

Presentation

The last edition of the international Industrial Relations in Europe Conference (IREC) had an ambitious starting point: the examination of industrial relations in a post-crisis future, based on a philosophy of sustainable growth. The aim was to find *answers*.

One of the major questions in research into industrial relations since the late 1970s has been the extent of increasing convergence or persistent divergence across industrial relations models. The predictions of across-the-board convergence towards a low-profile industrial relations model characterized by decentralization and weak trade unions were rejected by several studies in the 1990s, which showed some limited convergence and adaptation in a context of persisting varieties of capitalism and industrial relations. However, the recent economic crisis has provided new incentives to further deregulation of labour markets and the decentralization of collective bargaining. A particularly interesting issue in this regard is how actors use their power resources, including industrial conflict and social dialogue, as complementary rather than mutually exclusive strategies.

Several kinds of paper were presented at the conference. Some sought to analyze how industrial relations helped to improve the quality of employment. Others addressed the strategies developed by trade unions in Europe to face the membership crisis that has already been affecting them for three decades. And yet others focused on unions' recruitment strategies with respect to migrant workers, young workers, and women. Another issue of interest in the context of this conference was the internal politics of trade unions: i.e., the mechanisms by which members can participate, which can help to explain grass-root perceptions about their role within the trade union. Finally, another area of interest was the analysis of trade union member flows (i.e., the causes underlying the processes of joining trade unions but also of disaffiliation).

In this issue of the *International Journal of Organizations* we wish to give visibility to some of the presentations made at this conference. The items selected will provide a good taste of what was there.

Firstly, Nils Karsson & Henrik Lindberg (Ratio Institute, Sweden) propose that one of the main causes of shortcomings in European labor markets is the existence of corporative cartels, through which the state has delegated various forms of regulatory power to employers and employees that act as cartels. Their paper suggests that the European labor market models need to be modernized. Tomas Berglund and Patrick Vulkan also came from Sweden (Gothenburg University). The first author, Berglund, focuses on the transformations of Swedish labor market institutions and the effects on employees' job change cognitions. Vulkan proposes that the insecurity facing employees in the labor market can be viewed as a multifaceted concept that encompasses job insecurity, employment insecurity and income insecurity, as well as the cognitive and affective dimensions of each of these.

Meanwhile, Dag Olberg (FAFO Institute, Norway) discusses trade unions in the Nordic context. His paper addresses working time schemes with highly concentrated work periods and comparatively extended work breaks.

In their paper *The Meanings and Strategies of Spanish Employers and Trade Unions on the Quality of Employment*, Maria Arnal, Carlos Prieto & Maria Caprile examine the various discourses of trade unions and employers on the quality of employment in Spain. They give us the Spanish point of view. Also ÁNGEL ALONSO (Oviedo University) proposes the concept of *flexicurity* in his discussion of the labor transitions of Spanish workers. Elgoibar & Euwema (Sevilla University) and their research team believe that in the current context of economic, social and labor changes, and limited resources, organizational conflicts are becoming more and more competitive. They offer two explanations for this approach to conflict in Spain: the low trust between unions and management, and the long tradition of confrontation in industrial relations. They analyze the conflict pattern from worker representatives and the relation to trust in management and union support.

Finally, the German researchers Schilling & Vanselow (University of Duisburg, Germany) describe the 'German miracle' and how trade unions shape the future of industrial working conditions. Their paper provides an insight into how the metalworkers' union develops strategies for innovative and sustainable solutions for improving future production and working conditions.

In a society such as the current one, in which the media-political focus is on the word *crisis*, it is sociologically necessary to analyze what is behind this

concept. The current issue of the URV's *International Journal of Organizations* – made up of eight articles and two book reviews – makes a contribution from the field of industrial relations. Undoubtedly this field is already undergoing significant transformations. We invite you to read the articles and learn from the analyses.

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