Atypical jobs, segmented labour markets and issues of under-representation

Proposed special panel

Co-ordinator: Guglielmo Meardi

Over recent decades, labour market research has increasingly focused on the insider-outsider divide and on the uneven representation of unions in processes of social policy making. The forms of labor market dualization and of employee representation vary greatly by country, depending on who are considered ‘outsiders’ (e.g. women, youth, immigrants, ethnic minorities), on welfare regimes, and on industrial relations systems. Following the increasing exclusion of certain groups of workers from political representation, recent studies have also emphasized processes of causalization in the labour market. At the same time some scholars have focused on how trade unions have been experimenting with new ‘revitalization strategies’ to deal with the uneven representation of workers, including those in non-unionized sectors.

The economic and financial crisis of 2008 and the main political and economic reforms introduced to face it have indeed contributed to an increasing dualization of the labour market and of the political representation of various occupational groups. Urban riots in different countries (such as the UK and Sweden), protest votes in Southern Europe, new social movements such as Occupy and the Indignados in Spain have called into question the capacity of western societies to provide representation and to give voice to the ‘crisis losers’. The duration of the present crisis indicates that the emerging tensions may have long-term effects on societies, but research has so far been limited to the analysis of the most visible movements. Union movements and the emergence of alternative forms of worker representation have not been analyzed adequately so far.

The panel aims at contributing to the scientific analysis of new forms of worker representation and self-representation, focusing on vulnerable workers. It also aims to discuss how the economic crisis has transformed the legislative framework regulating the social protection of workers and has reduced the capacity of trade unions to intervene and safeguard the rights of the workers. Studies that consider the shift of vulnerable workers from the domain of social protection to the domain of social assistance in different welfare systems, and those that investigate innovative forms of mutualism will also be welcomed.

The panel organizers invite papers from international scholars in an effort to promote the study in comparative perspective of the different forms of representation of the most vulnerable groups of workers across countries with varying types of trade union organization and with different political responses to the crisis. The panel’s contributions will lay the basis for a publication.

Contributors:

Guglielmo Meardi, Melanie Simms, Ingrid Artus, Michael Whittall, Enrico Pugliese, Bianca Beccalli: Representation of the losers of the crisis: A comparison of systems and strategies of representation of vulnerable workers
Bianca Beccalli and Marco Bacio: Women and Trade Unions, a relationship in crisis? History and developments in Italy.

Marisol Garcia and Marc Pradel: Emerging social movements in Spain: worker’s rights claims from the unemployed and their connection with other movements

Valeria Pulignano, Nadja Doerlinger, Guglielmo Meardi: Trade unions and labour market dualisation: A comparison of policies and attitudes towards agency and migrant workers in Germany and Belgium

Andrea Ciarini, New forms of representation of underrepresented workers in Italy

Stefano Boffo, Enrico Pugliese: In search of representation: the difficult relationships between unemployment and unions. Suggestions from the ‘Movimento dei disoccupati organizzati’