Immigrants and trade unions: new clients or new actors? A study on the Italian case
Immigrants and Trade Unions(1)

- At the beginning, a difficult relation, especially in Northern Europe (Castles and Kosack 1973; Roosblad and Penninx 2000; Pajares 2008; Hyland 2012)

- In recent years, fears of competition between immigrants and European citizens (the 'Polish plumber')

- In recent years, anti-discrimination measures, dismantling entry barriers to union participation (Avci and McDonald, 2000).
Immigrant and trade unions in Southern Europe

- In Southern Europe, trade unions are a key point of reference for immigrants, included the irregular sojourners
- They are among the protagonists in the political debates on immigration
- More than 1 million of immigrants are members of trade unions in Italy
Services provided by trade unions

- Trade unions have promoted:
  - measures to legalize the large number of irregular immigrants;
  - orientation services;
  - assistance in bureaucratic procedures (renewal of visas, applications for regularization, family reunions....);
  - labour disputes with the employers on mistreatments of immigrant workers
The reasons for the commitment of trade unions in Southern Europe:

- tradition of political commitment, even outside work issues;
- lack of incorporation in policy and economic choices, which encourages taking opposing positions;
- concern to restrict the space of the informal economy and undeclared work;
- immigrants as potential new members and activists (Marino and Roosblad 2008)
The functions of trade-unions towards immigrants

- Unions are proposing themselves, about immigration, as civil society actors engaged in the extension of citizenship rights, even beyond the economic sphere.

- Three functions towards immigrants (Marino 2007):
  - representation of their interest as workers;
  - promotion of political participation as members of society;
  - provision of services to improve their living conditions.

Can be added a fourth: the opportunities for social mobility by means union and political 'careers'
Methodology

COMPARISON between the two main Italian trade unions (CGIL e CISL)

• Gathering and analyzing documents from different categories on immigration issues

• 40 interview with Secretaries, officials and operators of services for foreigners, both Italian and foreign

• 15 interviews with union delegates

• Observation at Immigration office, attendance in meeting, immigrants committee, etc.
Political Issues

• Citizenship for second generation (Italia sono anch’io)

• Protest against high tax for renewals and permanent permission

• Crisis: unemployment permission for one year instead of 6 months

• possibility to give protection and a temporary residence permit to irregular immigrant workers accusing their employer

• Information and protection activities against scams during the "amnesty" of October 2012
“Immigrants Office”

• Trade Unions offer instruments and services to manage all the aspects connected to the ‘immigrant’ status:
  ➢ renewals of permit of residence;
  ➢ family reunifications;
  ➢ demand for permit within the yearly immigration quotas;
  ➢ demand for regularization during the periodical amnesties;
  ➢ request for language test, etc.

• Social work from the bottom with the participation of union operators, volunteers, leaders of immigrant minorities in connection with other social actors
Individual defence

- The individual defence is linked to:
  - rights’ affirmation;
  - respect of the contractual rules by the employer.

- Difficulty by migrant workers to ask for help in asserting their rights against the employer while they are still employed.

- Frequently, immigrants come to the union to ask for defence or help when they have already lost their job (unpaid income, holidays, etc.). These actions cover 60% of labor disputes.
Collective defence

- At the national level, few collective agreements include issues about immigrants (most agreements signed in 2007-08).

- Holiday is the most quoted issue

- Religion only in the domestic workers national agreement

- Other agreements include norms on training and language courses.

  Norms are general, directed to Italian workers also, although on the same time it can be seen the intention to refer them to immigrants more specifically
Company level bargaining

- At the company level, especially when most workers are immigrants, is normally easier to obtain:
  - More compact summer holidays (e.g., four weeks);
  - attention for special food needs;
  - different working hours in the Ramadan period (beginning early in the morning and ending early in the afternoon, so workers don’t get too weak), time for prayer (instead of coffee break) and so on
Immigrants participation to Unions

- Join unions → use of their services
- Active participation → involvement in meetings, events, courses, etc
- Career in the Unions:
  - delegates
  - Officials and operators
  - Leaders in branch unions (categories)
### Immigrant participation: a comparison (a)

#### CGIL
- In some categories, such as metalworkers, the Statute has established that 8% of leaders must be of foreign origin.
- No cooptation: most of the officials come from a path that saw them engaged for several years as workplace representatives.
- “I’m not the unionist of the immigrants. I am the unionist of all the workers” (int.Cgil1).
However, the same foreign representatives are aware that their being foreigners get themselves to relate with immigrant workers more.

#### CISL
- The different situation concerning the participation of migrants is due to many reasons: structural constraints, concentration of migrants in specific subsectors (lower widespread visibility), number and kind of migrants’ nationality, attitude of the sectoral local board and of the union leaders.
- Immigrant officials (and board membership) are one the most visible outcome of the intention - of at least part of CISL - to start to work with immigrants and not only for them.
Immigrant participation: a comparison(b)

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<tr>
<th>CGIL</th>
<th>CISL</th>
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<td>• Fillea: 5 foreign officials out of 15, one in the board. Fillea offers more career opportunities to immigrants members.</td>
<td>• Filca and Fim have Migrants Committees; Filca: 7 officials (one in the board), Fim 4/5 officials in Lombardy.</td>
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<td>• Fiom, Filt and Filcams promote immigrants presence and participation with Immigrants committees, positive actions and training of immigrants officials and representatives.</td>
<td>• Fim very active, an example for everybody.</td>
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<td>• Problem of the correspondence between nationality of the representative and nationality of most members.</td>
<td>• Filca active, but with different view on the issue among the Italian officials and leaders.</td>
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<td>• Fisascat and Fit give only limited attention to immigrants.</td>
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<td>• Difference between officials and detached representatives (Fit and Fisascat only have the latter).</td>
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Partecipation as delegates (a)

- **Enroll in the union:**
  - to get information or help to fill out the residence permits;
  - due to problems about the contract, with the employer;
  - for “family tradition”;
  - on “invitation” of delegates or officials/operators

- **Become delegates, by co-opted or by election, often after a training period:**
  - after a direct request of officials/operators of categories;
  - after realizing of the problems in the company;
  - as a result of personal problems about the contract, with the employer;
  - to be useful to their colleagues;
  - to compensate for the lack of foreign representatives;
  - to "provoke"
Partecipation as delegates (b)

- They give to their role as delegate the meaning of:
  - Bridge/mediation between the union and company
  - Support for all colleagues, especially the immigrants for issues related to the residence permits and immigrants' rights

- Believe that the union they belong to is working a lot on the immigrant issues but would like more concreteness on:
  - Issue of Italian citizenship;
  - Elimination of the crime of Illegal immigration;
  - Decrease in the cost of the renewal of permits.

- Many are members of the Category Board, Consultas or collaborate with the "immigrants office”

- Interest in a career within the union
Final remarks (1)

BETWEEN PROTECTION ...
- The unions offer services, individual and collective protection and point out the inclusion and anti-discrimination issues, but:
  - there is a difficulty to include in to the bargaining issues directly related to the needs of immigrants
  - The commitment against discrimination is still weak

... AND DIRECT PARTECIPATION
- is influenced by the political tradition of the branch, by the links with social movements and civil society, by the personality of the leaders, and by the strategies or other factors internal to the unions
- occurred at first in the provision of services
- it is slowly making way within the categories

SO FAR, THE PROTECTION ACTS BETTER THAN THE REPRESENTATION
Final remarks (2)

• Trade unions in Italy do their best for immigrants at the political level and in the provision of services for individuals
• They have achieved good results in influencing the normative production, in membership, in making trade unions a point of reference for migrants, in connecting with other actors in civil society
• At the intermediate level (inclusion in the organization) the active role of immigrants is still weak
• The struggle against discrimination in private employment has not been pursued with determination
• Efficiency in protection has not fostered immigrants’ action till now