

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



# Does Industrial Relations Research Support Policy? A Comparative Assessment of Research on Spain La recherche en relations industrielles vient-elle en appui aux politiques? Une évaluation comparative de la recherche sur l'Espagne ¿Respalda la investigación en relaciones laborales el desarrollo de políticas? Una valoración comparativa para el caso de España

Sylvia Rohlfer, PhD

Volume 68, Number 3, Summer 2013

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018435ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018435ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

### ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Rohlfer, S. (2013). Does Industrial Relations Research Support Policy? A Comparative Assessment of Research on Spain. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 68(3), 431–456. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018435ar>

### Article abstract

This article reviews the English-speaking literature on Spanish and German industrial relations published in the top 10 journals in this field between 2000 and 2010. The analysis contributes to the ongoing debate about the relevance of industrial relations by establishing the state of the art in research on Spain in comparison to Germany. Following this assessment we then ask whether existing research on Spain is well situated to orient policymakers. The consequences of either normative or normative-free research have largely been overlooked; our discussion expands on two contrasting positions: suggesting a move away from ideology in research (Mitchell, 2001) or recommending normative assumptions as a necessary precondition (Frege, 2007) in the context of Spain.

Our findings reveal a greater convergence in research regarding its restricted multidisciplinary character, its focus on the international level and a strong emphasis on empirical, quantitative work with analysis conducted at various levels. At the same time, some path dependency continues to exist, particularly concerning the active participants in research and the subjects for investigation. The results point to deficiencies in research on Spanish industrial relations.

We conclude by advocating an openly stated, normative base in industrial relations research to guide policymakers in Spain. While an evidence-based approach in policy making is desirable, normative choices are highly consequential and should feature in research in order to avoid a “democratic shock” in Spain.

# Does Industrial Relations Research Support Policy? A Comparative Assessment of Research on Spain

Sylvia Rohlfer

**This article reviews the English-speaking literature on Spanish and German industrial relations published in the top 10 journals between 2000 and 2010. Our analysis contributes to the debate about the relevance of industrial relations by establishing the state of the art in research on Spain using Germany as a point of comparison. Apart from indicating deficiencies in research on Spain, the results reveal a greater convergence in research regarding its restricted multidisciplinary character, its focus on the international level and a strong emphasis on empirical, quantitative work with analysis conducted at various levels. At the same time some path dependency continues to exist, particularly concerning the active participants in research and the subjects for investigation. We conclude by discussing whether the research on Spain should require normative preconceptions in order to orient policymakers – an aspect that has been largely overlooked when discussing the rejuvenation of industrial relations.**

**KEYWORDS:** industrial relations, policy making, research pattern, Spain, Germany

## Introduction

Readers of this journal need no reminder that the field of industrial relations (IR) is in bad shape and research in this area is widely viewed with disfavour or suspicion. For many practitioners, scholars are too academic and are often accused of bias: managers see them as pro-union, trade unionists as pro-management (Hyman, 2009). Governments tend to be sceptical about IR, regarding it as an expression of a system of sectional interest representation and compromise, which they blame as a key source of economic problems (Dickens, 2009; Hyman, 2009). This is accompanied by a declining labour movement and resistance to unionization in new sectors of employment.

Some scholars argue that, within the discipline, IR researchers have contributed to this dangerous trend. First, Dickens (2009) points out that the case made about the value of IR has mainly been addressed by the community of IR

researchers (i.e. it has been conducted internally), but that such debate needs to reach a wider external audience. Arguments made by renown IR academics such as Keith Sisson and the opinions articulated in Ralph Darlington's carefully edited "What's the Point of Industrial Relations?" (2009) are very familiar to those within the field but might appear alien to many outside the academic area. For instance, Sisson (2008) lists "business performance, individual wellbeing, human and social capital development and macroeconomic considerations such as inequality and productivity" as areas where employment relations is of importance. One could add to the list, for example, the level of entrepreneurship (Rohlfers, 2012). From this it is clear that the employment relationship, the institutions or rules involved in its governance, connect to a range of social, political and economic outcomes that are seen as relevant by public policymakers. But Dickens (2009) stresses that IR researchers need to be proactive in connecting to a range of issues: they have to demonstrate that academic IR research is relevant to the problems that practitioners and public policymakers deal with.

Some academics have highlighted the increase of empiricist research and the absence of theory building as a major deficiency in existing IR research "as the apparent statistical sophistication masks the lack of theory building" (Rodriguez Ruiz and Martinez Lucio, 2010: 139). Moreover, Hyman (2004: 266) observes damaging consequences in that "the field detaches analysis from broader social science traditions, trivializes its conceptual apparatus and privileges pragmatism over theoretical imagination."

The danger for IR lies in turning into a purely empirical, econometric, non-theoretical study at a time when, for instance, Spanish economists demand the contrary from labour market policy: "We know that public policymakers do not have in their hand the key to end unemployment. But they could put some more effort, imagination and intelligence in the search for solutions to the problem" (Pueyo, 2013; own translation).

Furthermore, investigating the world of work at various levels and from different disciplinary angles, as well as raising critical questions about, for instance, labour market reforms, flexibility measures etc., may not always be popular among those in positions of power and authority. But, unless critical questions are asked negative consequences can quickly develop. Research can reinforce taken-for-granted ideas and popular knowledge about work and employment. Policymakers will waste time and money on inappropriate or counter-productive change strategies – trying to do the wrong things better, as Sisson puts it (2007: 24).

This leads to a related point: the extent to which IR is a contested subject with a range of paradigms and concerns. The argument that IR is in a bad shape

also derives from the observations of an economic bias in IR research and the subsequent process of hollowing-out in its base of active research participants: psychologists, lawyers, sociologists and political scientists in the US have lost interest in IR topics (Kaufman, 1993, 2001). Considering the stream of human resource management (HRM) within IR, Rodriguez Ruiz and Martinez Lucio (2010) observe the Americanization of research on Spanish HRM and the way its move to a quantitative bias has had major effects in denying the context of the political and the actual terms of HRM. For the purpose of designing policies or other forms of intervention, quantitative and large-scale surveys are typically strong on general quantitative relationships. But they are relatively weak on the finely grained understanding of specific contexts that are better analysed through narratives and perceptions (Strauss and Whitfield, 1998).

The above points provide further explanation as to why the work of IR academics has little impact on politicians and policy makers. As Frege (2007: 4) puts it, "Employment research needs to re-establish a policy oriented research tradition which is not just a scientific exercise for its own good but reassuring of its continuing relevance for society."

Additionally, it is less clear how such rejuvenation of IR research can take place as it is argued that research is embedded in distinct national research traditions and IR systems and their actors continue to show considerable distinctiveness when it comes to international comparison (Keller, 2005; Frege, 2007). This is despite the growing internationalization of academia and the increasing globalization of IR practices throughout the advanced industrialized world. Distinctive national research patterns remain, which seem, so far, amazingly resistant to processes of universalization (Frege, 2007, 2008). This implies that academics would need to take different measures in order to revitalize IR research – depending on the state of the art in country specific IR research.

This paper explores the research on Spanish IR. Spain is selected as an appropriate subject as it has been particularly hit by the recent economic crisis and policymakers are searching desperately for appropriate measures in different areas to return to economic prosperity and social cohesion. It is becoming clear that the political and economic areas of modern societies are more interrelated and that there is pressure on the traditional disciplines of economics, political science and sociology to reflect these interdependencies (Crouch, 2004: 210). IR research could lead these attempts, "being naturally at the intersection of politics and the economy and able to offer a unique interdisciplinary approach to modern political economics" (Frege, 2007: 182).

Moreover, in Spain, the IR institutions such as trade unions were closely intertwined with the introduction of democracy after Franco in the 1980s. Hence, the

discourse on IR became genuinely embedded in the Spanish political economy and the potential exists for research on Spanish IR to inform policymakers (Hamann, 2012).

In our analysis, we firstly explore the distinct patterns in IR research on Spain published between 2000 and 2010 in prominent international journals. To allow for a thorough assessment, the results are contrasted with the patterns in research for Germany in the same journals. Germany has a long-standing IR tradition and is often referred to as a model to be imitated and from which other national IR systems might identify obvious lessons of wider application. Moreover, the recent time period chosen allows us to provide an up-to-date picture of Spanish and German IR research.

We then ask: given the findings, is IR research on Spain as a discipline well situated? While academics have stressed the need to address the deficits in IR research in order to strengthen its relevance, the consequences of normative versus value-free research for policy making have largely been overlooked. Frege (2007), for instance, underlines that normative assumptions are a necessary precondition for a public-policy approach aimed at changing the present situation. "Its influence lies less in being of direct utility than in providing a general perspective upon problems and issues with which particular policymakers are concerned. As a consequence it has to be interdisciplinary, international, and normative, recognizing that values are centrally involved in a policy orientation" (Frege, 2007: 183, 184).

Mitchell (2001) proposes a slightly different concept. He demands a stronger emphasis on policy research for IR but suggests that "as these realities enter the IR field, along with social science and economics in general, the scholarly literature may move away from ideology. It may instead focus on more general modelling of problems of concern to HR practitioners, policy makers and even the general public" (Mitchell, 2001: 392).

IR research removed from ideological or normative preconceptions would mean an increased link with positivism based on technocratic expertise and scientific claims. This enforces pragmatic, empirical hypothesis-testing research built on a free-market paradigm (Gerring and Yesnowitz, 2006). Research would rely on facts, free of the investigator's subjective values. Although, in this way, policy making is better equipped to respond to changing market requirements, critics point out that it leads to a less critical, innovative perspective on society and policy making.

These opposing points of views are valuable to situate the existing research on Spanish IR and to evaluate the following: in the Spanish context, is an engagement in political discussions of what is "good" for society at large,

for employees and employers favourable? Or, alternatively, is a discussion without any normative input more valuable for the rejuvenation of IR research?

Methodology

Selection of Journals

In order to explore the characteristics of IR research on Spain and Germany, we conducted a content analysis of articles published on this subject. Collecting a representative selection of journal articles requires a systematic approach. Hence we decided to analyse a sample of journals from the ISI Web of Science® database falling within the journal category “Industrial Relations & Labour.” This category covers journals in the area of arbitration, business and labour law, human resources, labour history, labour relations, and the sociology of work relations and hence exhibits the multi-disciplinary characteristic of the discipline (Colling and Terry, 2010). The above list was accessed in January 2011. Out of the 20 journals listed, the 10 journals with the highest five-year impact factor were selected (table 1).

Research in these journals is intended to reach scholars, policymakers and practitioners, with issues examining research in a variety of fields. In particular, the *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, the *International Labour Review*, the *Journal of Human Resources* and the *Journal of Labor Economics* explicitly claim to feature articles that make scientific contributions in research relevant to policymakers.

TABLE 1  
Sample Characteristics

Journal Title	Origin	5-year impact factor
Journal of Labor Economics (JLE)	US	2.644
Industrial Relations (IR)	US	2.589
Journal of Human Resources (JHR)	US	2.559
Work and Occupation (WO)	US	2.129
Work, Employment and Society (WES)	UK	1.977
British Journal of Industrial Relations (BJIR)	UK	1.783
Industrial & Labor Relations Review (ILRR)	US	1.353
Personnel Review (PR)	UK	1.166
European Journal of Industrial Relations (EJIR)	UK	1.154
International Labour Review (ILR)		0.987

Source: Web of Knowledge; own compilation.

This constitutes an opportunity to reflect on knowledge generation in Spain and Germany cases and to establish the starting point for IR research on Spain from which revitalization can be pursued. We acknowledge that the effect of research on policy rarely comes from academic publishing directly to policymakers. It is often mediated by institutional research-based reports, such as those carried out by the European Commission or, at Spanish level, by the Spanish Economic and Social Council (CES) or the Spanish National Research Council (CSIS). However, during the last decade the pressure for Spanish academics has increased to publish in accredited journals such as those cited in the ISI Web of Science database. Such “publish or die” culture has led IR experts to publish their research in these journals. Moreover, the articles published are supposed to be of higher quality given the number of journal citations and English publications are often more influential as they reach a wider audience than non-English publications. They therefore serve as a base of knowledge on which institutional research-based reports build on.

We avoid examining book publications and country specific journals for IR, such as *Cuadernos de Relaciones Laborales*, *Relaciones Laborales*, *Revista del Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración* or *Industrielle Beziehungen*. Critics may argue that we overlook a considerable amount of research on Spanish or German IR. Of course, there is an arbitrary element in our pragmatic definition, but including such journals would have gone well beyond the scope of this study.

### **Selection of Articles and Analytical Process**

The review was carried out via a search within the ten journals identified. We used “Spanish,” “Spaniard,” “Spain,” “German” and “Germany” as search terms in order to identify the articles that address IR issues in those countries. The list of articles generated was then checked for duplications and during the process of content analysis each individual article was verified for relevance. To be included in the sample, (a) a discussion of trends in Spain or Germany based in empirical data or (b) in the case of a theoretical paper, the use of Spain/Germany to form a concept was required. A mere mention of Spain or Germany as illustrative examples was not sufficient for inclusion. Finally, a list of 116 articles for Spain and 135 articles for Germany was obtained (tables 2 and 3).

The articles were reviewed by focusing on five principal variables covering institutional characteristics, article subject and methodological patterns in research. While a discussion on the selection of the variables would require a paper in itself, similar approaches are found in the literature reviewing research in IR, such as research carried out by Whitfield and Strauss (2000), Mitchell (2001) and Frege (2007).

For our purposes the variables were conceptualized as follows.

TABLE 2  
Nature of Papers Published on Spain

	US Journals					UK Journals					International	
	JLE	IR	JHR	WO	ILRR	US Total	WES	BJIR	PR	EJIR	UK Total	Total all Journals
Articles coded	3	12	0	0	7	22	7	18	20	26	71	23 116 (100%)
<b>Country location of University</b>												
Spain	1	2	0	0	2	5	1	5	16	4	26	6 37 (32%)
Cont Europ	0	3	0	0	1	4	2	3	2	6	13	12 29 (25%)
Anglo-Saxon	2	7	0	0	4	13	4	10	2	16	32	5 50 (43%)
Asia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 0 (0%)
Rest of World	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 0 (0%)
<b>Disciplinary affiliation of author</b>												
Business Management	0	4	0	0	2	6	0	4	11	11	26	1 33 (28%)
Economics	3	4	0	0	4	11	1	6	7	3	17	6 34 (29%)
Industrial & Labour relations	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	3	0 5 (4%)
Social Science	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	6	1 7 (6%)
History	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 0 (0%)
Law	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4 4 (4%)
Political Science	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	4	6	1 7 (6%)
Sociology	0	1	0	0	1	2	3	2	0	3	8	0 10 (9%)
Psychology	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1 2 (2%)
Miscellaneous	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	5	1 6 (5%)
NA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8 8 (7%)
<b>Article subject</b>												
IR issues	0	11	0	0	3	14	3	13	0	25	41	17 72 (62%)
Human resource issues	1	1	0	0	1	3	0	3	19	0	22	3 28 (24%)
Labour market issues	2	0	0	0	3	5	4	2	1	1	8	3 16 (14%)



**TABLE 2 (suite)**  
**Nature of Papers Published on Spain**

Nature of research	US Journals				UK Journals				International				
	JLE	IR	JHR	WO	ILRR	US Total	WES	BJJR	PR	EJIR	UK Total	ILR	Total all journals
Empirical descriptive	0	3	0	0	0	3	1	1	0	0	2	3	8 (7%)
Empirical inductive	0	2	0	0	2	4	0	5	1	19	25	2	31 (26%)
Empirical deductive	3	6	0	0	5	14	4	12	19	7	42	14	70 (60%)
Think piece	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	4 (4%)
Theoretical	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	3 (3%)
Method													
Qualitative	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	5	1	18	24	4	30 (27%)
Quantitative	3	9	0	0	6	18	5	13	19	7	44	15	77 (71%)
Multi-method	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	2 (2%)
Set up of study													
Stand alone	1	2	0	0	5	8	1	8	18	10	37	5	50 (46%)
Historical	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	2 (2%)
Comparative	2	8	0	0	2	12	4	10	2	15	31	14	57 (52%)
Level of analysis													
Macro-societal	0	5	0	0	1	6	0	5	0	12	17	8	31 (28%)
Sector-industrial	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2 (2%)
Firm	1	1	0	0	4	6	0	4	12	7	23	0	29 (27%)
Micro	2	2	0	0	1	5	4	6	8	4	22	9	36 (33%)
Multi-level	0	2	0	0	1	3	1	3	0	3	7	1	11 (10%)

**TABLE 3**  
**Nature of Papers Published on Germany**

	US Journals					UK Journals					International	
	JLE	IR	JHR	WO	ILRR	US Total	WES	BJIR	PR	EJIR	UK Total	Total all Journals
Articles coded	7	13	8	2	22	52	16	22	12	28	78	135 (100%)
<b>Country location of University</b>												
Germany	4	5	2	1	6	18	5	7	6	9	27	48 (35%)
Cont Europ	1	0	2	0	3	6	8	2	0	7	17	23 (17%)
Anglo-Saxon	2	8	4	1	13	28	3	13	5	12	33	63 (47%)
Asia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1 (1%)
Rest of World	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)
<b>Disciplinary affiliation of author</b>												
Business Management	1	6	0	1	1	9	0	7	8	5	20	29 (22%)
Economics	4	4	5	0	10	23	1	7	1	4	13	36 (27%)
Industrial & Labour relations	0	1	0	0	3	4	0	1	1	4	6	10 (7%)
Social Science	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	2	3 (2%)
History	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)
Law	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	4 (3%)
Political Science	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	3	4 (3%)
Sociology	0	0	0	0	2	2	7	0	1	4	12	15 (11%)
Psychology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)
Miscellaneous	0	1	0	0	1	2	2	1	1	4	8	11 (8%)
NA	2	1	2	1	5	11	5	3	0	4	12	23 (17%)
<b>Article subject</b>												
IR issues	0	10	0	1	13	24	3	17	6	26	52	80 (60%)
Human resource issues	1	2	2	0	4	9	1	4	6	1	12	22 (16%)
Labour market issues	6	1	6	1	5	19	12	1	0	1	14	33 (24%)

**TABLE 3 (suite)**  
**Nature of Papers Published on Germany**

	US Journals				UK Journals					International		
	JLE	IR	JHR	WO	ILRR	US Total	WES	BJIR	PR	EJIR	UK Total	ILR Total all Journals
<b>Nature of research</b>												
Empirical descriptive	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)
Empirical inductive	2	3	0	1	3	9	3	6	3	13	25	1 35 (26%)
Empirical deductive	5	10	8	1	19	43	12	12	8	15	47	4 94 (70%)
Think piece	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	2 (1%)
Theoretical	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	4	4 (3%)
<b>Method</b>												
Qualitative	0	3	0	0	4	7	5	9	5	19	38	4 49 (38%)
Quantitative	7	10	8	2	18	45	10	8	5	5	28	1 74 (57%)
Multi-method	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	6	6 (5%)
Set up of study												
Stand alone	5	9	5	1	15	35	3	8	4	6	21	1 57 (44%)
Historical	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1 (1%)
Comparative	2	4	3	1	7	17	11	10	7	22	50	4 71 (55%)
Level of analysis												
Macro-societal	0	1	0	1	4	6	1	4	1	12	18	2 26 (20%)
Sector-industrial	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	2	0 3 (2%)
Firm	0	8	0	0	10	18	2	9	4	12	27	2 47 (37%)
Micro	6	1	8	1	6	22	11	4	5	3	23	1 46 (36%)
Multi-level	1	3	0	0	1	5	1	0	1	0	2	0 7 (5%)

*Year of Publication.* The year of publication refers to the publication of the article in the printed version of the journal to indicate trends in country specific IR research.

*Country location of university to which author is affiliated.* This variable refers to the country-of-origin of the university to which the author – or the first author in the case of co-published papers – was affiliated at the time of publication in order to indicate how international the authorship on each country is. The country-of-origin was clustered into five groups once the entire sample was reviewed: Spain or Germany, Continental Europe excluding Spain or Germany, Anglo-Saxon countries (Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, and USA), Asian countries (Japan), and the rest of the world (Brazil and Israel).

*Author's disciplinary affiliation.* The author's disciplinary affiliation at the moment of publication was broadly classified according to the core discipline's contributions to the field of IR, "drawing upon perspectives from core disciplines including sociology, political science, economics, history and law" and psychology (BUIRA, 2009: 47; Colling and Terry, 2010: 04). This list was augmented during the process of analysis to "business management" given the encountered affiliation by authors during the course of analysis. This variable indicates how interdisciplinary the research on a specific country is.

The variable was not applied to those articles authored by academics with no university affiliation, such as those affiliated to the International Labour Organization (ILO), Max Planck Institute and other independent research institutes. Those organizational sections that did not fit into one of the main disciplinary categories and that did not appear in sufficient number in order to be listed, such as Centre for Migration, Policy and Society, Centre for International Education and Research, Urban Studies and Planning or Geography department, fall under miscellaneous.

*Article subject.* Acknowledging that IR, "at least in the academic world, never completely lost its broad focus" (Kaufman, 2001: 344), the article subject was broadly classified into IR, human resources or labour market related subjects. There is a substantial literature to support the view that human resource issues can be set apart from IR (e.g., Kaufman, 2001; Mitchell, 2001). In our study, therefore, IR issues are based in an external view (markets, government policy, social norms) and include collective bargaining, industrial democracy, union strategy, social security policy, employment law and regulation, MNCs and work organization.

In contrast, human resource issues are related to the functional activities associated with people management activity in companies, that take a management perspective and are more vocational and less "social" in orientation (Kaufman,

2001). Issues covered are, for instance, training, continuous learning, internal recruitment, job satisfaction and quality, employee productivity, compensation, incentive plans, high performance work systems, high involvement practices, leadership, workplace flexibility, employee commitment and health and safety.

Labour market issues are related to determinants of the supply and demand for labour. They include for instance labour market trends, contingent and part-time work; temporary agency work, employment (in)security and probability; gender wage gaps; labour mobility; labour market assimilation of immigrants; occupational segregation, occupational skills, and educational institutions.

Sometimes the classification proved difficult. Articles were classified according to their main topic, but frequently articles comprised various topics and it was not always easy to decide on the most important one. For example, the article by Doellgast (2008), which assesses the relationship between national and collective bargaining institutions, management practices and employee turnover, may be classified as one dealing with IR issues, due to its focus on IR institutions, or as one dealing with human resource issues, due to its focus on high involvement management practices in call centres. Ideally, one would require an in-depth content analysis of each article, but this was not feasible given the large number of articles.

*Methodology of articles.* In order to examine how much variation exists with respect to the methodology used, the following classifying variables were included: empirical descriptive, empirical analytical-inductive, empirical analytical-deductive, think piece (essay, commentary, literature review) or theoretical (theory building, methodology, policy development). For empirical based articles, we distinguished between quantitative or qualitative methods, comparative, historical-longitudinal or standalone research. In addition, the levels of the empirical analysis examined were as follows: macro-societal, sector industrial, firm and micro (group, individual).

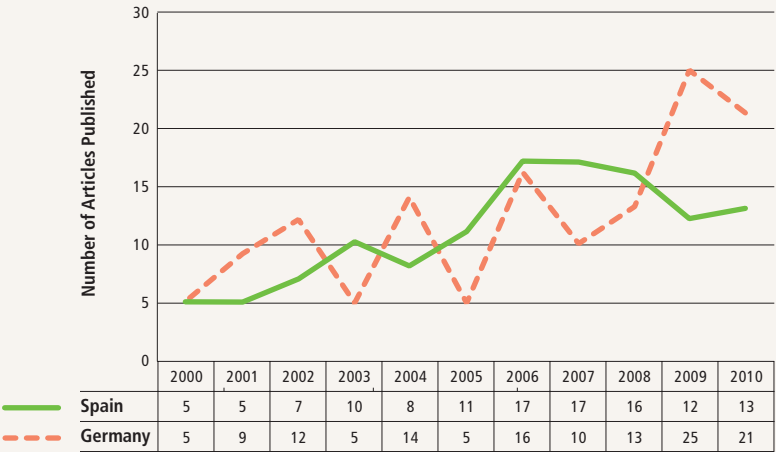
## **Industrial Relations Research in Comparative Perspective**

### **Year of Publication**

Figure 1 illustrates that since 2003 increasingly more is communicated about Spanish IR to an external audience. The number of publications peaked in 2006 with 17 publications and, despite a significant fall in 2009 back to 12 publications, previous publications levels were reached again in 2010. For Germany, clear patterns in published research are less visible. It is notable though that the number of publications steadily increased since 2007. It peaked in 2009 but

decreased again in 2010, although it remained at a significantly higher level compared to the number of publications on Spain. This may be explained by the interest of researchers concerned with the benign labour market outcome in Germany at that time. Despite an above-average fall in real GDP during the crisis, the unemployment rate in Germany increased by 0.5 percentage points during the crisis, compared to 3 percentage points in the OECD on average (OECD, 2012). This unemployment reaction was also highly unusual compared to past recessions in Germany and research indicated that factors behind this outcome were Germany-specific, including the “AGENDA 2010” and “Hartz I-IV,” which were aimed at reforming the German social system and labour market. By contrast, the trend in publications on Spain most likely reflects the growing economic power of Spain between 1994 and 2007, therefore calling for academics to better understand the distinct Southern European model of IR. Interestingly, two US journals, *Journal of Human Resources* and *Work and Occupation* did not publish any articles about Spanish IR during the 10 year time period. Although we explored aspects such as submission policies, the journal’s focus, the editor’s policies, the reviewer pools, etc., we were not able to find an explanation and therefore we approached the editors of both journals. The *Work and Occupation*’s editor could not provide further insights and the *Journal of Human Resources*’ editor replied that they are neither a management nor an IR journal – despite being listed in Thompson Reuter’s IR and Labour category. Hence this point is left to future enquiry.

FIGURE 1  
Evolution of Number of Articles



### Country Location of University to which Author is Affiliated

It is not surprising that researchers from Spanish and German universities show a great interest in their respective national IR systems (tables 2 and 3). In general, the breakdown shows that a greater contribution comes from researchers at Continental European universities (including Spain or Germany) than from those in the Anglo-Saxon world (57% vs. 43% in the case of Spain and 52% vs. 47% in the case of Germany). This is surprising given the language barrier and does not confirm the prominence of IR research as a primarily Anglophone endeavour. Asian researchers show hardly any interest in either Spanish or German IR, which may be due to the limited development of the subject in Asia.

In comparison, it is striking that almost half the publications on Spain by authors from Spanish universities are in *Personnel Review*, a far higher proportion than for non-Spanish authors (table 2). Researchers from Anglo-Saxon countries appear to prefer publishing in the *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, *Industrial Relations* and *European Journal of Industrial Relations* whereas authors from Continental European universities dominate in ILR publications. Therefore, although similar tendencies are observable for other journals, it appears that authors from Spanish universities are disproportionately more likely to avoid specific IR journals and publish in personnel management journals (80% of *Personnel Review* publications about Spain are linked to Spanish universities and 43% of publications by authors at Spanish universities are in *Personnel Review*). With *Personnel Review's* clear focus on “contemporary challenges to HRM theory, policy and practice development,” one can say that it reflects the change in the status of HRM and the steady attempt by Spanish firms to modernize people management. Until the late 1980s the profile of HRM remained low, being purely administrative and reactive in character, making limited use of innovative techniques (Flores-Saborido *et al.*, 1992: 39). Since then, the function of personnel has undergone a steady process of modernization “triggered by the increasing flexibility in the labor market, EU social policy, growth in competition and the emergence of new organizational principles” (Aguilera, 2004: 199).

Furthermore, the presence of multinational corporations in Spain has been essential in testing new practices oriented to increasing participation, leadership and motivation. As Wächter and colleagues (2006) put it, “the malleability” of the HR function has made “Spanish subsidiaries a strategic test bed for the implementation of innovative HR practices” despite the highly regulated environment. Hence, IR researchers from Spanish universities tend to focus on people management practices to improve their understanding of this evolving area.

With respect to patterns on Germany IR research, a clear preference by researchers at German universities with respect to publication venue is not

discernible (table 3). Similar to the patterns on Spanish IR research, researchers from Anglo-Saxon countries appear to prefer the *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, *European Journal of Industrial Relations* and *Industrial Relations* and contributions by authors from Continental European universities are spread, particularly amongst *Work*, *Employment and Society*, *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, *British Journal of Industrial Relations* and *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*.

It is notable that publications on German IR tend to come from authors at either a German or Anglo-Saxon university, whereas publications on Spanish IR were more evenly distributed – at least between researchers from Spanish and Continental European universities. Whereas the interest of German research in German IR is not surprising, a likely explanation of the interest by researchers from UK institutions might be due to the role model character of both economies with a recurrent interest of academics from a “liberal market economy” in the functioning of the IR system in a contrasting “coordinated market economy” (Hall and Soskice, 2001).

### **Disciplinary Affiliation of the Author**

To what extent are the fields of study of Spanish and German IR multidisciplinary? Our results question the multidisciplinary approach to the field of IR for both countries. Over the last 10 years the field of IR for both countries has been dominated by economists and business management academics. Significant fewer contributions were made by academics belonging to any of the remaining fields. In the case of publications on German IR, it is notable that contributions by sociologists remain important and that publications by authors from non-university institutions are significant (table 3, NA column). Regarding the former, this may be explained by the traditionally significant contributions of industrial sociologists to the study of work and employment (Keller, 2005). The latter confirms that, in Germany, scientific research is supported not only by the network of universities, but also by scientific state-institutions such as the Max-Planck Institute, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) and the Institute für Arbeitsmarkt und Berufsforschung (IAB). By contrast, universities are the driving force behind scientific output in Spain (FECYT, 2005).

Regarding differences according to the territory of journals, it is no surprise that in both cases US journals published more articles by economists than did their British counterparts. In contrast, for the UK journals, they maintained in their publications on German and Spanish IR contributions from researchers belonging to a greater variety of academic fields, even though dominance by economists and business management researchers is still observable.

To conclude, the multidisciplinary character of Spanish and German IR is maintained to a greater extent in the UK journals than in the US journals although, in



general, the multidisciplinary character of IR as a field of study is not prevalent in research on both countries. It may reflect a shift towards science building and an economic bias of IR research and the subsequent hollowing out of IR (Kaufman, 1993, 2001).

## **Article Subjects**

Between 2000 and 2010 the most frequent article subjects in research on Spain and Germany were on IR issues. Human resource and labour market issues are considerably less important in IR research on both countries, although human resource issues tend to be more important in the Spanish context while German IR research tends to focus more on labour market issues. In the case of Spain, the greater focus on human resource issues can be explained by the changing character of people management as explained above. Nevertheless, the considerably lower interest in Spanish labour market issues is somehow surprising given the difficulties encountered since 2007 and the singularity of Spanish labour market characteristics, such as the segmentation of the market into outsiders and insiders, larger oscillations of the unemployment rate than in other European countries, and its high degree of wage rigidity. Meanwhile, for the research on German IR, the greater focus on labour market issues rather than human resource issues can be explained through the strong resilience of employment during the past recession. Another explanation might be that, traditionally, people management is discussed in a more legalistic manner in Germany and is therefore less likely to be published in pure HR journals.

Significant trends when distinguishing article subject by territory for Germany and Spain are not observed. It is worth noting that in the case of publications on Spain, a greater focus on HR issues is clear in UK journals compared to their US counterparts. These trends may be due to the greater physical proximity to Spain.

## **Methodology of Articles**

### **Nature of Article's Methodology**

The analysis of articles demonstrates that the external presentation of Spanish and German IR is primarily based on empirical research (94% and 96% respectively) with only 6% and 4% respectively of published articles between 2000 and 2010 accounting for think pieces or conceptual papers. Furthermore, the trend towards empiricism and sophisticated statistical work is noticeable in research on both IR systems: empirical deductive articles dominate the published research, patterns that were already noted by Whitfield and Strauss (2000) in their analysis of IR research between 1952 and 1997. The overall tendency towards empirical work reflects the fact that academia has made a concerted effort to deepen the empirical evidence in the IR field for both countries. Moreover, it can be said that

this common trend in research is a result of the growing availability of concepts to the matured field of IR and the perceived applicability of universal concepts to particular contexts (Rodríguez Ruiz and Martínez Lucio, 2010). Authors endeavour to test empirically the relations that are supposed to hold in the theoretical literature in either the German or Spanish context.

### **Qualitative vs. Quantitative Methods**

For articles with an empirical base, a related methodological characteristic is the application of qualitative or quantitative methods. Overall, the published work on Spain was mainly quantitative (71%) with 27% of publications being qualitative and 2% being multi-method. Similar patterns were observed for research on Germany: more than half of the research being quantitative (57%) followed by qualitative (38%) and multi-method approaches (2%). This tendency in IR research follows the observed patterns in international IR journals by Whitfield and Strauss (2000).

Furthermore, it is no surprise that the vast majority of empirical articles published in the US were quantitative (18 out of 21 for Spain and 45 out of 52 for Germany), whereas the picture was more balanced in the UK (44 out of 69 for Spain and 28 out of 72 for Germany). This may reflect the profound quantitative tradition of IR research in the US (Kaufman, 1993) and the long-standing bias in US academia towards pragmatic, positivist research (Schorske, 1998). At the same time it may reflect the growing opinion among some academics that the main IR journals favour quantitative work (Whitfield and Strauss, 2000).

### **Set Up of Studies**

Empirical publications can also be characterized by their overall set up, i.e. depending on whether their analysis is comparative, historical or based on a stand-alone case or incidence. The published work on Spanish IR over the last ten years has achieved almost a balance between comparative and stand-alone approaches (46% vs. 52% of publications). This is in slight contrast to the set up of studies on German IR, for which a larger number of publications based on a comparative analysis (55%) than a stand-alone case (44%) was found. Overall, these findings reflect the growing internationalization of the IR field, giving researchers the confidence to use either the Spanish and German system for comparison.

When differentiating according to a journal's territory, a significant pattern is found in research on German IR: the majority of work published in UK journals adopted a comparative approach (50 articles out of 72). In contrast, US journals made significantly more stand-alone research available than comparative research (35 articles out of 52). One can say that this reflects the interest by academics to juxtapose the "German model" against other country specific systems and to publish in UK journals that reach a mainly English-speaking European audience.

### Level of Analysis

Finally, whether research focuses on the macro (international and national), sector, firm or micro (individual, groups) level is another key consideration in the external presentation of Spanish and German IR. Journals articles with an analytical focus on the micro and firm level make a significant contribution to the English-speaking presentation of both Spanish and German IR. This is closely followed by the macro-societal level where the contribution is more significant in the case of Spain than Germany. A significantly lower percentage of articles adopt a multi-level focus (10% in the case of Spain and 5% in the case of Germany) but hardly anything is known by the English-speaking audience about sector-level IR in Spain and Germany (2% each).

When considering the journals' territory and the IR research on Spain and Germany, significant trends are not observed. Putting the results into other words, it can be concluded that workplace, firm and national level IR issues are well researched for both IR systems, although they lack a clear sector level analysis. This is an important missing piece in the IR puzzle about Spain and Germany since much of the heterogeneity in national surveys is thereby screened out.

### Concluding on the Detected Patterns

Our analysis shows that, since 2003, Spain has become more visible in the main sources of international publications although, since 2008, significantly more was communicated about German than Spanish IR. Overall, we detect clear patterns of communality in IR research on Germany and Spain. Such convergence in research patterns is observed in four variables:

First, the pool of authors is rather international in outlook with no dominance of either European or Anglo-Saxon academics in both cases. This aspect of our study reveals that the globalization of the economic and academic spheres has corresponded in a stronger international outlook in IR research. This is supported by the finding that both IR systems are compared against other systems rather than studied on a stand-alone basis.

A further commonality in IR research on both countries is obvious in the disciplinary affiliation of researchers. In research for both countries we found that the multidisciplinary character of IR research is diminished given the dominance of business management academics and economists, a trend particularly observable in journals published in the US. The findings, however, show that the hollowing out of IR as observed by academics in the US context is more evident in research on Spain than in studies about Germany.

Another marked pattern in research on both countries is the strong emphasis on empirical work and a noteworthy quantitative bias in research, which is, as

we noted earlier, a major deficiency in IR work. In the context of our study we underline the limited relevance of such research in the eyes of practitioners and policymakers. As Strauss and Whitfield (1998) point out, inferences drawn from inductive research rather than deductive research have proved especially useful in developing policy advice. In general, it is difficult in social sciences to verify anything definitely and journal referees and policymakers are likely to call into question far-reaching assertions. Hence, we observe that academics often point to the clear limitations of their claims put forward. For example, one study in our sample states: "The study has shortcomings that require additional research to support further its findings and being cautious about the interpretation of the data" (Luis Carnicer *et al.*, 2004: 239). This kind of hesitant conclusion is less likely to attract the interest of policymakers. On the contrary, it makes IR research less interesting and puts off non-IR readers who might otherwise have been prepared to review this literature.

A fourth commonality is that, in both country studies, an investigation of the world of work at various levels is achieved – although the sectoral level is significantly less investigated for both countries. We stress that the oversight of sector analysis in IR research is a particular caveat for policy-makers. In Spain, the financial sector, for instance, shows a startling combination of being a victim of and a driving force in the economic context. In this sector of the Spanish economy saving banks have been subject to immense restructuring processes, leading to a reduction from 45 entities, at the beginning of 2010, to 14 entities in 2012 (CECA, 2012). At operational level this has meant the elimination of branches and an overall reduction in employment. Although collective bargaining and participation in the Spanish banking sector are well established and being predominantly carried out at sectoral level, unions and employer associations face serious challenges. The continuing hostile economic situation sets limits on their negotiations leverage and tends to force unions into a defensive position (Sanz de Miguel, 2010). In addition, the Spanish government and the European Central Bank obliged the sector entities to accelerate the efforts of strengthening the Spanish banking system and formulate elements to oversee restructuring efforts. According to a study on the Spanish banking sector, such efforts would require additional drastic reductions, including the closure of another 8,000 branches in Spain (26% of the total) and a workforce reduction of further 35,000 employees (*El País*, 2012b). Consequently, the room for manoeuvre for both unions and management is constrained by sectoral circumstances.

At the same time, a certain degree of path dependency in certain variables used to identify patterns in IR research cannot be denied – although being less substantial than the trend towards greater homogeneity in research. First, indications for contingency in research are found in the multidisciplinary base of IR research. The recent research on Germany still benefits from the traditional influence of German sociologists in IR research and the contributions of research institutes.

Second, the evolution of HRM as a function and management practice in Spain appears to determine the subject in IR research and consequently the publication outlet for articles. We observed a clear tendency of authors from Spanish universities to publish in *Personnel Review*. This is confirmed by the results for the variable “article subject” which shows a greater focus on HRM issues in IR research on Spain than in research on Germany.

### **Is Industrial Relations Research on Spain Well Situated?**

Apart from the noted deficiencies in IR research on Spain and the significant degree of convergence in research when compared to Germany, the issue remains whether IR research on Spain should be free from ideological or normative preconceptions or, on the contrary, should be required to orient policymakers. While the existing debate about the relevance of IR research has mainly been centred on the examination of research patterns (Darlington, 2007; Kaufman, 2001; Whitfield, 2000), the consequences of either normative or normative-free research have been largely overlooked.

An a-normative approach enforces pragmatic research, based on a market-driven rather than ideological paradigm and therefore connects better to a range of issues relevant to practitioners and public policymakers, as emphasized by Dickens (2009).

Furthermore, pragmatic research based on a market-driven paradigm provides a substantial building block for an evidence-based approach to policy making, i.e. public policy informed by rigorously established objective evidence. Evidence-based policy is not new but it is more recently popularized by several European governments, including Spain, which want to end the ideological led-based decision making in policy (Davies, Nutley and Smith, 2000). In 2006, for instance, representatives of the Valencian Ministry of Public Administration stated: “Any innovative social reform raises profound uncertainties about its consequences in the medium and long term. [...] Instead of searching for optimal policies, the framework of an evidence-based analysis proposes a systematic search for robust public policy. The procedures of evidence-based policies allow for the creation, through a political consensus based on an empirical evaluation, of proposals that are technically sound and politically acceptable for any plausible future” (Pinilla Pallejá, 2006: 1; own translation).

Without going into the details about the processes of developing an evidence-based approach, the source of such policy approach is already flawed. The findings of our analysis point to deficiencies in research on Spanish IR. Our concern is whether such evidence itself is of sufficiently high quality to present incentives for policymakers, who promote an evidence-based approach, to enthusiastically “bridge the gap” between IR and policy. Hakim (1987) declares that policy-oriented research is likely to be multidisciplinary and to be conducted at a number of different levels, among

other factors. As seen earlier, the research on Spain is lacking these characteristics. In addition, the timid claims made by IR researchers, as stated earlier, are less likely to make for fascinating bedtime reading (also Mitchell, 2001).

In addition, the suspicion and resistance to what is perceived as technocratic tendencies in the EU have increased in recent years. It has revived a debate between advocates of technical politics, linked to quantitative social sciences, and those who see policy making based on knowledge that only gains full meaning through the application of personal experience and intuitions. So far, in Spain, this discussion has been largely artificial. A purely technical approach to policy making untangled from decisions with an ideological character does not exist – it is more likely that value orientations in policy making are not disclosed and openly debated: “Sensitivity to the norms implicit in one’s research often gets ignored or suppressed in published empirical studies” (Kochan, 1998: 39).

At the same time, it is true that advocates of evidence-based approaches have addressed concerns about intuitions and personalism frequently governing the political analysis in Spain, and have raised debates about a more parsimonious and rigorous policy analysis. We add that, obviously, empirical knowledge cannot supplant the democratic process whereby norms and plural interests within society are reconciled. This is not only because, at present, the quality of the empirical base can be questioned, but also because the preferences of the citizen are a source of value for themselves. This means that the policy will probably always retain a core of prudent practice, social activity, dialogue and discussion of interests and opinions. Perhaps the role of IR in particular, and social sciences in general, is to set the rules for the debate: to help distinguish facts from those that are not and, above all, to help contribute to each argument the value it deserves in the light of the available evidence. It encourages the discussion to be kept constructive and allows positions that are most likely to emerge to stand out from the rest. In this way, research will not reinforce taken-for-granted ideas and popular knowledge about work and employment held by policymakers (Sisson, 2007).

In light of these arguments, would the second approach not be preferable? This approach requires the identification and open declaration of normative values possessed by researchers and applied to the IR research. We have already pointed out that IR is a normative, value-oriented field. Many industrial relations scholars have at least moderately left-wing leanings and identity with unions (Strauss and Whitfield, 1998). If the purpose of social sciences is to help citizens and policymakers to better understand the world with an eye to change the given situation (Gerring and Yesnowitz, 2006), then pure empirical exercises which focus primarily on high methodological sophistication without providing a discussion on their normative assumptions cannot reach a broader audience and satisfy neither citizen nor policymakers.

Considering the Spanish case, governments adopted their own targets and austerity measures to return to economic prosperity with effects on consumption, employment and growth perspectives. Such involvement gives policymakers a specific responsibility and citizens expect them to be honest with facts. Without doubt, scientific evidence in policy making is important, but policies are only seen as legitimate by society if they are adequately motivated, efficient and respectful of social and individual rights (Pinilla Pallejá, 2006; Gerring and Yesnowitz, 2006). In Spain, however, analysts have pointed to the “democratic shock” following the “economic shock” (*El País*, 2012a) and the “indignados” movement has been interpreted not just as a manifestation of economic discontent but also as an expression of distrust in institutions and the governing value assumptions by governments (Armingeon and Baccaro, 2011). In the field of IR, for instance, research on and claims for a revival on social dialogue in Spain assumes that this is in the best interest for employees and the social cohesion in Spanish society at large. But this is usually neither made explicit nor tested. Moreover, it is evident that the benefits of the latest, controversial labour market reforms in Spain can be conceived differently. Normative choices are therefore highly consequential and one can say that they should feature prominently in the motivations for a study as well as in its interpretation.

## Does Industrial Relations Research Support Policy?

We review the existing English-speaking literature on Spanish and German IR that is published in the top 10 IR journals between 2000 and 2010. The findings reveal a significant degree of communality in research for both countries indicating a greater convergence regarding the restricted multidisciplinary character of research, its existing degree of internationalization, and a strong emphasis on empirical, quantitative work with analysis conducted at various levels. At the same time, some path dependency continues to exist, particularly regarding the active participants in research and the preferred subjects for investigation. The findings point to deficiencies in research on Spanish IR. We conclude by advocating an openly stated, normative base in IR research to orient policymakers in Spain.

## References

- Aguilera, Ruth. 2004. “Corporate Governance and Labor Relations: Spain in the European Context.” *Corporate Governance and Labor Management: An International Perspective*. A. Pendleton and H. Gospel, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 197-225.
- Armingeon, Klaus, and Lucio Baccaro. 2011. “The Sorrow of Young Euro: Policy Responses to the Sovereign Debt Crises.” Paper presented at the CES Conference, Barcelona, June.
- BUIRA. 2009. “What’s the Point of Industrial Relations?” *What’s the Point of Industrial Relations?* R. Darlington, ed. Manchester: BUIRA.
- CECA. 2012. “Consolidación.” <<http://www.cajasdeahorros.es/reestructuracion.html>> (accessed June 19, 2012).

- Colling, Trevor, and Mike Terry. 2010. "Work, the Employment Relationship and the Field of Industrial Relations." *Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice*. T. Colling and M. Terry, eds. Chichester: Wiley.
- Crouch, Collin. 2004. "Epilogue." *A History of Sociology in Britain*. A. H. Halsey, ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 208-211.
- Darlington, Ralph. 2009. "Some of the Challenges facing the Academic Study of Industrial Relations." *What's the Point of Industrial Relations?* R. Darlington, ed. Manchester: BUIRA.
- Davies, Huw, Sandra Nutley and Peter Smith. 2000. "Introducing Evidence-based Policy and Practice in Public Services." *What Works? Evidence-based Policy and Practice in Public Services*. S. Nutley, H. Davies and P. Smith, eds. Bristol: Policy Press, 1-12.
- Dickens, Linda. 2009. "The Point of Industrial Relations: Rising to the Challenges." *What's the Point of Industrial Relations?* R. Darlington, ed. Manchester: BUIRA.
- Doellgast, Virginia. 2008. "Collective Bargaining and High-involvement Management in Comparative Perspective: Evidence from U.S. and German Call Centers." *Industrial Relations*, 47 (2), 284-319.
- El País*. 2012a. "Del 'Shock' Económico al 'Shock' Democrático." 3 June.
- El País*. 2012b. "La Banca Espera Severos Ajustes en Sueldos y Oficinas si se Piden Ayudas." 11 July.
- FECYT. 2005. *Universities, Mainstay of Spanish Scientific Output*. Barcelona: Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology.
- Florez-Saborido, Ignacio, Manuel Gonzales-Rendon and Manuel Castro. 1992. "Human Resource Management in Spain." *Employee Relations*, 4 (5), 39-60.
- Frege, Carola. 2005. "Varieties of Industrial Relations Research: Take-over, Convergence or Divergence?" *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 43 (2), 179-207.
- Frege, Carola. 2007. *Employment Research and State Traditions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Frege, Carola. 2008. "The History of Industrial Relations as a Field of Study." *The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations*. P. Blyton, E. Heery, N. Bacon and J. Fiority, eds. London: Sage, 35-52.
- Gerring, John, and Joshua Yesnowitz. 2006. "A Normative Turn in Political Science?" *Polity*, 38 (1), 101-133.
- Hakim, Catherine. 1987. *Research Design: Strategies and Choices in the Design of Social Research*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Hall, Peter, and David Soskice. 2001. *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hamann, Kerstin. 2012. *The Politics of Industrial Relations: Labour Unions in Spain*. London: Routledge.
- Hyman, Richard. 2004. "Is Industrial Relations Theory always Ethnocentric?" *Theoretical Perspectives on Work and the Employment Relationship*. B. Kaufman, ed. Champaign, IL: Industrial Relations Research Association, 265-333.
- Hyman, Richard. 2009. "Why Industrial Relations?" *What's the Point of Industrial Relations?* R. Darlington, ed. Manchester: BUIRA.
- Kaufman, Bruce. 1993. *The Origins and Evolution of the Field of Industrial Relations in the United States*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.



- Kaufman, Bruce. 2001. "Human Resources and Industrial Relations: Commonalities and Differences." *Human Resource Management Review*, 11, 339-374.
- Keller, Berndt. 2005. "The Industrial Relations Field in Germany: An Empirical and Comparative Analysis." *Advances in Industrial & Labor Relations*, 14, 239-277.
- Kochan, Thomas. 1998. "What is Distinctive about Industrial Relations Research?" *Researching the World of Work*. K. Whitfield and G. Strauss, eds. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 31-45.
- Luis Carnicer, Maria de, Angel Martínez Sánchez, Manuela Pérez Pérez and Maria Jose Vela Jiménez. 2004. "Analysis of Internal and External Labour Mobility." *Personnel Review*, 33 (2), 222-240.
- Mitchell, Daniel. 2001. "IR Journal and Conference Literature from the 1960s to the 1990s: What Can HR Learn from It? Where Is It Headed?" *Human Resource Management Review*, 11 (4), 375-393.
- OECD. 2012. *OECD Economic Surveys Germany*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Pinilla Pallejá, Rafael. 2006. "Politica Basada en la Evidencia Para la Renovacion del Estado del Bienestar." Paper prepared for the XIII Encuentro de Economia Publica, Almería, 2 and 3/02.
- Pueyo, Ramon. 2013. "Las Redes del Desempleo." *Cinco Días*, 19/04.
- Rodriguez Ruiz, Oscar, and Miguel Martínez Lucio. 2010. "The Study of HRM in Spain: The Americanization of Spanish Research and the Politics of Denial?" *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21 (1), 125-143.
- Rohlfer, Sylvia. 2012. "Are Industrial Relations Relevant for Entrepreneurs? A Conceptual Exploration." RENT XXVI, Conference publications.
- Sanz de Miguel, Pablo. 2010. "Challenges in Restructuring of Saving Banks." EIRO. <<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2009/12/articles/es0912029i.htm>> (accessed May 19, 2012).
- Schorske, Carl. 1998. "The New Rigorism in the Human Sciences, 1940-1960." *American Academic Culture in Transformation*. E. Bender and C. Schorske, eds. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 309-330.
- Sisson, Keith. 2007. "Responding to Mike Emmott: What "Industrial Relations" Suggests Should Be at the Heart of Employee Relations." <<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wbs/research/irru/publications/recresrep/response1.pdf>> (accessed 13 January 2013).
- Sisson, Keith. 2008. "Putting the Record Straight: Industrial Relations and the Employment Relationship." *Warwick Papers in Industrial Relations*, No. 88, April, IRRU.
- Strauss, George, and Keith Whitfield. 1998. "Research Methods in Industrial Relations." *Researching the World of Work*. K. Whitfield and G. Strauss, eds. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 5-30.
- Wächter, Hartmut, Rene Peters, Anthony Ferner, Paddy Gunnigle and Javier Quintanilla. 2006. "The Role of International Personnel Function." *American Multinationals in Europe: Managing Employment Relations across National Borders*. P. Almond and A. Ferner, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 248-270.
- Whitfield, Keith, and George Strauss. 2000. "Methods Matter: Changes in Industrial Relations Research and their Implications." *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 38 (1), 141-151.

## SUMMARY

### Does Industrial Relations Research Support Policy? A Comparative Assessment of Research on Spain

This article reviews the English-speaking literature on Spanish and German industrial relations published in the top 10 journals in this field between 2000 and 2010. The analysis contributes to the ongoing debate about the relevance of industrial relations by establishing the state of the art in research on Spain in comparison to Germany. Following this assessment we then ask whether existing research on Spain is well situated to orient policymakers. The consequences of either normative or normative-free research have largely been overlooked; our discussion expands on two contrasting positions: suggesting a move away from ideology in research (Mitchell, 2001) or recommending normative assumptions as a necessary precondition (Frege, 2007) in the context of Spain.

Our findings reveal a greater convergence in research regarding its restricted multidisciplinary character, its focus on the international level and a strong emphasis on empirical, quantitative work with analysis conducted at various levels. At the same time, some path dependency continues to exist, particularly concerning the active participants in research and the subjects for investigation. The results point to deficiencies in research on Spanish industrial relations.

We conclude by advocating an openly stated, normative base in industrial relations research to guide policymakers in Spain. While an evidence-based approach in policy making is desirable, normative choices are highly consequential and should feature in research in order to avoid a “democratic shock” in Spain.

KEYWORDS: industrial relations, policy making, research pattern, Spain, Germany

## RÉSUMÉ

### La recherche en relations industrielles vient-elle en appui aux politiques? Une évaluation comparative de la recherche sur l'Espagne

Cet article passe en revue la littérature anglophone sur les relations industrielles espagnoles et allemandes, publiée entre les années 2000 et 2010, dans les dix revues les plus importantes du domaine selon le *Journal Citation Reports* (ISI). L'analyse se veut une contribution au débat concernant la pertinence des relations industrielles en appliquant les règles de l'art sur les recherches portant sur l'Espagne en comparaison de celles portant sur l'Allemagne. À la suite de cette évaluation comparative, nous nous demandons si la recherche actuelle sur le cas espagnol est bien positionnée pour aider les décideurs politiques dans leurs orientations. Les conséquences d'une recherche de type normatif par rapport à une recherche non contrainte par des normes nous semblent avoir été largement surestimées. Notre discussion se développe autour de deux positions divergentes : l'une suggérant de se distancer en recherche de tout cadre idéologique ou normatif (Mitchell, 2001) et l'autre favorisant le recours à des hypothèses normatives comme condition pré-requise pour s'appliquer au contexte de l'Espagne (Frege, 2007).

Nos résultats suggèrent une convergence importante en recherche en ce qui concerne son caractère multidisciplinaire, son niveau actuel à l'international et une forte emphase sur les travaux de nature empirique et quantitatifs et ce, à différents niveaux d'analyse. En même temps, il continue d'exister une dépendance de trajectoire, particulièrement en ce qui concerne les participants actifs en recherche et les sujets sous étude. Les résultats mettent en lumière des lacunes dans la recherche sur les relations industrielles espagnoles.

Nous concluons en plaidant en faveur d'une recherche fondée sur une base normative en relations industrielles et ouvertement avouée pour guider les décideurs politiques en Espagne. Bien qu'une approche fondée sur des données empiriques soit souhaitable en matière d'élaboration de politiques, les choix normatifs portent fortement à conséquence et devraient caractériser la recherche dans le but d'éviter un « choc démocratique » en Espagne.

MOTS-CLÉS : relations industrielles, élaboration de politiques, tendances en recherche, Espagne, Allemagne

## RESUMEN

### ¿Respalda la investigación en relaciones laborales el desarrollo de políticas? Una valoración comparativa para el caso de España

Este artículo revisa la literatura en inglés sobre relaciones laborales en España y Alemania publicada en las mejores 10 revistas en este campo entre 2000 y 2010. El análisis contribuye al debate sobre la relevancia de las relaciones laborales, estableciendo el estado actual de la investigación sobre España, usando Alemania como punto de referencia. Tras dicha evaluación, nos preguntamos si al día de hoy la investigación sobre España está bien situada para orientar a los responsables de desarrollar políticas. Las consecuencias, ya sea de la investigación con un carácter normativo o no-normativo, han sido en gran medida ignoradas; nuestra discusión se amplía en dos posiciones opuestas: lo que sugiere un alejamiento de la ideología en la investigación (Mitchell, 2001) o la recomendación de supuestos normativos como condición necesaria (Frege, 2007) en el contexto de España.

Los resultados revelan una mayor convergencia en materia de investigación en cuanto a su carácter multidisciplinar restringido, su nivel internacional existente y un fuerte énfasis en el trabajo empírico y cuantitativo con el análisis llevado a cabo en varios niveles. Al mismo tiempo, un cierto grado de path dependency sigue existiendo, especialmente en relación con los participantes de la investigación y los temas analizados. Los resultados apuntan a deficiencias en la investigación sobre las relaciones laborales españolas.

Se concluye abogando por una base normativa abiertamente declarada en la investigación sobre las relaciones laborales para orientar a los responsables de la política en España. Si bien es deseable un enfoque basado en la evidencia para la formulación de políticas, decisiones normativas son muy consecuentes y deben figurar en la investigación con el fin de evitar un "choque democrático" en este país.

PALABRAS CLAVES: relaciones laborales, formulación de políticas, patrones de investigación, España, Alemania