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What is This?
Transformation and Continuities in Urban Struggles: Urban Politics, Trade Unions and Migration in Spain

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Abstract

Spain was one of the countries at the heart of the work of Manuel Castells due to its history of urban struggles and labour–urban based alliances. It formed one of the key examples of city movements and the democratisation of urban spaces. The 1960s and 1970s were seen to throw up a range of new types of urban mobilisation and engagement—in part based on issues of internal migration and its urban and employment impact. With the changes in Spain during the late 1970s and 1980s—which were economic, political and social—this dimension of urban politics steadily fell away, although Spain continued to exhibit unique organisational forms at the level of the local state and local civil society. Civic politics were linked to local associations in a curious way, but the extent of mobilisation had changed due to the steady institutionalisation of urban and labour movements (and a weakening of their relations). However, this civic dimension began to re-emerge with the strong wave of immigration after the mid 1990s when, from being a country with one of the lowest levels of first-generation immigrants, it has become the European country with one of the highest. The paper focuses on the way migrant organisations and trade unions have organised in relation to migrants in the labour market. It shows how the legacy of previous mobilisations and structures continues to provide a framework for the politics and inclusion of migrant communities. However, it also argues that much of the new urban politics of migration has been influenced by a service delivery—leading to a similar set of outcomes that faced the indigenous urban movements of the 1960s and 1970s. This is of theoretical significance to how we see network and urban politics in relation to unions and employment relations.

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Introduction

Spain was one of the countries at the heart of the work of Manuel Castells due to its history of urban struggles and labour–urban based alliances. It formed one of the key examples of city movements and the democratisation of urban politics. The 1960s and 1970s were seen to throw up a range of new types of urban mobilisation and engagement—in part based on issues of internal migration. With the changes in Spain during the late 1970s and 1980s—which were economic, political and social—this dimension of urban politics fell away, although Spain continued to exhibit unique organisational forms at the level of the local state and local civil society. Civic politics continued to be linked to local associations in a curious way, but the extent of mobilisation had changed due to the steady institutionalisation of urban and labour movements. However, this civic dimension began to re-emerge with new forms of immigration after the mid 1990s when, from being a country with one of the lowest levels of first-generation immigrants, it has become the European country with one of the highest.

This paper focuses on the way immigrant organisations and trade unions have organised in relation to migrants in the labour market. It illustrates how the legacy of previous mobilisations and structures continues to provide a framework for the politics and inclusion of migrant communities. However, it also argues that much of the new urban politics of migration has been influenced by a service delivery and hierarchical politics of inclusion—leading to a similar set of outcomes and issues that faced the indigenous urban movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The theoretical significance of this relates to the issue of how we see networks and urban politics.

The paper aims to show how the urban and spatial dimension of union strategies in relation to the workforce is subject to a range of experiences and factors. It is not the outcome of some clear rational choice type decision-making (see Upchurch et al., 2009, for a critique), but is the outcome of historical circumstances, political factors and legacies of regulation, and the challenges brought by immigration and social changes. The manner in which unions developed a territorial and community presence—built on a notion of industrial relations being ‘socio-political’, especially in particular unions—framed the development of responses to migration.

The paper also shows how the role of the state is a key factor in terms of how it develops its social service provision in both quantitative and qualitative terms—and in terms of how the state supports and links with social actors and institutions in civil society. This is missing in a great part of the community union debate which ignores how the community is structured and developed in terms of different templates of community strategies and structures (Tattersall, 2006). In such debates, community unionism tends to mean non-workplace activity focused on the local constituency of workers in settled areas, but the terminology is rarely clear or precise. In turn, how unions relate to these community dimensions and the role of state funding and agencies are also significant. Hence, the paper starts with an outline of the employment relations debate in relation to the community and the spatial dimension. This leads to an outline of the way democratic union strategies emerged in Spain after the mid 1950s and developed through to the 1970s transition from the Francoist dictatorship to a new liberal democracy. This shows how the community and urban dimensions of the labour movement were central to the labour movement’s structures and identity. Urban
struggles and spaces impacted on organisations and established a basis for their identity and action; this link between different actors and regulatory spaces (Martínez Lucio and MacKenzie, 2004) means that forms of action and responses continue to persist and frame the activities of organisations such as trade unions.

However, the impact of political imperatives and industrial restructuring led to a decline in the centrality of community structures and politics to the labour movement during the mid to late 1990s. The growing disconnection between work-based union politics, on the one hand, and the local community and aspects of the labour market, on the other, came to the fore in the context of changing migration patterns from the 1990s. This analysis leads to a section in the paper on immigration in Spain and the way in which community centres have been developed as part of a strategy to provide information and social support. These centres are predominantly union centres that have a strong degree of state funding. This section of the paper assesses the extent of dependency on the state, the nature of the services provided and the way different union strategies have been using such new structures. The tension between different views related to the urban and spatial dimensions of the labour market is discussed in relation to questions of union autonomy, competing systems of representation and voice within immigrant politics, and the changing nature of the state’s role.

The City, Migration and Labour

There is an on-going concern within the study of trade unionism and employment relations about the failure to conceptualise local non-workplace and ‘community’ dimensions in terms of worker representation. The emergence of the field of ‘industrial relations’ during the early to mid 20th century has been focused on forms of job regulation such as collective bargaining and workplace informal bargaining (Clegg, 1976). The focus is on the formal and informal mechanisms of job regulation through collective bargaining and informal negotiation processes. This focus on the rules and regulations of the workplace and the industrial sector has been mirrored even by prevailing critical approaches in the sociology of work. Based on evaluating and explaining the way workers are controlled, monitored and exploited within the workplace by employers and managers—and, indeed, unions at times—the focus has been on how workers are progressively deskilled and alienated within the capitalist employment relationship (Braverman, 1974; Thompson and Newsome, 2004). In effect, the question of work and trade union representation has been addressed through the ‘primary’ processes and relations at work at the heart of such analysis. Whilst some would question such a characterisation, due to the counter-traditions that exist within industrial relations and which are more interested in conflict and instability in the employment relationship, one can nevertheless state that the study of trade union roles and relations has focused on the sphere of work in relative isolation from social and political issues (Martínez Lucio, 1988).

However, within the traditions of labour history, issues concerning local urban and rural communities have been significant to a range of traditions. The role of established occupational communities located in specific geographical areas has been seen as important to the development of working-class identity in sectors such as docks, steel and mining (Thompson, 1963). There are traditions of labour history that, through their technological or economic determinism, have not always been sensitive to such issues, but an increasing interest in the social
and non-workplace issues within labour history has tended to correct this since the 1960s. Recent studies of restructuring and change within labour sociology have even referenced the significance of occupational identity in shaping the restructuring of those communities (see MacKenzie et al., 2006). Within geography, the role of the spatial in shaping labour markets and labour market politics has also been emphasised (Massey, 1995). Labour exists in particular spatial areas and the impacts of capitalism and employer strategies are experienced in different ways not just according to sector, but also according to such spatial areas (Peck and Tickell, 1995). Yet regardless of these traditions, the study of labour and trade unions has not always engaged with urban issues, tending to focus on the relation with the employer around specific elements of the employment relationship through formal or informal processes.

A debate on community unionism has, during the recent decade, emerged in Australia, the UK, and the US due to the argument that such structures may be more relevant to a more decentralised form of work organisation, post-industrial development and a weakening of traditional trade union politics with their focus on collective bargaining and formal mechanisms of job regulation. The debate on community unionism is linked to changes in labour markets especially migration along with displacement and change in traditional established communities (Stewart et al., 2009). In collective terms, more or less, we see that such immigrant constituencies may organise in a variety of ways and not solely through traditional forms of trade unionism. Fine (2006) is concerned with cataloguing the phenomena of worker centres in the US. These are centres that provide a range of services and cultural spaces, and support for local migrants and vulnerable workers. Trade unions are but one part of the narrative of struggles for rights within these communities. There are a series of characteristics that Fine draws out from these centres and which form an interesting tapestry of ‘new actors’ in employment relations. These centres focus on service provision, advocacy and organising, and are community-based rather than workplace-based. They are built around strong ethnic and racial identification, leadership development and internal democracy, popular education, ‘thinking globally’, coalition building and small and involved memberships. These characteristics provide us with an interesting challenge. Many groups through such independent agendas and networks of centres are filling a major social service gap in the US. Trade unions are not the sole player, given the role of various social movements and religious organisations. The interest in community unionism (see Tattersall, 2006; Wills, 2004) which has evolved in recent years is an attempt to see how unions can actually approach migrant communities, amongst others, with a view to providing broader and non-workplace-based forms of representation. So we are seeing a major rethink of how we understand the community and migrant dynamic within industrial relations.

However, regardless of such competing traditions within the study of labour and trade unionism, in particular, the question of the urban dimension, and changing labour markets linked to the urban dimension, is not always studied in industrial relations in terms of the strategic and political developments within the labour movement. Moreover, the turn towards community remains marginal to the study of industrial relations regardless of the emphasis placed on the urgency of such an approach (Wills and Simms, 2004). Yet the drive towards researching migration in the past 10 years has forced many to begin to study migration and unions in relation to spatial factors.
Findings in the UK, Australia and the US—where the union renewal debate in theoretical and practical terms has been more advanced—have been stretched by two extremes: the way unions ‘reach’ migrants through services and established systems of regulation (Martínez Lucio and Perrett, 2009); and the way migrants and ‘other actors’ (see Heery and Frege, 2006) organise around independent organisational sites such as workers’ centres (Fine, 2006). Yet, mainstream debates on union renewal, ‘organising’ union strategies and new forms of trade union service activity rarely touch the question of space. It is increasingly clear that the spatial dimension of work is vital for an understanding of how trade unions organise and relate to migrant communities especially in the current context of a relatively deregulated capitalism and a corresponding approach to labour deployment and use (see Lash and Urry, 1987, for discussions on this economic debate). First of all, the declining presence in the UK and the US of larger industrial workplaces capable of integrating immigrant labour into the industrial process challenges the areas around which unions regulate and organise. Hence, the urban areas which ‘surrounded’ such workplaces provided a spatial context that allowed clearer and stable relations between trade unions and the local workforce and labour market—although this does not mean that segregation or exclusion within such spaces did not exist (Jenkins et al., 2003). Secondly, the presence of new forms of informal and illegal economic activity creates more hidden and ‘hard to reach’ areas where immigrants are in part employed (MacKenzie and Forde, 2008). The smaller scale and less regulated character of employers in such cases makes for a more complex pattern of relations with communities being less stable and more mobile. Thirdly, the failure by trade unions to develop an urban or spatial dimension within their structures and strategies, one that was externally facing and clearly located within urban communities—beyond administrative offices or occasional drinking venues—means that the new employment dynamics within urban areas with an immigrant presence are disconnected from the work and influence of trade unions. Hence, the urban or spatial dimension becomes more precarious in employment terms, fragmented in terms of sectoral and employment identities and forms of work, and disconnected from the traditional forms of worker representation.

**Research Methods**

The research for this paper comes from two distinct sources and time-periods, allowing for a longitudinal study of the development of trade union strategies in Spain with regard to local community issues. The first emerges from a dataset of interviews in the Madrid region of Spain gathered in the 1980s. This broader dataset consisted of 200 semi-structured and unstructured interviews and was conducted by Miguel Martínez Lucio with union officials, workplace activists and local territorial and community-based trade unionists and social movements. It was focused on the emergence of union strategies within the Spanish industrial, social and political transition of the 1960s through to the 1980s. The second set was collated in 2008–10 and consists of 25 interviews conducted with trade union officials and migrant organisations in a number of different regions in Spain as part of a wider project by the authors studying trade unions, migration and social exclusion/inclusion in the Netherlands, Spain and the UK. This was funded by the Leverhulme Trust: further interviews in Spain were conducted but focused on other aspects of migration and...
labour. The research methodology for both sets of data has been qualitative with a focus on gaining an in-depth understanding of the evolution of trade union strategies in Spain. Interviews, both semi-structured and unstructured, have been conducted with trade union officials and activists at all levels of the Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) and the Union General de Trabajadores (UGT), including specific migrant organisations (especially Ecuadorian and Columbian organisations). The research has also included some participant observation of trade union congresses and visits to trade union offices and union-run migrant worker information centres.

The City and Labour Movement in Spain: The Framing of Internal Migration, Worker Representation and Urban Mobilisation, 1960–80

The Spanish context in historical terms is relevant because it is one of the few instances in the European Union where—regardless of the repression of trade unions during the rule of General Franco from 1939 to 1975—there is a strong tradition of community engagement and activity in spatial and urban terms based on resistance and mobilisation. The emergence of an independent trade union movement during the last 20 years of the regime was haphazard and prone to periodic repression from the state (Ellwood, 1976). The attempt to develop an independent union approach, which nevertheless attempted to infiltrate the formal positions and ‘shop steward’ roles of the official organs of the state, was driven by a range of left-wing movements (especially the illegal Spanish Communist Party) and a range of libertarian Catholic groups (Martínez Lucío, 1998). The attempt to influence the pseudo and uneven collective bargaining system which had been emerging since the late 1950s met with variable success. In the latter period of the regime, new less military-oriented policy élites prepared the ground for a post-Franco scenario with democratisation as an option although levels of repression remained, if less intense than those of the 1940s and 1950s.

In terms of the urban dimension during this period, Castells (1977, 1978) was one of the pioneers in studying the Spanish experience of urbanisation and urban movements. Informed by research and his own experience as a Spanish academic and left-wing intellectual, he pointed to the significance of the urban movement and neighbourhood associations in Spain during the 1960s and 1970s. His studies outlined the development of a strong mobilisation and collective dimension to the urban movements during that period. This was partly driven in other countries by the crisis in collective welfare provision, but in the case of Spain by its absence and slow development (see also Navarro, 2002). Castells spoke of a politics of collective consumption that paralleled the politics and contradictions of collective production. Much of this was configured around welfare and work issues due to the nature of internal migration patterns within Spain during the 1950s through to the 1970s when large numbers of migrants left regions such as Extremadura, Murcia and Galicia to relocate in Madrid, Bilbao and Barcelona, for example. This brought rapid changes in labour markets and an intensive period of urbanisation in key areas. Hence, social service infrastructure and social welfare issues came to the fore of the agenda of urban protest. So, whilst there was an extensive phase of industrialisation and growth in industrial employment, it was not clearly paralleled by a phase of coherent and consistent state services to support urbanisation. Hence, urban movements mobilised on a range of
issues and, what is more, through a variety of internal and participative democratic means such as the assembly (Villasante, 1984, pp. 90–127).

This had a range of effects on the character and structure of trade unions as they emerged from the dictatorship, especially on the Comisiones Obreras (CCOO). The basis of this newly emerging trade union movement, beyond the attempt to infiltrate state union offices and positions, was twofold. First, it was ‘assemblyist’, being driven or highly influenced by the role of mass open meetings in the workplace or its local communities. This was a prevalent feature of the Spanish Communist Party and groups to its left in the newly emerging Spanish labour movement (Fishman, 1990; Ruiz, 1988). The role of the assembly was at times led by lower tiers of independent (non-state) trade unionists or worker representatives to one extent or another, but there was a realisation that the role of mass worker meetings was essential for participation and communication within the newly independent streams of the labour movement. It represented the reclamation of public space in the wake of the authoritarian tradition in Spain as it challenged state dictates that restricted the rights of assembly and communication. The assembly was a way of reclaiming a new democratic dynamic and its real and mythical status amongst the workers at that time cannot be underestimated. Secondly, the link with urban movements and demands was a further dimension of the newly emerging labour movement. In fact, many members of the Spanish Communist Party and other Marxist groups played a role inside the urban and labour movement, acting as a link between the two, alongside other left-wing activists.

Hence the local urban issues of working-class communities were linked to their workplace issues and common mobilisations were not unusual. This is what configured both informally and formally the notion of the Comisiones Obreras union as a socio-political union—although over time this would be redefined in various ways. In terms of union identity, the spatial and the community dimensions were significant features. In organisational and structural terms the CCOO—and other unions such as the Union General de Trabajadores (UGT)—had a range of local offices throughout the major cities and local agricultural centres. This created organisational offices which were not just or merely administrative, as in the UK, but which served as political and cultural reference points which interfaced with the local urban movement and its politics—especially in the CCOO. This dynamic has remained, in one form or another, a feature of the Spanish labour movement (Martínez Lucio, 1998, 2008). The CCOO have represented this dynamic more clearly than the more social democratic currents within the labour movement such as the UGT, who re-emerged in the 1970s after the dictatorship as a significant force having been a major union during the pre-Francoist period. However, in the late 1970s, the changing political context and the national consensus generated between the left and new centre-right democratic government began to ‘privatise’ and close these newly emerging public spaces (Aguila and Montoro, 1983).

Deindustrialisation and the Decline of the Urban Dimension, 1978–90

The alternative and new dynamics of Spanish organised labour in the period from the 1960s to the late 1970s was in great part an outcome of the circumstances and politics of the period. Identities in some of the key left unions and their structures were driven by particular views of organised labour, but also by the way history and context shaped its urban, spatial and social identity (see Foweraker, 1989).
Yet the political and economic pressures of the 1970s and 1980s tested this embryonic and alternative view of labour organisation. First, the need for political consensus and stability during the first years of liberal democracy meant that unions signed a series of national agreements and engaged with a general politics of demobilisation. The political break of the late 1970s was meant to limit the negative impact of strikes and union-led mobilisations. This meant that the more socio-political features of key aspects of union activity were redefined. A more passive approach developed. Traditional workplace and bargaining activities became more central to these consensus-generating processes (Martínez Lucio, 1998). This put into question the community features of trade union politics. A crisis of union resourcing and membership in the early 1980s began to accelerate the closure of many local union offices and union bureaucrats focused activity on a limited number of local facilities. This had a knock-on effect on the community role of the labour movement. Secondly, the economic crisis in Spain during the 1970s and 1980s meant that unions were focusing local community-based mobilisation on challenging restructuring in traditional industrial sectors. This focused attention at that moment on restructuring, away from a broader approach to community politics. Trade unions found themselves divided on how to deal with restructuring in terms of negotiations and mobilisations—with the CCOO and the UGT entering a period of open competition with each other as the latter felt that a closer relation to the state and the new Socialist government (1982–96), with its politics of ‘negotiated’ industrial restructuring, was to be preferred due to promises of social support and employment creation. The unanticipated emergence of a market-oriented social democratic government, supportive of more monetarist and privatisation-based views of industrial and economic policy (Rand Smith, 1996), meant that trade unions were unable to work consistently and closely with the state around a more progressive set of social support strategies beyond providing retraining services and some minor regulatory roles in questions such as labour contracting. The steady distancing between all unions and the state on broad social and industrial policy after the 1988 general strike did not lead to a return to locally based socio-political approaches to community and the city. If anything, the declining activist base of the union—which had not been as extensive to start with, given historical circumstances and political constraints—meant that unions were forced to mobilise around short-focused general strikes, on the one hand, and an acceptance of new state funding for union development and services such as learning and training for workers, on the other. Memories of the link with urban movements and a broader politics of citizenship (see Alonso, 2007) did not explicitly contribute to configuring new union strategies. The role of local offices was steadily becoming focused on services in legal and social information and developing training centres. Within the two main confederations, such offices did not have a major bearing on young workers or women workers who were still relatively excluded from the labour market in the 1980s; this was also the case in general terms for minority anarcho-syndicalist and anarchist unions.

The Impact of Immigration and the City in Spain, 1990–2010

During the course of the 1990s, the situation in Spain in relation to the labour market began to change with the context of an older workforce, the increasing presence
of women in the labour market and a sudden increase in immigration. Whilst unemployment had rarely been below 15 per cent in the first 25 years of the new democracy, women’s participation in terms of the labour market has remained relatively low. The 1990s began to see a variety of sectors such as construction, agriculture and hospitality turn to immigrant labour sources. Spain’s immigration level up until the 1990s was one of the lowest in Europe, having emerged from a relatively closed and internally looking economy under the dictatorship in terms of labour markets. If anything, the regime prioritised emigration as a way of sustaining managed urban development and growth during the 1960s and 1970s. However, during the 1990s, immigration from North Africa, Latin America (especially Ecuador and Columbia) and eastern Europe (Romania and Poland, in particular) meant that a new workforce was arriving and settling in key urban areas and agricultural towns. In 1996, 1.4 per cent of the population was born overseas, whereas in 2008 it was 11.33 per cent (Aragon Medina et al., 2009).

According to most trade unionists, this led to a range of challenges for the labour movement due to a broad presence of the immigrants in the informal economy which is one of the largest in Europe—such as hospitality and agriculture—and an increasing use of migration in key sectors such as construction. Trade unionists from the CCOO and the UGT were encountering a range of bad employment practices, health and safety hazards, and low pay levels emerging amongst small and medium-sized firms which employed immigrants who were relatively more significant to the Spanish economy compared with countries such as the UK and Germany. There was a growing awareness that, as workers, immigrants were subject to high levels of exploitation and susceptible to greater risks in terms of health and safety issues due to the culture of smaller firms and their tendency to bypass regulations in many cases, whilst also placing pressure on the system of regulation within labour markets such as collective bargaining by undercutting wages. Spanish unions had developed internal organisational structures for emigrants, but had not really considered immigrants during the 1980s. Anti-racist initiatives at work and in society were not a priority within the labour movement; in part, this was due to initially low levels of immigration and a preference—according to our research—to see exploitation in mainly class terms. Immigrants were seen to be exploited due to their precarious employment relations and low levels of social inclusion mechanisms in society. This, then, was the main narrative within both main unions (although anarcho-syndicalist trade unions have been more focused on the impact of racism and xenophobia within society). National and local union interviewees in larger unions felt that the major challenge was in extending and enhancing the mechanisms for regulating work which were already in place in terms of sectoral, regional and company-level bargaining along with a body of union representation within the firm. However, whilst there are works council and union elections in Spain every four years that determine the worker representation in the firm and which receive 80–90 per cent turnouts from the workforce, in smaller and medium-sized firms the role and scope of the representatives have always been a challenge and in parts limited (Martínez Lucio, 2008).

Yet the scale of immigration, its intensity in a short period of time and the impact it was having on the regulation of work brought a range of responses from Spanish unions in the 1990s. Unions began developing immigrant sections aimed at raising the question of immigration and the levels of
support for immigrants within the union, as in the case of the CCOO where the department for emigration mutated into one that was dealing with immigration. This occurred with the involvement of immigrant members. These sections were secretariats and, unlike counterparts in certain unions—in the UK, for example—did not have systematic internal representative mechanisms and democratic processes such as annual conferences for immigrant members—although they were more expansive in their presence. Interviews with senior members in the relevant secretariat between 2008 and 2010 revealed that the idea of autonomous immigrant sections was not ‘on the table and neither should they be’. However, most of Spain’s leading and majority trade unions have developed and involved a series of immigrant activists. A series of leading figures have begun to play a role within these sections, although in the national conferences and congresses of the unions the presence of immigrants is not visible to any great extent. These new voices—whilst still less apparent at the leadership level—have been central to developing a range of campaigns on questions of legality and legalisation. Unions have been at the forefront of pushing governments—both on the right and left—into wide-ranging amnesties for illegal immigrants and blanket legalisation of particular immigrant constituencies to a massive extent. The past decade has also seen the development of national tripartite institutions at the level of the state, where unions, employers, specific immigrant bodies and other ‘social partners’ work alongside government representatives on a range of advisory projects for government initiatives and research projects similar to others dealing with learning, for example (Guillén Rodríguez et al., 2008). These bodies have become a form of neo-corporatist dimension of immigrant economic and social interests, which involve union engagement and advice. These are bodies that serve to provide a network for communicating concerns and discussions.

Trade unions have taken this further through an institutional strategy that has called for and gained resources for learning and support, including that of the local level of state administration where unions have developed information services, local social services for younger workers, emergency housing and other services (Aragon Medina et al., 2009). This is relevant because the role of the state at a time of neo-liberalism is not solely concerned with criminalising immigrants (see Hiemstra, 2009), but can maintain and refocus the role of social service—especially in Europe—albeit with a more marketised approach. Yet the major unions have developed their services with new immigrant communities in mind with special reference to information and learning. They have begun to use their leverage in terms of learning and training funds (see Rigby, 2002) as a way of developing courses on language and basic information relevant for immigrants in terms of labour markets. This service approach varies according to region, but both Socialist and Conservative regions have developed high levels of commitment in terms of support—albeit within a welfare state context which remains underdeveloped by western European standards in key areas such as housing and social services (see Alonso, 2007). Yet at the heart of these developments is the systematic creation in the past 10 to 20 years of information centres throughout the Spanish nation which in numerical terms is one of the largest.

Trade Unions and the Role of Community Initiatives in Relation to Migration: Renewing the Community Dimension

The role of the local union information centres for immigrants within Spain is for
many a major ‘benchmark’ and source of interest throughout Europe. Spain is seen as a country coming late to the debate on immigration, but it appears to have learned most from other national experiences, especially those with longer traditions of migration. Unions have developed a network of information offices and centres throughout virtually every major Spanish city. These have been developed especially by the CCOO and the UGT. They are normally located in local union offices and their role is to act as a first port of call for immigrants in relation to work and other social or labour-related concerns. There are many immigrant centres and law firms focused on these types of activity, but none can compare with the sheer extent and breadth of the union network—something which is unusual in most European nations. One of the features of this new form of engagement with immigrants is that the state provides a wide range of funding for such resources. This allows trade unions, who have been identified as being a key part of the provision of such services, to develop these trade-union-oriented information centres and a strategy of support centres more generally.

Such centres provide a range of information services in relation to employment, citizenship, social rights and housing—amongst others—although it needs to be clear that these are not immigrant-led offices, although they may have trade unionists involved from an immigrant background. The unions in the main are expected to keep clear records of such activities. A range of individuals are employed in such centres and in some cases there can be anything up to half a dozen people working in one capacity or another, although numbers vary between offices. Our research covered a selection of cities in the centre and north of Spain (Madrid, Toledo, Valladolid and Oviedo), along with visits to the centres and interviews with their staff and the relevant union. These offices were not always located in areas where immigrant communities would reside, but in the main trade union offices. However, there is a tradition of visiting such offices due to the legal and training services they provide. Therefore, one could argue that such offices were integrated within the main structures of the union in spatial terms. In a place such as Oviedo, the CCOO’s offices (CITEs) would attend to at least 3000 individuals a year. It is clear that as worker centres they are mainly information-based and formal in their approach to attending to immigrants. They open a file on a worker which is logged on a main server so that people can return for further advice. This allows, for example, seasonal agricultural workers as they move across Spain to be supported and logged when they have visited different offices in different regions according to the harvesting calendar. In comparative terms across Europe, the experience of the CCOO’s and the UGT’s developments in this area were accepted as a leading “benchmark and good practice” (European Trade Union Congress officer).

The CITEs do not organise in themselves broader social activity, coalition building or communication strategies with the local immigrant groups. This is driven mainly by the immigration departments of the unions themselves and those co-ordinating some of the offices in question. Hence, one sees that the actual service provision element is divided from the broader immigration-related strategies of the unions. This means that, as centres for bringing workers into the trade union movement who are from an immigrant background, there may be less of a role than at first anticipated. In the geographical areas researched, links with organised immigrant groups were sporadic as far as the unions were concerned due to the problems of sustainability that such groups
had. This varied according to the extent and politics of different immigrant communities. Hence, in the case of the region of Castille Leon, coalition building was a problem even if the CCOO union had organised a range of regional-level cultural events. However, in Madrid and Barcelona, links with migrant organisations were more common and stable.

There were concerns within the CCOO locally that there was a need to connect traditional CCOO work into the CITE and the ‘clients’ they had. In the case of the UGT in Oviedo, there was an acknowledgement that the service had become more detached and that there was a need to rethink such service provision. In 2009, the CCOO began to fuse its immigration section into its employment section which led to a joint department at the national and regional levels—although this mirrored developments in certain state departments. This was seen as a vital step for integrating the issue of immigration into the mainstream of the union’s work. There were also discussions about building a more proactive network of CITE activists throughout the country with the aim of using it for information gathering and as a link into the immigrant population. However, it was not seen as the basis for a stand-alone section or an autonomous body according to senior members of the CCOO. This question of fusing the community dynamic into broader strategies around social inclusion and union activism is therefore a challenge even if the experience of information centres such as Spain’s is one of the most elaborated in Europe. For the UGT, this was a greater problem, with their migrant worker offices being considered as part of the servicing logic of the union and the work they did was seen as being more technical and ideological in approach. Relevant activists in the specific regional union structures were, for example, concerned with the way local regional leaderships were increasingly disconnected from the local dimension and community dimension of the union where once they would have visited local sites more often. In this instance, it was recalled how union officers in the regional union would visit the local town and city offices more regularly and be more connected with the local dynamic. Instead, now the interviewees felt that it was only during the trade union elections every four years that people from the union offices and even the larger workplaces visited local communities and small to medium-sized employers.

The new ‘community union’ dimension and the link to the past ‘community’ of the union are not so clear in such developments. In the CCOO, this dilemma has in recent years been especially apparent, given its history. The CITEs are in part contextualised in terms of the ‘socio-political’ identity of the union—itself a changing object of internal union politics within the CCOO—but remain ambivalently linked to the union’s overall work and activities. Hence, in recent years, the CCOO have begun to use the CITE as an entry into the mainstream activity of the union by raising reference to the role of membership and union activity. Whilst they form a vital part of support for immigrants in terms of their rights, recent strategies have been developed to fuse such immigrant-facing activities more clearly. This demonstrates the way such highly elaborate structures of worker support may be formally linked to the union but not necessarily its broader politics of community engagement and activism—leading to internal political discussions.

**Conclusion**

The role of the urban and spatial dimension within the question of worker representation is significant in the case of Spain. Spain’s
trajectory of union development has been bound up with spatial and local issues since its resurrection in the late 1950s and early 1960s during the dictatorship. The role of community-oriented strategies has formed part of the identity of trade unions such as the CCOO—something which was the case with the anarcho-syndicalist traditions in the earlier 20th century as well. This shows how regulatory and political traditions play a role in framing responses and developments. There is a need to consider industrial legacies and cultures when considering new urban and community-based strategies.

Yet the paper has suggested that such community traditions cannot be seen in some static sense—that is to say, they cannot be seen as being some straightforward alternative to ‘traditional’ workplace or industrial politics. The community itself is structured and restructured in strategic and ideological terms across time. Emerging as a way of connecting to broader issues and experiences within a nascent working class, they formed a vital backdrop to the workplace mobilisations and struggles against employers and the state. They were part of a system of coalition building which led to specific views of work and labour politics that were broader and more inclusive. Hence, the notion of community needs to be seen in dynamic terms. It is a concept that is moulded and structured in different ways throughout recent history. With the demands on union leaders and emerging bureaucracies, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, to stabilise and even control the panorama of industrial relations through formal mechanisms such as collective bargaining, the socio-political dimension began to be rewoven in terms of social pacts with government and employers on wages, training and other employment-related issues (Martínez Lucio, 1998, 2008). This in turn was reinforced by a systematic restructuring of the key areas of trade union organisation and historical mobilisation such as mining and steel production. The link to the community, broadly speaking, was reduced in strategic and structural terms but not extinguished. Hence, the development of immigration during the 1990s found a trade union movement less connected to the local labour market and local urban and rural dimensions than it had once been. The concentration of immigrant labour in sectors with relatively weaker trade union traditions meant that the community dimension re-emerged within the discourse of trade unionism. However, it re-emerged and was remade in a more instrumentally supportive, social and service-driven direction. The link into the immigrant communities and through local offices was therefore constructed as a primary stage of the regulatory process dealing with immediate issues and concerns. It was a functional link into the more established ‘internal’ workplace and collective-bargaining-based regulatory systems of the union—it was in effect a subservient dimension of the regulatory function of unions detached from issues of identity and purpose—and in effect broader renewal.

These developments dovetailed as a discourse with state concerns about social order, labour market regulations and control, and legality and exclusion. This led to the ‘majority’ union movement being offered resources by the state to develop further the offices and centres already discussed—mainly within established union centres. The community dimension was remade, but whereas once it was against the state it is now related to the state, albeit a very different state. This could be due to the perceived weakness of civil society and associational cultures (Perez Diaz, 1993), the failure of the state systematically to develop strong welfare support (Navarro, 2002) or the uneven urban spaces that have developed in the context of neo-liberalism (Peck et al., 2009). Either way, the state,
through various agencies, can enter the debate on community-related representation: although that does not mean we can see union initiatives such as those discussed here as being simply an extension of supposedly omnipotent capital or state-led strategies to restructure working-class communities and interests—through a range of restructuring and post-restructuring initiatives—given the possibility for counter-struggles and active responses from within civil society (Cumbers et al., 2009). There is agency and there are alternative approaches to community realities: to this extent, the politics and autonomy of community initiatives are central to any discussion of the role of urban and spatial politics within the labour movement and within immigrant communities.

Yet a curious development is that the trade union movement has begun to rethink its view of such new community initiatives, once more showing us how community and spatial issues are the subject of political and ideological intervention and invention. How these community initiatives fit into the broader dynamic of trade union politics, how immigrants are linked in active and open and not just passive and service delivery terms, and how a broader strategy of coalition building emerges appear to be a new agenda which recognises the risk and tensions of using state resources. The community dimension is therefore the subject of political intervention: its structures are articulated and provided with meaning through the combination of different strategies and through different links between the employment, urban and regulatory spaces (Martínez Lucio, 1988; Martínez Lucio and MacKenzie, 2004). It is not therefore a simple case of engaging or not with ‘communities’ (for a parallel discussion on organising and partnership see Martínez Lucio and Stuart, 2009). The urban may be a silent dimension of industrial relations and labour studies, but it has in practice been a very explicit dimension of labour movement history in certain contexts with its dynamics and ironies. The question that this paper addresses and one that needs further exploration is how this urban dimension is constructed and what the politics related to it are.

Notes
1. By traditional, we mean the post-World-War-II model of trade unionism based on using collective bargaining and political lobbying through formal mechanisms as a basis for changing and improving the terms and conditions of working people. In this piece, we reference countries such as Australia, the UK and the US because they are examples of this tradition and of new forms of renewal as well.
2. Although Maravall (1979) questions and challenges the way the UGT is depicted by many observers as being marginal during the dictatorship, pointing to their work in Spain during the period.

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