The tensions between direct and representative workplace workers’ participation are at the heart of one of the most important debates on participation in recent decades (Wood and Fenton-O’Creevy 2005). A context such as the Spanish, combining employer prerogative on work organisation matters and a young system of representative participation, means that direct participation is an uncertain move for all workplace actors. Yet, against the evidence supporting the existence of substitution processes between works councils and direct participation in Germany (Addison et al 1997; Hübler and Jirjahn 2003; Helfen and Schuessler 2009), several studies based on case study research have found processes of complementarity in Spain (Blyton and Martinez Lucio 1995; Ortiz 1998, 2002; Juan Albalete 2005). Focusing on studying this relationship, the determinants of direct participation are examined through a representative workplace survey administered in a Spanish region in 1999.

Collective voice through workers’ representatives is shown to have a significant positive association with direct participation. A number of propositions relating to human resource policies and managerial attitudes to trade unions are not supported, however, and the skills variable used unexpectedly shows a significant negative association with direct participation. A framework of relatively unsophisticated work organisation environments combined with substantive social dialogue suggests a model of direct participation aimed mostly at workers’ integration within a broadly neo-Tayloristic approach to labour management and pragmatism of unions and managers. These results question dominant perceptions of the determinants of direct participation. Since the extension of forms of work organization based on high discretionality levels in Spain continues to be below the European average (Valeyre et al 2009), creating an economy that delivers jobs of quality constitutes an important challenge.
REFERENCES


