

REPORT

ChangingEmployment workshop: Multinationals and industrial relations in Europe

Network participants

Clara Aguilà, Mona Aranea, Ben Egan, Sara Lafuente Hernández and Holm-Detlev Köhler (plus other participants from the University of Oviedo.)

Venue

University of Oviedo

Date

28-29 January 2014

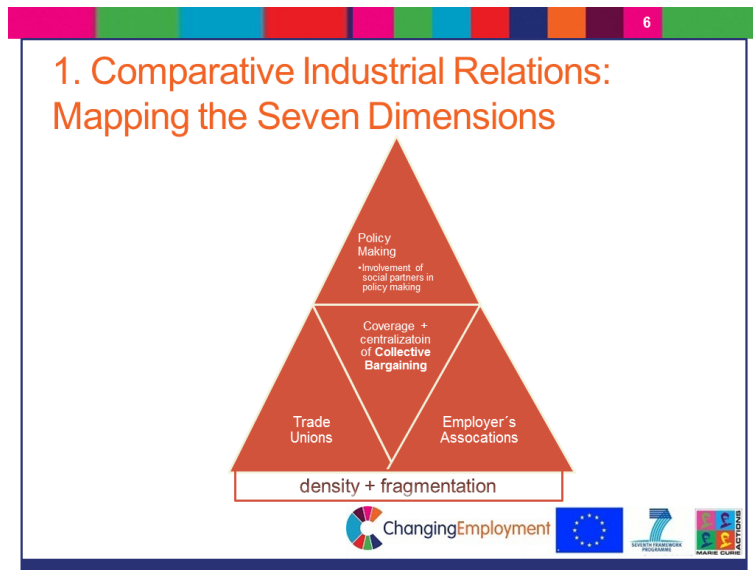
Background

At the *ChangingEmployment* annual colloquium in Paris in November 2013, it became increasingly clear to several ESRs that there was a great deal of potential in the exchange of ideas across, as well as within, the three designated themes of the network. In particular the sharing of ideas on the topic of employment relations (ER) systems—or indeed industrial relations (IR) systems—in several comparator countries across the network as a whole and the impact of multinational companies on such arrangements.

The distinct backgrounds of ESRs in terms of both academic and professional experience was further influenced by being based at universities with differing traditions, meaning that there are diverse understandings of ER systems in each country. In addition exposure to different strands of the vast body of literature on multinational companies, and the ER therein, meant that we felt it would be useful to have an inter-theme workshop to present general interpretations of national ER/IR systems as well as share key texts that have been influential in the first year of the project. The intention was that this would be open to all ESRs working on multinationals and might bring us closer to a shared understanding of the conceptual foundations.

Sessions

Prior to the workshop, several key readings were circulated, with one in particular forming a core text: 'Typologies and levels of analysis in comparative industrial relations' (Bechter et al 2012). Following welcomes and introductions the opening session consisted of a presentation of this paper by Mona Aranea and a discussion of the issues raised around integrating sectorial and national analyses of ER systems.



(Aranea, 2014)

After this Prof. Köhler delivered a special session detailing research that he had undertaken previously in the steel sector and how restructuring had been undertaken in the same company across different European countries – namely Belgium, Germany and Spain. This provided the link between the previous discussion on levels of analysis and real ER research in a multinational setting.

Subsequent sessions consisted of presentations from each of the present ESRs on a national ER system for the four countries of Belgium, France, Germany and Spain. These were chosen as at least two ESRs present were using these particular countries as comparators in their research projects. Wide-ranging feedback and discussions following each, which was particularly useful as it included people from outside the CE network.

Clara Aguilà, Mona Aranea, Ben Egan & Sara Lafuente Hernández



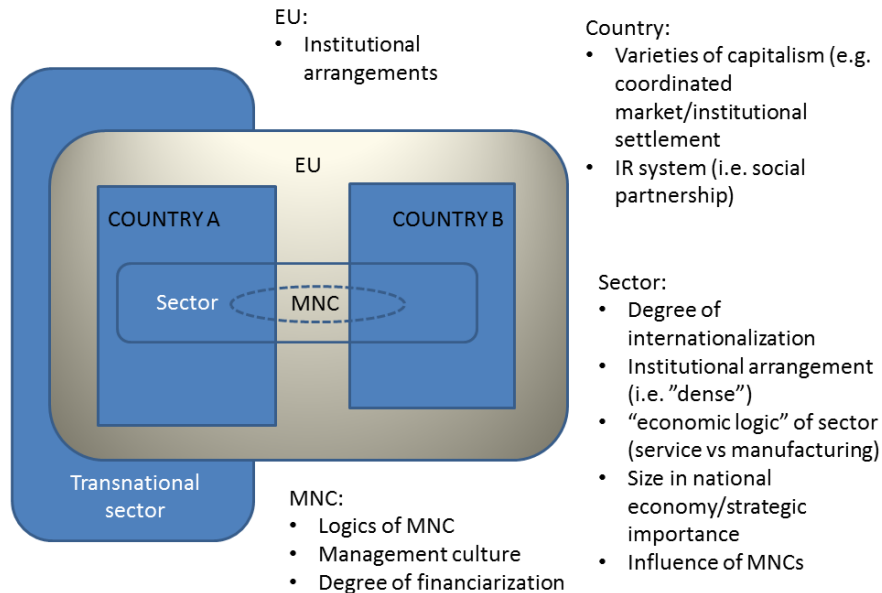
The second day focused more on the sharing of key literature and to that end was much less structured and more geared towards generating discussion on the broad topic of ER in multinationals in Europe. Each participant had the option of presenting one or two key texts that had been most instructive to their development through the first year on the multinational as employer or institution.

Though several others were drawn upon in the detailed and lengthy discussions the main two texts presented were a journal article 'Globalization, multinationals and institutional diversity' (Morgan, 2009) and a book chapter 'Private sector employment relations in western Europe' (Sisson, 2013).

Outcomes

A long discussion followed regarding the significance of the various levels of analysis of ER that are crucial when working on multinationals. Drawing in particular on the institutional literature raised and developed in the Morgan article, a graphic was subsequently designed by Sara Lafuente Hernández that attempts to demonstrate a snap shot of how our discussion progressed in trying to get a grasp of the relationships between the levels of analysis. It is shown here:

LEVELS OF ANALYSIS IN THE STUDY OF IR



This was in turn developed from the various notes that were made on the board in the classroom in which these lively discussions took place.

As a result of the workshop three of the ESRs decided that they would like to develop a working paper for the network website on ER in multinational companies in Europe as for each the issue was an important pillar in situating their own research projects in the broader field of literature. It was therefore decided that another workshop would be required with the explicit intention of developing ideas for this paper.

Following discussions with interested parties the current proposal is to have a 1.5/2 day seminar at KU Leuven in the week beginning 7 April.

References

Bechter, B., Brandl, B. and Meardi, G. (2012): *Sectors of countries? Typologies and levels of analysis in comparative industrial relations*. *European Journal of Industrial Relations* 18(3), 1-18.

Morgan, G. (2009). Globalization, multinationals and institutional diversity. *Economy and Society*, 38(4), 580–605.

Sisson, K (2013) 'Private Sector Employment Relations in Western Europe. Collective Bargaining under pressure?' In: **James Arrowsmith/ Valeria Pulignano** (eds): *The Transformation of Employment Relations in Europe. Institutions and Outcomes in the age of Globalization*. London: Routledge, 13-32