

ILERA European Congress 2016

The future of representation, Milano, Italy, 8-10 September 2016

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CALL FOR PAPER AND WORKSHOP PROPOSALS (deadline 15 January 2016)

The XI European Regional Congress of the International Labour and Employment Relations Association (ILERA) will take place in Milano on 8-10 September 2016 and intends to explore and analyse developments in labour and employment relations across Europe and in a comparative perspective.

Representation is a core element in labour and employment relations and one of the aspects which are more exposed to changes in the socio-economic environment. Trade unions and employer associations are constantly influenced by developments in the labour market and employment structures and in the business and economic systems. They have to respond the basic questions which shape collective employment relations and refer to apparently simple issues: whom they shall represent and how.

The increasing diversification in the labour market, due for instance to the growing importance of workers' individual features and aspirations and to the variety of contractual frameworks, and in the economic environment, linked to the multiplication of business and organisational models, is challenging established representation structures and patterns. Mergers and restructuring are now a stable feature of representation systems and both trade unions and business/employer organisations explore new paths to better collect and represent the demands put forward by their constituencies. Similarly, whether representation takes place through collective bargaining, participatory practices, tripartite dialogue or by directly providing members with services may affect the ability to respond to the various members' demands as well as the nature and structures of interest organisations.

On the employee side, such processes are intertwined with efforts aimed at 'revitalising' unions and preserve and possibly expand membership levels, after a period of difficulty and almost generalised decline. On the employer side, the needs and demands of individual firms emerge as a pressing issue as well as the relevance of the transnational level of regulation, beyond the obvious importance of growing international competition.

In Europe, alongside the national level, the European Union plays an increasing role not only in the definition of employee representation in domestic and transnational firms, but also as an arena where both representation and representativeness become key elements of social dialogue on socio-economic policies.

Papers and workshops addressing the multi-faceted issues outlined above are welcome. In particular, proposals can refer to the following five tracks:

Track 1: Actors at national and European level

Trade unions and employer associations are undergoing important transformations in both their structures and strategies. In Europe, in particular, the transnational dimension of representation is particularly strong and developed, due to the role of the European Union, but also to economic integration, which broadly affects all European countries. The state, as the third actor of employment relations, is seemingly taking up a more important role vis à vis social partners, as a number of traditional core elements of industrial relations, like wage setting institutions, are gaining prominence within economic and labour policies.

Under this track, we welcome papers and workshops which analyse recent developments and trends in:

- Trade union and employer representation and representativeness;
- The internal organisation of social partner associations and their reorganisation processes;
- The strategies that social partners organisations are implementing to preserve and expand their membership;
- The actions and initiatives undertaken by governments to influence industrial relations processes and outcomes and more broadly the changes in public policies regarding employment and labour issues.

Track 2: Collective bargaining and participation

Collective bargaining remains the key regulatory tool of industrial relations, but, as the decentralisation of negotiation towards the workplace proceeds and economic processes such as the globalisation of markets and production seem to strengthen the position of employers, participatory practices, notably in decision making, can become more important.

Under this track, we welcome papers and workshops on:

- Recent trends in collective bargaining structures;
- The analysis of collective bargaining outcomes in terms of number and level of agreements, coverage rates, content of agreements, including wage developments;
- Studies on legislation affecting collective bargaining, for instance concerning extension mechanisms or the relationship between bargaining levels;
- Developments in participatory practices.

Track 3: The European dimension of regulation

The influence of EU regulation over employment and labour relations in Member States has apparently increased in recent years. While the focus on 'soft regulation' since the turn of the century was seen as implying less harmonization across countries and possibly lower effectiveness, the establishment of the European Semester in 2011 seemingly marked a shift to enhanced policy coordination. This was the result of the strengthening of the Stability and Growth Pact and especially of the tightening of fiscal discipline. But, in the framework of the Economic and Monetary Union, the relevance of labour market flexibility as well as of wage developments has increased as a means to address macroeconomic imbalances and therefore key industrial relations processes, like wage setting institutions, have been closely considered in the annual policy reviews. Alongside such developments in the EU regulatory system, the European dimension remains quite important for the social partners. For instance, Europe-wide wage coordination remains on the trade union agenda, EWCs continue to play an important role in the Europeanisation of labour and employment relationships, and the operation of multinational companies across Europe raises a number of issues linked to the transnational nature and impact of their strategies.

Under this track, we welcome papers and workshops on:

- The changing features and effects of EU regulation over labour and employment relations;
- The European dimension in the strategies of national and European social partner organisations;
- The role of EWCs and developments in their actions and achievements;

- Developments in transnational private governance mechanisms, like code of conducts, voluntary initiatives, framework agreements, social auditing/certification processes, which cover labour standards and employment and working conditions.

Track 4: The transformation of the public sector

The public sector remains at the centre of broad and compelling initiatives, which are affecting in significant ways the economic and employment conditions of public employees as well as the regulatory arrangements. International factors and supranational actors have come centre stage in an environment traditionally sheltered from external pressures. Within the new European Union economic governance the pre-crisis balance between unilateral regulation and collective bargaining has been strained, although to different extent across countries. The role of trade unions has also been affected by seven years of austerity policies and public service restructuring. Old and emerging themes coexist, like the importance and peculiarities of labour conflicts in the sector, with their regulatory problems, and the potential role of service users as a new actor in public service employment relations. The evolution of these features and trends are crucial for the configuration of public service employment relations in the years to come.

Under this track, we welcome papers and workshops on:

- Collective bargaining and wage setting systems emerging from the economic crisis;
- Austerity policies, public service restructuring and the role of trade unions;
- Recent trends in labour conflicts in the public services and regulatory issues;
- The potential role of public service users as a new actor in public service employment relations
- Public service employment relations theory in the new economic and institutional environment.

Track 5: HRM, business performance, quality of work

Business strategies and practices are an ever changing element which has a key impact on employment and working conditions. Choices concerning selection and recruitment, skill and career development, training, reward systems, direct participation practices can be crucial for the firms' economic performance and greatly influence the quality of work. The integration and combined effects of unilateral company policies and industrial relations remain a topical issue for labour studies.

Under this track, we welcome papers and workshops on:

- HRM practices and the quality of work;
- Reward systems and business performance;
- Work organisation, innovation and productivity;
- Training, skill development and careers;
- Equality initiatives at the workplace;
- High-performance workplaces;
- Employee participation.

Notifications of acceptance will be sent by 29 February 2016

Registration for the Congress will start on 1 February 2016