sector in combination with blue-collar status? I assume that sector and employee status affect the working situation to a high degree. Work load and working conditions in return influence the possibilities and inclination of women for trade union involvement. Physically, mentally and emotionally, hard work has a negative effect on the employees' readiness for doing extra unpaid work; irregular working hours in the evenings and on the weekends make individual engagement and collective action more difficult, since common dates for meetings cannot be found easily. The empirical material contains some support for this assumption with regard to Austria (for Germany, it does not provide any information on the subject). Working duties and other workplace circumstances hindering the participation in meetings are named by the expert from the Austrian Hotel, Restaurant and Personal Services Workers (one of the two Austrian blue-collar services sector unions). In addition, a report of the ÖGB women's department mentions this problem for the predecessor Union for Hotel and Restaurant Workers, as well as the high fluctuation in this sector, which renders the organization of employees' difficulties (ÖGB Frauenabteilung, 1960: 59); the latter problem also occurred in the predecessor Union for Personal Services (ÖGB Frauenabteilung, 1961: 63). It has to be noted that experts from a few other unions (which are not blue-collar services unions) also said that working conditions hindered women's participation in meetings.

The qualification level shows an influence only for the first occurrence of a woman as (vice-)president, but not on female representation in union bodies or among union officers. Available information reveals women's diverse paths into the position of (vice-)president, but no common pattern is visible. As already mentioned, qualification does not always exert an influence: while it does affect the first

occurrence of a female (vice-)president, there is no influence on the presence of women in union bodies. This suggests that the mechanisms leading to representation in union bodies and in peak positions are not the same.

According to some indicators the representation of women in trade union bodies tends to be higher in trade unions of the railway industry than in comparable unions. In the data collected no explanation can be found for this result. It is possible that a specific union culture of the railway industry fosters female representation; here future investigation is necessary.

Public sector unionism with a conservative political orientation shows a negative influence on the representation of women in union bodies. A conservative political orientation usually goes hand in hand with traditional views on gender roles, which might explain why women are less integrated in conservative trade unions. An important factor which contributes to the specific situation of women in these unions is the strong orientation of the unions' policy towards the (formerly) male-dominated group of civil servants and public employees with tenure (women are more often in positions without tenure). The findings with regard to the influence of political ideology correspond with earlier studies on political parties, according to which the representation of women is higher in left-wing parties than in parties of the right (Caul, 1999: 81–82, 85–87).

At the beginning of this research project, it was assumed that sector, employee status and qualification exerted their influence on trade unions to a large extent via the behaviour and attitudes of the members. These processes also comprise the impact of working conditions on female union engagement, as was illustrated earlier. Apart from the empirical evidence named in connection with working conditions, there are a few other hints that the specifics of the domain influence the attitudes and behaviour of female and male union members: several of the interviewed experts attributed the state of female participation mainly to personal attitudes as well as to the behaviour of female and male union members, for example 'women perceive themselves as not capable enough', 'women are not interested', 'women hesitate to take over a position', 'men strive for positions', 'men hinder women', 'men have prejudice against women'. However, these statements do not contribute to an explanation of the observed inter-union differences in female representation. The impact of the sector (or industry) may also be due to sector-specific norms, which exert pressures on the trade unions to conform to them. Even though such influences may exist, they are not visible in the interviews or in the documents analysed.

Further research in other countries is needed: (a) to test and develop the hypotheses which can be derived from the results, and (b) to investigate and then formulate additional hypotheses for the effects of factor values which could not be examined sufficiently. For the latter task, it would be particularly important to find cases exhibiting aspects of sector and employee status which do not exist in the two countries analysed in this study (or do not exist in sufficient numbers). Future research should also examine to what extent the hypotheses from the results may be applied to countries that differ from Austria and Germany in their union system and other macro-level factors. Another area for future research would be

the further examination of processes leading to the observed pattern. One aspect would be the investigation of obvious differences in the processes leading to an above-average female presence in union bodies and to an earlier female presence in peak positions: the qualification level shows an influence on the first occurrence of a woman in a peak position, but does not have any effect on the representation of women in union bodies or among officers. The question of whether lower female representation as a result of unfavourable working conditions is more widespread in blue-collar services unions than in other unions is another issue for future research, as well as the already mentioned investigation of the reasons for better female representation in railway unions. Studies on the micro level may establish the link between micro-level processes, which according to the existing literature foster women's participation on the one hand, and the observed patterns in relation to sector, employee status and qualification on the other hand. As a result, additional processes leading to the observed patterns may be detected.

Declaration of conflict of interest

The author(s) declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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Notes

1. '(T)he term "women's structure" (...) usually refers to the sum of women's collectives and posts within a union, the former including women's conferences, committees, courses, meetings, caucuses and networks' (Parker and Foley, 2010: 282).
2. Before World War II in Germany as well as in Austria, all trade unions had been banned by the National Socialist regime. In the years after the war, trade unions were founded anew in both countries.
3. For example Delaney et al. (1988: 632), Garrett and Way (1999) and Visser (1991: 107–18).
4. Cf. Delaney et al. (1988: 632).
5. In Austria and Germany, white-collar workers are distinguished from blue-collar workers as those performing commercial, clerical or noncommercial higher-qualified tasks. Public employees are not differentiated by blue-collar and white-collar in Austria; in Germany only those without tenure (until 2005) are differentiated in the category of public employees. At the time of the investigation (2004) in Germany, the differences in labour law between blue-collar and white-collar workers had been abolished in the years before, yet the differentiation between blue-collar and white-collar constituted a strong tradition, and there were still some differences in social security and often separate collective agreements within the same industry. In Austria, the cleavage between blue-collar and white-collar workers was and is more pronounced than in Germany; there are differences in labour laws and social security, and in 2004, there were separate collective agreements in most industries. All Austrian public employees are subject to a specific labour law and have no collective agreements; in Germany this applies to those with tenure. German public employees without

- tenure have specific collective agreements and, in industries with a mix of private and public employers, public employees do not fall under industry-wide agreements.
6. Thus, the qualification levels of employees were derived from their occupations. It might occur that the qualification level of a person is higher than the qualification needed for the occupation. However, in Austria and Germany, there exists (especially on the rough scale used) a strong correlation between the qualification level of an employee and the qualification level necessary for his or her occupation.
 7. For reasons of convention, statistical tests (Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney *U* test with exact inference, Fisher's exact test – Pett, 1997: 147–156, 169–179) were carried out for the reported findings of effects whenever the number of cases was sufficient; a note mentions when a test is significant.
 8. The difference is significant at the 0.01-level (Fisher's exact test).
 9. Even though the analysed Austrian and German trade unions were set up as unitary unions, there exist close ties with political parties (mainly with the social democratic parties). In addition, the Austrian unions are internally divided into political factions.

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