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Summary

The current economic recession has had a dramatic impact on youth employment across Europe. This article analyses responses by trade union confederations in Denmark and the UK. Looking first at their power capacities (with a specific focus on communicative power and its relevance for young people), the article moves on to analyse how these capacities and the broader political opportunity structure shape the nature and extent of actions in which they engage. The article ends with some reflections on the usefulness of communicative power as a new theoretical and analytical tool.

Résumé

La récession économique actuelle a eu un impact spectaculaire sur l'emploi des jeunes à travers l'Europe. Cet article analyse les réactions des confédérations syndicales au Danemark et au Royaume-Uni. Après avoir examiné leurs capacités en termes de pouvoir (en s'attachant en particulier au pouvoir de communication et à son importance pour les jeunes), l'article analyse comment ces capacités et la structure plus large des opportunités politiques déterminent la nature et l'ampleur des actions dans lesquelles les syndicats s'engagent. L'article se termine par quelques réflexions sur l'utilité du pouvoir de communication comme nouvel outil théorique et analytique.

Zusammenfassung

Die aktuelle Rezession hat dramatische Auswirkungen auf die Jugendarbeitslosigkeit in ganz Europa. Dieser Beitrag analysiert die Lösungsansätze von Gewerkschaftsverbänden in Dänemark und im Vereinigten Königreich. Der Artikel befasst sich zunächst mit ihren Machtressourcen (mit einem besonderen Augenmerk auf ihrer Kommunikationsmacht und deren Relevanz für junge Menschen), bevor er sich der Analyse zuwendet, wie diese Ressourcen und die allgemeine politische Möglichkeitsstruktur Art und Umfang der Aktionen, an denen sie sich beteiligen, beeinflussen. Abschließend stellt der Beitrag Überlegungen zum Nutzen des Begriffes „Kommunikationsmacht“ als neuem theoretischen und analytischem Instrument an.

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Keywords

Trade union confederations, young workers' representation, infrastructural resources, network embeddedness, communicative power, communicative action

Introduction

The financial crisis that began in late 2008 has had a dramatic impact on labour markets and industrial relations systems. Unemployment has increased throughout the European Union (Kitson et al., 2011: 295) and governments across the political spectrum are imposing austerity measures with varying degrees of severity. Employment has become increasingly precarious across all age groups, with young people (aged 18–29) being the age group most adversely affected (Vandaele, 2012). They are suffering from soaring levels of unemployment, a lack of apprenticeships, and temporary employment options that are increasingly unpaid or underpaid. These increasingly high levels of unemployment are leading to the marginalization of a whole generation.¹

This study looks at contemporary campaigning methods aimed at mitigating the effects of the crisis on young people, examining how the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions² (LO) and the British Trades Union Congress³ (TUC) have responded to the youth employment crisis. As umbrella organizations, and thereby with a more political role than that of the trade unions they represent, confederations have the potential to take effective initiatives and support campaigns addressing the concerns of young people (Vandaele, 2012). Despite a decline in resources and a difficult economic and political environment (Baccaro et al., 2010), confederations still possess significant forms of power. Until now, however, their power capacities and the ways in which they have attempted to exercise them within the current economic context have remained largely unexamined.

Within this study, power is conceived as a capacity and the various forms of its exertion thereby excluding the question of agency (Lukes, 2005). On top of a confederation's conventional power based on its financial and human resources (infrastructural resources), confederations must now pay attention to the power of 'network embeddedness' (Lévesque and Murray, 2010) and communicative power. As with every organization in the 21st century, trade union confederations have had to embrace the new media – internet and social media – especially when addressing young people. This represents a considerable shift away from the old 'roll-up-your sleeves' image of the trade union movement, and requires a lot of experimentation before the right recipe is found, as will be seen later when comparing the situations in Denmark and the UK.

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- 1 In Denmark, youth unemployment among 18–24 year-olds has risen from 7.5 per cent in 2007 to 14.1 per cent at the end of 2012 (Statistics Denmark, 2013). In the UK, youth unemployment for the same age group has risen even more dramatically, doubling from its pre-recessionary levels to reach 20.8 per cent in 2012, which represents almost a million young people (ONS, 2013).
 - 2 The LO is the largest national trade union confederation in Denmark. Its affiliated unions have approximately one million members, making it the most representative workers' organization in both the private and the public sector.
 - 3 The TUC represents the majority of trade unions in the United Kingdom with 58 affiliated unions that together have a total of approximately 6.5 million members, around half of whom are represented by Unite and Unison.

Infrastructural resources

Infrastructural resources have three dimensions:

1. Material resources. Particularly relevant for the current research are the material resources in the shape of forums, financial resources and the ability to generate new sources of revenue to undertake confederation activities;
2. The human resources necessary to pursue confederation strategies, including the question of who is in charge and how their responsibilities are structured;
3. The organizational practices, policies and programmes confederations employ.

Network embeddedness

In the union revitalization literature on trade union power, ‘network embeddedness’ (Lévesque and Murray, 2010: 339) refers to the degree to which unions are linked to their own and other union organizations, community groups, social movements and other stakeholders. This form of power capacity has two dimensions:

1. The first dimension can be seen as a continuum and refers to the types of networks to which a confederation is connected: a relatively homogenous network embracing just unions or a heterogeneous network also including other NGOs and community groups.
2. The second dimension relates to the intensity, density and permanency of contacts within and between unions and other stakeholders – i.e. the extent to which unions operate within networks of stakeholders, and possess the capacity to mobilize support from other social movements (Kelly, 2012: 20).

Communicative power

The final type of power capacity used in this study is communicative power. Although this type of power has not been explicitly theorized in trade union scholarship, it is of increasing importance in the 21st century. As the work of Manuel Castells (2009) highlights, power relationships are increasingly decided in the media sphere. In his characteristic style, Castells writes:

‘discourses are generated, diffused, fought over, internalized, and ultimately embodied in human action, in the socialized communication realm constructed around local-global networks of multi-model, digital communication, including *the media and the internet*. Power in the network society is communication power’ (2009: 53, emphasis added).

From this perspective, conflicts are also fought communicatively by networked social actors aiming to reach their constituencies and target audiences through multimedia communication networks based mainly on the media and the internet. Although the extent to which communicative power has supplanted other forms of power is highly contested, as a theoretical tool the concept opens up a whole new line of empirical inquiry for trade union scholarship. In acknowledging this type of power, researchers must also recognize the analytical distinction between traditional forms of collective action (protests and strikes) and more communicative forms of action (Habermas, 1984), understood as the exertion of communicative capacities. This is an important analytical step as unions increasingly combine physical mobilizations with communicative attempts to raise awareness among the public, both offline and online.

As a power capacity, communicative power has two dimensions:

1. The material and human resources of a union's communicative work;
2. The types of media integrated into a union's day-to-day operations and strategy. This includes traditional print media, television, radio and digital communication (internet and social media).

This study has chosen to focus solely on the internet and social media due to its prevalent use among young people.⁴ In Britain, the age group with the largest proportion of internet users is the 16–24 age group, with 98.8 per cent using internet. This represents 7.19 million young people (65 per cent of their time on the internet is spent communicating with other people, 29 per cent on social networking, 19 per cent on email and 19 per cent on instant messaging). Facebook is by far the most popular social networking site, and the average internet user also visits a video site at least 18 times a month, with YouTube accounting for 70 per cent of these visits (Office for National Statistics, 2012). In Denmark, 92 per cent of all young people between 16 and 24 use social networking sites, and the internet is the most popular type of media. Similar to Britain, Facebook and YouTube are two of the most popular websites (FDIM, 2010).

Power capacities of the TUC and LO

The framework described above will now be used as a basis for examining the efforts of the British TUC and Danish LO to fight youth unemployment. This section begins by broadly examining the power capacities of each confederation. This helps give a better sense of their overall capacity before specifically examining the infrastructural resources devoted to their youth work. The next section then looks at government policies in the UK and Denmark, how these have affected youth employment and how the TUC and LO have leveraged their power capacities to voice the concerns of young people and put across confederation opinions.

Given the exploratory nature of the research for this article, data were collected using a mixed-methods cross-national approach (Hyman, 2001). This involved a combination of semi-structured interviews with officials at the confederation's organizing departments; in-house observation of their youth work over a two-week period in each country; documentary analysis; and an analysis of their websites and social media activities. Temporally, data collection was limited to the four-year period between 2009 and 2012.

Overall infrastructural resources available to the TUC and LO

With regard to financial and human resources, both the TUC and LO have experienced considerable change. This is largely due to the overall drop in union membership as affiliation fees from affiliated unions comprise a substantial part of their revenue base. In Denmark, union membership in LO-affiliated unions has suffered particularly from the 2002 liberalization of unemployment insurance. Traditionally administered by trade unions, unemployment insurance used to be an important recruitment tool (Clasen and Viebrock, 2008) and hence a key source of institutional power. However, the LO-affiliated unions with their unemployment funds now compete with the so-called 'yellow unions' which are far cheaper as they are not engaged in collective bargaining and thus do not have to fund strikes. The consequence has been an accelerated decline from 1 167 000 union members in 2000 to 917 000 in 2011 (Due et al., 2012: 3), impacting LO finances.

⁴ Unions' use of social media such as Facebook is receiving an increasing amount of scholarly attention (see Bryson et al., 2010).

Table 1. Union density in Denmark by age, 1994–2008.

| | 1994 | 2008 |
|-----------------|------|------|
| All employees | 77.1 | 70.9 |
| Adults 30+ | 79.8 | 75.6 |
| Youth (18–29) | 67.5 | 52.1 |
| Adult-youth gap | 12.3 | 23.5 |

Source: LO (2010a).

Annual reports reveal that its annual income from affiliation fees declined from DKK329m in 2002 to DKK216m in 2011, resulting in the downsizing of staff from 143 to 126 (LO, 2002: 34; LO, 2012a: 18).

The decline in membership of the TUC's affiliates could already be seen in the early 1980s. In 1980, membership of TUC-affiliated unions peaked at 12.2 million. It has since been in constant decline, reaching 5.98 million in 2012 (TUC, 2012a). More than half a million members have been lost since the beginning of the recession in 2008. This is largely due to the fact that British unions do not have an institutional buffer such as the Danish union-administered unemployment insurance to retain members during a recession when unemployment increases. Although the TUC's financial and human resources have declined significantly since 1980, their annual reports reveal a situation markedly different to that of the LO in the last decade. Between 2002 and 2011 the TUC's affiliation fees have in fact increased from £12.1m to £15.2m. Over the same period its income has doubled from £22.5m to £44.9m due to a sizable increase in donations and fees which totalled £26m in 2011. In terms of human resources, the TUC has increased staff expenditure from £10.4m in 2002 to £15.7m in 2012 (TUC, 2003: 170; TUC, 2012a: 160). Thus overall, while the LO's resources have declined over the past decade, the TUC has experienced financial growth. And during the recession, an additional 10p levy per member from affiliated unions has provided a temporary increase in financial resources for the TUC's campaigning work (TUC, 2012c: 6).

One should note that the decline in membership which the respective confederations' affiliated unions have experienced has been particularly pronounced amongst young people. This growing demographic gap in union membership means that young people are now less likely to be a member of a union than their older counterparts. Hence, there are fewer members in trade union youth groups, in turn influencing the financial and human resources dedicated to them. In Denmark, the membership rate of young people under 30 fell from 67 per cent of the age group in 1994 to 52 per cent in 2008 (LO, 2010b: 170). This decline has continued during the recession, with fewer than half of this age group now belonging to a trade union (Andersen and Redder, 2012). In the UK, membership fell 19.3 per cent in 1995 to 12 per cent in 2010 (Brownlie, 2012: 29). With just 50 per cent of young people belonging to a trade union in Denmark and just 1 in 10 in the UK, both trade union movements face a considerable challenge in their attempts to voice young people's concerns. For an overview of the demographic shift over almost two decades see Tables 1 and 2.

There are also significant differences in the TUC's and LO's respective communicative capacities. Alongside its website, the LO's media capacity and strategy is centred on its daily electronic publication, A4.⁵ Targeting union representatives, opinion-makers and the public, A4's *raison*

5 The history of this publication goes back to the late 19th century, making it the oldest workers' newspaper in the world.

Table 2. Union density in the UK by age, 1995–2011.

| | 1995 | 2011 |
|-----------------|------|------|
| All employees | 29.2 | 25.9 |
| Adults 30+ | 33.4 | 26.9 |
| Youth (16–29) | 18.0 | 11.0 |
| Adult-youth gap | 15.4 | 15.9 |

Source: Brownlie (2012).

Table 3. Overview of the TUC's Twitter accounts.

| Twitter accounts | Followers | Tweets |
|------------------|-----------|--------|
| TUCNews | 10 042 | 2 011 |
| Touchstoneblog | 3 250 | 3 876 |
| Stronger Unions | 3 684 | 1 339 |
| TUCglobal | 2 839 | 8 842 |
| Unionnewswire | 2 462 | 4 264 |
| Unionlearn | 1 878 | 2 044 |
| Going_to_work | 746 | 283 |
| Rights4interns | 631 | 46 |

d'être is to publish stories based on facts and figures that can set the political agenda and influence other media outlets to cover the same issues. In 2012, 11 per cent of the annual LO budget was devoted to A4 administration and publication (LO, 2012a: 5) with over 25 000 daily subscribers. Ranked the fifth most cited media source in Denmark (A4, 2012) it has a considerable capacity to shape the political debate and agenda (Mailand, 2009: 20). Finally, in terms of social media, the LO has a Facebook page with 6 927 likes (as of December 2012) but does not make use of any other social media.

By contrast, the TUC's communicative capacity is centred on the publication of research, a monthly newsletter⁶ for all its affiliated members and the use of social media. While the TUC does not have an initiative similar to the LO's A4, it does have a number of blogs written and updated by staff from the Organization and Communications Department and occasional guest writers. Its most prominent blogs are Stronger Unions⁷ (organizing issues) and Touchstone⁸ (policy issues). The TUC also has a website with similar functions to that of the LO. The marked difference is its use of social networking platforms. The TUC has a dedicated Facebook page with 3 465 likes and a YouTube channel set up in March 2009 with 31 videos and almost 100 000 views (as of December 2012). The TUC is also an avid user of the social networking and micro-blogging website, Twitter⁹, having nine active Twitter accounts, all with a considerable following. Tweets (a small burst of information, up to 140 characters) most often include links to publications/articles or statements. For an overview of the TUC's Twitter accounts, see Table 3.

6 Both electronically and in hardcopy.

7 <http://strongerunions.org/>

8 <http://touchstoneblog.org.uk>

9 For more information see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter>

Table 4. The infrastructural resources of the TUC's and LO's Youth Wing.

| | TUC Youth Wing | LO Youth Wing |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Human resources | National Organizer Young union activists | Youth Consultant Affiliated youth consultants |
| Material resources | | |
| a. Annual budget 2011 ^a | £20 000 | £30 000 |
| b. Networks | Young Members' Forum SERTUC Young Members' Network | Young Members' Network |
| Programmes/activities | Annual Young Members' Conference | 1st of May Event |

^a At both confederations, additional financial and human resources are provided by the Organization and Communications Departments when project aims and activities overlap.

TUC and LO infrastructural resources devoted to youth work

TUC youth work has an annual budget of £20 000 and is centred upon two key activities: the Young Members' Conference¹⁰ and the Young Members' Forum (YMF). Activities are coordinated by the TUC's National Organizer. The work takes place in collaboration with a large number of young union members from affiliated unions who participate in the Conference and/or are members of the YMF and SERTUC¹¹ network. All these union activists are engaged to a greater or lesser extent in the youth work of their respective trade unions. Outside of this homogenous network of union activists, there are no formalized or financial links with social movement actors.

By comparison, LO Ungdom (LO's Youth Wing) is headed by a full-time Youth Consultant with a 50 per cent larger budget.¹² This official is responsible for coordinating the Young Members' Network of affiliated youth consultants and union-centred political activities and campaigns. The Young Members' Network meets once a month and is attended by up to eight youth consultants from the largest affiliated unions. The meeting is used by the LO Youth Consultant to coordinate political activities and actions. The fact that these youth consultants are all full-timers enables LO Ungdom to organize projects collectively with political and financial backing from their respective unions, increasing both their resources and capacity to act. The LO also has strong financial ties to a variety of political youth groups with a long tradition of collaboration (LO, 2012a: 28). These include Denmark's Social Democratic Youth (£300 000); the Socialist People's Party Youth (£50 000); EEO, a student group for vocational schools (£23 000); and the Socialist Youth Front (£5 000). The permanency of contact is in part ensured by a separate annual meeting with each group at LO headquarters.

In addition, there is a clear institutional difference between each of the respective youth wings' capacity to influence confederation policy. While the LO's Young Members' Network allows

10 According to the statutes, each TUC-affiliated national union is allowed to send a certain number of delegates according to the size of membership. Although unions often fail to fill their entire quota due to logistical and resource constraints, the 2012 Conference drew approximately 100 delegates.

11 At the regional level, the most high-profile organizational outlet is the SERTUC Young Members' Network. It is chaired by a TUC organizer who is elected at the Young Members' Conference.

12 Prior to the LO's Congress in June 2011, its youth strategy was organized around union-centred political activities (campaigns), organizational activities (political courses and courses for young trade unionists) and awareness campaigns (Job Patrol and School Contact). These activities aimed to promote LO branches in local, regional and national media as well as national political campaigns (LO, 2011: 14). At the time, the LO Ungdom had five full-time employees. However, in response to the aforementioned decline in financial resources, the LO downsized and decentralized their operations in 2011.

youth consultants from affiliated unions some scope for influencing the activities the LO engages in, the TUC's Young Members' Conference provides a formal representative body for young affiliated union activists to influence the confederation's policies and activities on youth issues each year. Following amendments made in 2010, the TUC's Young Members' Conference began employing a motion-based system in 2011. Each union puts forward a motion and, at the end of the Conference, a single motion is chosen to be put forward to the TUC's General Congress. Once passed, this motion then sets the agenda for the following year's work of the YMF.

Finally, in terms of communicative capacities there are also clear differences between the two national confederations. The LO's communications infrastructure is centred on a website (www.loungdom.dk) that links directly to their Facebook page. Created in December 2010,¹³ the page is regularly updated by the Youth Consultant with news content concerning young people and questions regarding political and social issues. LO Ungdom has a YouTube channel with 16 videos and 4 823 page views. It also has its own logo that is used for all promotional material, communications, and campaigns it generates, giving it a distinct identity. By comparison, the TUC does not have a dedicated Facebook page for its youth work. Twitter is used, though only by the SER-TUC network which has an account with 323 followers and 1 482 tweets. Where the TUC stands out in comparison to LO is in the creation of its first free smartphone app. This allows young people to check whether they are being paid according to the law for their work as a trainee or apprentice.

The TUC and LO fight against youth unemployment

Having looked at the power capacities of the TUC and LO, in this section we look at the policies adopted by the respective governments relevant to the youth employment situation and how the TUC and LO responded with physical mobilizations and communicative forms of action.¹⁴ In doing so, these exertions of power will be linked to the broader political opportunity structures that shape them (Kelly, 2005).

In Denmark, the Liberal-led coalition government implemented crisis management measures aimed at alleviating the employment situation which had begun deteriorating in 2009.¹⁵ Then, in May 2010, the government presented 'Genopretningspakken', a package of reforms and budget cuts to restore fiscal balance to the state budget with the intention of revitalizing the economy. It entailed welfare cuts at state and municipal level, totalling DKK24bn over the next three years, and the loss of approximately 27 000 public sector jobs (Bjoersted and Madsen, 2010). The reforms most relevant for young people were the reduction in the length of time a person could receive the highest rate of unemployment benefit from four years to two years and the doubling of the length of time it takes to gain entitlement to unemployment benefit;¹⁶ and reducing the educational maintenance allowance administered by the Danish Agency for Higher Education and Educational Support (SU).

In terms of on-the-street mobilization, LO Ungdom drew on its dense heterogeneous network of political youth groups, vocational associations and student groups to organize four campaigns targeting the lack of apprenticeships, cuts in education and the deteriorating state of the job market in

13 Prior to that LO Ungdom had a Facebook group which was established in 2007.

14 See Tables 5 and 6 in the Appendix for an overview of the main LO and TUC responses.

15 These included short-time working schemes and reductions in non-wage labour costs (demand measures) and training programmes to help the unemployed find work (Clegg, 2010).

16 Only the unemployed who have paid into unemployment insurance funds, *a-kasser*, are entitled to dagpenge. Otherwise they must claim the far less generous cash welfare benefit *kontanthjælp*.

general. In March 2009, LO Ungdom collaborated with EEO, the student group for vocational students, to organize a blockade of the Education Ministry with approximately 500 participants. Shortly after the action, the Education Minister agreed to meet with LO and the Danish Employers Association (DA) to discuss solutions to the lack of apprenticeships (Arbejderen, 10 March 2009).

In September 2010, LO Ungdom worked together with affiliated union youth groups, the Danish Social Democratic Youth Organization (DSU) and a large number of student and youth organizations to organize a national political campaign entitled 'Youth take Responsibility'. The campaign's aim was to protest against the proposed cuts (particularly in SU grants) hitting young people, the lack of 10 000 apprenticeships and high youth unemployment. Following its launch, a meeting of the entire network was held in Odense to develop a feasible set of solutions to the problems faced by young people. The proposals were then presented to MPs on the opening day of Parliament in conjunction with demonstrations and political actions that brought together some 25 000 people outside Parliament and 40 000 nationally (Arbejderen, 5 October 2010).

LO Ungdom also made use of its extensive contacts with vocational schools during its 'Lars Løkke Rasmussen¹⁷ is pissing on the Youth' campaign. The aim was to raise awareness for the lack of apprenticeships and to criticize the government for focusing on reforming the 'early retirement scheme' and increasing the retirement age instead of addressing the lack of apprenticeships. The campaign included visits to 35 vocational schools across the country (Arbejderen, 25 January 2011).

Then, in the second half of 2011, LO Ungdom's focus shifted towards the election arena. In the run-up to the national election in September, it collaborated with EEO and an association for vocational schools as part of the national 'Take Youth Seriously' campaign. Its aim was to get young people involved in politics. Through the large national networks of participating actors, 45 debates were organized at vocational schools across the country with over 7 000 students.

Following the formation of the Social-Democratic coalition after the 15 September 2011 election, a more favourable political opportunity structure led to a clear shift from on-the-street mobilization to more communicative forms of action. The explanation for this is that what is left of the relationship between the LO and the Social Democrats¹⁸, and the 'Nordic Model' of tripartite consultation¹⁹ still provides access to government decision-making bodies. That said, access was not without difficulty. After the tripartite negotiations commenced on 24 May 2012, the LO actively pursued a discussion of the government's proposed youth package, which it hoped would increase the number of apprenticeships and reduce youth unemployment, especially amongst graduates (LO, 2012b). However, the negotiations collapsed on 8 June 2012, after only two weeks, limiting the possibility of influencing the package's policies.

Nevertheless, the LO continued publicly to demand that the package guarantee apprenticeships and income support to young VET students and graduates struggling to get onto the job market. On

17 The former Danish Prime Minister and chairman of Denmark's Liberal Party served between 2009 and 2011.

18 Although the LO formally severed financial ties with the Social Democrats in 2002 (LO, 2002: 32), the organization was still a very strong supporter of their 2011 election bid.

19 After being elected in 2002, the coalition government introduced a wave of legislation that has successfully begun to undermine the power of trade unions. Policies include the restructuring of labour market policy administration where unions traditionally played an important role. As a consequence of these policies, trade unions now operate more as lobbyists than as part of strong corporatist institutions and decision-making arrangements regardless of the colour of the government in power (Jørgensen and Schulze, 2011).

12 November 2012, the government launched its five-year DKK645m youth package to reduce youth unemployment. This fund is expected to assist 6 000 to 7 000 young people get into employment or education (Ministry of Employment, 2012). Given this recent government concession, the LO's focus on communicative action rather than on on-the-street mobilization is likely to continue. Evidence can be found in the LO's new youth strategy (LO, 2011: 14) which focuses on raising public awareness of youth issues through the media. In 2013, LO Ungdom will be training 20 young union activists from affiliated unions for six months in written and verbal communication, in collaboration with the centre-left think-tank CEVEA. The aim is to increase their capacity to engage in the political debate within the mainstream media. This will be undertaken alongside the LO's recently launched five-year 'OK' campaign which aims to raise awareness for the benefits of union membership and the achievements of the labour movement. It combines a large-scale media campaign using the internet, social media and print publications with on-the-ground organizing by LO trade union affiliates.

Turning to the UK, the TUC's youth work displayed a more pronounced communicative focus under the former New Labour government. In 2009, it launched the Next Generation Campaign which included the Next Generation Accord. In June 2009, the TUC organized a one-day conference – 'Youth in the Recession' – with Youth Compass²⁰ raising its concerns with regard to the deteriorating labour market. Towards the end of 2009, the Labour government began trying to address the problem of youth unemployment by launching the Future Jobs Fund (FJF). The Department for Work and Pensions pledged 150 000 temporary paid jobs lasting six months for unemployed young people and people living in disadvantaged areas.

However, after the national elections in May 2010, the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition decided to end prematurely the FJF, citing high costs²¹, and the educational maintenance allowance (EMA) scheme – a Labour policy that was of great benefit to teenagers from low-income households. The government also announced cuts of approximately £83bn to be made over four years at the expense of 490 000 public sector jobs.²² Following this dramatic shift in the political opportunity structure – which included the Coalition's hostile stance towards trade unions and the belief that it is unnecessary to consult them in the policy-making process – and rapidly rising youth unemployment, the TUC's youth work shifted towards on-the-street mobilization.

At the TUC's Young Members' Conference in 2010, a motion was passed to Congress calling for a national demonstration against youth unemployment by the end of the year (TUC, 2010). With its relatively homogenous network of actors, the TUC's youth wing organized this demonstration together with the National Union of Students and the University and College Union on 11 January 2011.²³ It was supported by Unison, PCS, NUT, Unite, FUB and GMB, and included a number of prominent speakers. As this action was incorporated into the TUC's overall campaign against austerity, it drew upon other areas of the organization's financial and human resources.

This top-down approach of the TUC in response to the youth employment crisis, and its relatively homogenous network of actors with little active involvement from its youth networks, was also evident in its 2012 youth unemployment campaign.²⁴ Targeting three politically Conservative

20 The under-30 youth wing of the think-tank Compass, Direction for the Democratic Left.

21 By March 2011, when the last FJF jobs were filled, the programme had placed 105 220 people in temporary employment (Fishwick et al., 2011).

22 The impact of these cuts has been especially severe in the north of England which is more dependent upon public sector employment and expenditure (Kitson et al., 2011: 294–298).

23 Unfortunately attendance was limited by a scheduling clash with another demonstration.

24 This campaign utilized the TUC's Going to Work website (www.goingtowork.org.uk)

areas, it was led by TUC organizers at the national and regional level in partnership with other trade unions and community groups (TUC, 2012c: 7). It aimed to mobilize young people around the issue of youth unemployment by establishing contacts with community groups, leafleting and press work. Groups of young people were recruited and trained in preparation for lobbying their local MPs to get them to tackle youth unemployment in the area. While it is beyond the scope of this study to make claims about the extent to which a wider network of youth groups would have increased the effectiveness of these actions, network embeddedness has a clear impact on the success of the campaign's communicative action.

The TUC's use of social media during their youth unemployment campaign has been unsuccessful so far. The Facebook page has received just 58 likes, and its two YouTube videos were only viewed 43 times. Similarly the SERTUC's Young Workers Month campaign attracted an equally low level of 82 Facebook likes. By contrast, the heterogeneous network of youth groups involved in the LO's 'Youth Take Responsibility' campaign, with its mobilization of approximately 25 000 for a single day of action, had a clear impact on the success of their Facebook page which reached 14 709 likes. Thus there is a clear relationship between the scale of communicative action through social media and the density and intensity of the network of actors involved.

This is consistent with recent research which has found that any effective social media strategy requires a high degree of network embeddedness (Hale and Margetts, 2012); specifically, a group of activists that are highly trusted, possess large followings within their own networks, and are representative of the diversity of social networks such as student organizations, NGOs and prominent public figures. The implication is that trade union confederations and unions should be acutely aware of this when campaigning online. Trade union confederations and unions should therefore actively recruit activists within political, cultural and social circles outside their traditional contact base to help share content, events and actions.

There are already signs of a more communicative focus at the TUC and LO. Since 2012 the LO's youth strategy (LO, 2011: 14) has shifted towards raising awareness for young people's issues through the media as highlighted earlier. Similarly, the TUC's 2012 Young Members' Conference included speakers from the world's largest and fastest growing online campaigning organization, Change.org. This was followed up with the Grassroots Campaign held by the Organizing Academy with a prominent focus on new media that attracted more than 150 activists from a range of organizations, both national and international (TUC, 2012c: 10).

Some conclusions

The findings reported indicate that the TUC and LO have been engaged in a variety of activities in response to the youth crisis. In the UK, youth unemployment has been far more prominent on the TUC's agenda than its Danish counterpart. This should be understood in the light of the UK's relatively high rate of youth unemployment and the Coalition's measures which have exacerbated the situation for young people. Both these factors have helped to give youth unemployment a profile, and have influenced the TUC's and its affiliates' decision and ability to mobilize against it.

Findings gathered on the TUC's and LO's existing infrastructural resources and network embeddedness also reveal a clear relationship between their existing capacities and the types of actions they engage in. While the TUC has organized actions through a relatively homogenous network of actors linked to their broader campaign against austerity, the LO's youth wing has utilized its heterogeneous network of youth groups to organize smaller independent actions with relatively little participation from affiliated unions. The study has therefore taken the first step towards linking infrastructural resources and network embeddedness with the actual exercise of power.

A common feature of both confederations was the influence of shifting political opportunity structures on the types of action they engaged in; on-the-street mobilization in the form of demonstrations and protests under right-wing governments and more communicative forms of action under left-wing governments. A more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon was limited, however, by the study's narrow focus on the internet and social media. By including other types of communicative action in its analytical framework, future research could provide important insights into the shift from traditional to communicative forms of collective action under varying political opportunity structures.

Finally, while the use of communicative power as a new theoretical tool shows considerable promise for future research, it faces significant analytical hurdles, in particular with regard to the extent to which communicative types of action have agency. How can one measure the impact of Facebook likes, a YouTube video or a string of editorials? How can we ascertain the extent to which it has had an impact on its intended target – be it the opinion of a specific segment of the public or the outcome of public policy? In other words, while researching power capacities and their exertion – ‘power to’ – is relatively straightforward, the question of ‘power over’ poses significant theoretical and empirical problems (Lukes, 2005: 69–73). Ultimately it is our ability as researchers to address these problems that the future usefulness of this new theoretical concept depends upon, as well as the study of trade union power within the union revitalization literature more generally.

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Appendix

Table 5. LO Action in Denmark between 2009 and 2012.

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|---|--|
| 2008 | Liberal-led coalition government in power |
| Economic recession begins | |
| March 2009 | Actor(s): LO and EEO |
| Protest | Action: blockading the Ministry of Education |
| 8 June 2010 | Actor(s): LO and FTF |
| 'No to Genopretningspakken' Demonstration | Action: approx. 70 000 demonstrated against government cuts outside Parliament Communicative action: 89 897 Facebook likes |
| September 2010 | Actor(s): LO Youth and affiliated union youth groups; DSU; and student/youth organizations |
| 'Youth Take Responsibility' Campaign | Action(s): 25 000 protest outside Parliament, 40 000 nationally Communicative action(s): Facebook page, 14 709 likes |
| January 2011 | Actor: LO Youth |
| 'Lars Løkke is pissing on the Youth' Campaign | Action: visits to 35 vocational schools nationally Communicative action: YouTube video, 109 views |
| 2011 | Actor(s): LO Youth; EEO; National Association of Vocational Schools |
| 'Take Youth Seriously' Campaign | Action: 45 political debates at vocational schools nationally, with over 7 000 students Communicative action(s): 2 000 txt messages sent by students to 165 participating politicians |
| 15 September 2011 | Social-Democratic-led coalition formed |
| 1 May 2012 | Actor(s): LO and Social Democrats |
| Rally | Action(s): public speech by LO General Secretary and Social Democratic Prime Minister Helle Thorning highlighting youth issues Communicative action: YouTube video (3 479 views) |
| 24 May 2012 | Actor(s): LO, Danish Employers Association and the government |
| Tripartite negotiations | Action: lobbying the government on its youth package |

Table 6. TUC action in the UK between 2009 and 2012.

| | |
|--|--|
| 2008 Economic recession begins | Labour government in power |
| June 2009 'Youth in the Recession' Conference | Actor(s): TUC and Youth Compass Action(s): One-day conference |
| 2009 Next Generation Campaign | Actor(s): TUC Action(s): Next Generation Accord Communicative action(s): website (www.rightsforinterns.org.uk); 630 Twitter followers |
| May 2010 2011 Launch of False Economy Website | Conservative-Lib. Dem. Coalition formed Actor(s): TUC Communicative action(s): launch of website (www.falseeconomy.org.uk); 14 744 Facebook likes; |
| January 2011 Rally | Actor(s): TUC; NUS; UCU Action(s): Rally against cuts in Manchester |
| March 2011 Jobs, Growth and Justice Demonstration | Actor(s): TUC; affiliated unions; campaign organizations Action(s): Approx. 500 000 participants |
| April 2012 Cluster Pilot Unemployment Campaign | Actor(s): TUC (national and regional); community groups; trade unions Action(s): political lobbying of Conservative boroughs Communicative action: 58 Facebook likes; 43 YouTube video views |
| May 2012 Grassroots Conference | Actor(s): TUC Action(s): One-day conference |
| October 2012 Young Workers Month Campaign | Actor(s): SERTUC Communicative action(s): launch of website (youngworkersmonth.org) |
| October 2012 Future That Works Rally | Actor(s): TUC and affiliates Action(s): approx. 100 000 participants |
| October 2012 Going to Work Campaign | Actor(s): TUC Action(s): Charter for a Future That Works Communicative action (s): 3 356 Twitter followers; 2 555 Facebook likes |

