

# The History of Industrial Relations as a Field of Study

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Industrial relations (IR) broadly defined as the study of work and employment, was established as an independent academic field in the 1920s in the US and subsequently after WWII in Britain and other Anglophone countries.<sup>1</sup> Though originally established by US institutional economists it soon became to be seen as an interdisciplinary field incorporating labor economists, social psychologists, personnel management scholars, industrial sociologists, labor lawyers as well as political scientists working on labor issues. In continental Europe and indeed in the rest of the world research on work and employment remained, however, a subject within those social science disciplines.

This chapter starts by outlining the different historical developments of IR research in the US and Britain as two examples of Anglophone countries with the longest traditions in IR research. It is then contrasted with the developments in Germany as an example of continental Europe. A major finding is that research traditions and outcomes differ from country to country and challenge the

classical notion of the universality of scientific research. This chapter argues instead for the embeddedness of IR research in national-specific path dependencies.

## INSTITUTIONAL HISTORIES OF IR RESEARCH

The industrial revolution and its social consequences in Europe and the US in the nineteenth and early twentieth century increasingly drew scholars from a variety of emerging social sciences (for example law, economics, political science, sociology) to engage in the analysis of the mechanics of capitalism and the 'social question', in particular the 'labor problem' (poverty and social unrest related to the industrialization) (Katznelson, 1996). In the US and Britain (and subsequently in other Anglophone regions) an independent field of study of employment, industrial or labor relations, developed at the beginning of the twentieth century.

As outlined before, this development did not occur in the rest of the world, in particular not in continental Europe, where IR research remained multi-disciplinary, conducted mainly by sociologists, political scientists and lawyers. The different institutional developments across countries are accompanied by specific research traditions exemplified in different methods, theories and paradigms.

In the following sections I will briefly outline the historical development of IR research in the three countries.<sup>2</sup> Generalizing and classifying national traditions is a potentially problematic task. Research is never homogeneous and there are always alternative lines of research. Note that this chapter does not attempt to achieve a complete coverage of the field of study in each country but merely wishes to outline its main, comparatively distinctive features.

### **United States**

The first IR course in the US was created at the University of Wisconsin in 1920. Other universities such as the University of Pennsylvania (Wharton Business School, 1921) and Princeton (1922) and Harvard (1923) followed. In the same year the National Association of Employment Managers changed its name to the IRAA (Industrial Relations Association of America), which was a forerunner of the current professional association, IRRALERA (Labor and Employment Relations Association), which was created in 1947. After the end of World War II IR became increasingly institutionalized as an independent field of study in various US universities.

Historically IR as an academic field was founded in the US by institutional or political economists, such as Richard Ely, Henry Carter Adams and John Commons (the founder of the Wisconsin School), who were heavily influenced by the German historical school of economics and felt increasingly alienated in their economics departments which began to turn towards neoclassical paradigms at the beginning of the twentieth century

(Hodgson, 2001). One can argue therefore that the 'new political economy' or institutional economics arose in reaction to the ascendance of the laissez-faire perspective within economics. The institutional economists found in IR a niche to pursue pragmatic, behaviorist, public-policy oriented research which took institutional constraints in the labor market into account (Jacoby, 1990; Kaufman, 1993). Ideally, this perspective focused on the rules and norms underpinning economic activity, viewing institutions of work and employment as embedded within, and largely inseparable from, broader social, economic, and political institutions (Godard, 1994: 1).

One should note that these early theorists were not radical progressives however, but liberals and conservatives at the same time. They were liberals in their desire for reforming some of the social processes operating in the US society and conservatives in their desire to preserve the contours of a capitalist system and the parameters of wealth and power therein (DeBrizzi, 1983: 8). As Commons would have put it, they wanted to preserve capitalism by making it good. It comes as no surprise that when the IRAA was established in 1920 the top positions were taken over by pro-management conservatives. Their publication *Personnel* became dominated by the conservatives and adopted a strident anti-communist tone that spilled over into more general anti-labor sentiments (in particular against militant workers) but continued to remain agnostic on the question of collective bargaining (Kimmel, 2000: 197).

Moreover, the pioneers of the field in the Anglophone world, Commons in the US and the Webbs in Britain, were heavily engaged in the world of public policy (Hyman, 2001). IR was therefore developed as a policy oriented field of research, thus devoted to problem-solving (Kaufman, 2004: 117).

IR in the US arose as a relatively pragmatic, socially progressive reform movement, thus

occupying a position in the progressive centre to moderate left on issues of politics and economics, and spanning a diverse and not entirely consistent range of opinion with liberal business leaders on the

more conservative side of the field and moderate socialists on the more radical side. (Kaufman, 2004: 2)

The aim was to solve the labor problem without threatening capitalism. As Kaufman (2004: 121) states 'the goals of efficiency, equity and human self-development were mutually served by an active, broad-ranging programme of social and industrial reform'. In other words, IR sought major change in the legal rights, management, and conditions of labor in industry, but at the same time was conservative and non-Marxist in that it sought to reform the existing social order rather than replace it with a new one. In fact, Marxists were antagonistic to the new field of IR since it sought to save through reform what they hoped to replace by revolution (Kaufman, 1993: 5).

At the same time, HR practitioners (or what was formerly called personnel management) and managerial scholars also became interested in the wider field of work and employment (Kaufman, 1993: 19). Already in the 1910s there was increasing interest in the scientific engineering of human capital, as symbolized in the work by Frederick W. Taylor (*Principles of Scientific Management*, 1911). According to Kimmel (2000: 5), by the end of WWI, however, academic researchers and practitioners in personnel management split in two camps, the 'reformists' and 'managerialists'. The reformists adopted liberal values and continued to support progressive ideas of capitalist reforms and saw a role for personnel managers to mediate between workers and employers interests. 'They defined their professional task as the regulation of labor relations in the public interest and the oversight of collective dealings between employers and employees' (Kimmel, 2000: 6). These scholars and practitioners would borrow from the theory and methods of the institutional labor economists. They were part of a wider progressive group of policy makers and scholars from different disciplines who came to the joint conviction that modern industries would need reform such as an employment department which would promote

employee welfare, for example (Commons, 1919: 167).

The managerialists, on the other side of the spectrum, embraced, according to Kimmel (2000), scientific expertise and objectivity as the defining features of their profession and assumed a harmony between employers and employees. Their task was to discover the source of problems in 'sick' companies where workplace relations were not harmonious and then to cure them. They used scientific techniques for 'adjusting' workers to industry, drawing in particular on industrial and social psychology. The idea was to improve workplace relations by a special profession which would apply in particular the new science of psychology to the 'human factor' in industry.

Over time, the more reform-oriented HR members of the management profession found themselves increasingly marginalized (Shenhav, 2002: 187). The triumph of managerialists meant a sharp split between psychological approaches and political and economic approaches to the study of IR. Managerialists favored psychological approaches which were seen as more objective. Industrial psychology became very popular during WWI and thereafter and was increasingly regarded as the solution to the labor problem (Shenhav, 2002: 183). This shift of the new profession of personnel management away from reform and toward 'science' also entailed a move away from a broad treatment of work and employment as involving economic and political, as well as psychological and social factors, towards a narrow treatment of IR/HR as a fundamentally psychological concern (Kimmel, 2000: 311). This approach gained dominance during the 1930s and 1940s. In 1922 business leaders even found their own rival organization to promote the field of employment/personnel management. The American Management Association (AMA), as it was named, campaigned vigorously for the open shop and against organized labor. Thus, increasingly in the early twentieth century the rising academic field of management excluded concerns with labor from their industry and personnel studies

and pushed those reformist scholars interested to the evolving field of study of IR (Shenhav, 2002: 187).

As a consequence, institutional economists interested in IR and reformist HR scholars shared in the beginning a common interest in pragmatic research leading to solutions of the labor problems. However, over time disagreements arose in particular over trade unions and collective bargaining (as one possible regulatory solution) and the two factions eventually split but learnt to co-exist and to divide the problem of work and employment between them, with personnel types handling the 'human element' and IR experts handling the material and collective aspects of labor relations (Kimmel, 2000: 312). For Kaufman (1993: 20), this divide remained a characteristic feature of the field over the following decades. These complicated developments partly explain why today there are two sorts of HR scholars in the US: the ones in the IR field under the umbrella of LERA and the HR and OB scholars which belong to the Academy of Management. Another reason may also be the growing divide between business schools and free-standing schools of labor relations.

It comes as no surprise that the broad field of IR was perceived as an interdisciplinary study rather than a distinctive discipline (Kaufman, 1993: 12). For example, as the director of the IR section at Princeton 1926–1954, J. D. Brown, states, IR should include 'all factors, conditions, problems and policies involved in the employment of human resources in organized production or service' (quoted in Kaufman, 1993: 201). However, interdisciplinarity was in reality pretty narrowly defined. The leading assumption was that the field should investigate a broad terrain by combining economics as well as psychology (see for example the Committee on Industrial Relations in their overview of the field of study in 1926, quoted in Kimmel, 2000: 304). Interdisciplinary research did not mean the dynamic interplay of related disciplines such as political science, sociology or history and their different methodologies and paradigms. Labor economics and social psychology

(in the tradition of the Hawthorne experiments) were clearly the leading disciplines in the field of IR in the US.

After WWII the split between the two economic and psychological groups became larger and the field became increasingly dominated by labor economists and other institutionally oriented scholars interested in collective bargaining (Jacoby, 2003; Kaufman, 1993). Thus, the quasi-stable co-existence of HR and IR started to disintegrate in the 1970s and 1980s when the New Deal system of collective labor relations began to break down. Labor economists have since then increasingly dominated the LERA activities and research programs as well as publications (Kaufman, 1993: 193). According to Kaufman (*ibid.*: 155) it is no surprise that the past academic presidents of the LERA were all labor economists. Similarly, Mitchell (2001: 375) agrees that IR research in the US was always dominated by labor economic paradigms, and probably now even more than in its high days, in the 1950s and 1970s.

As mainstream economics developed during the 1970s toward a sharply focused analytical discipline with a strong methodological consensus centering on model-building and on the statistical-empirical verification of largely mathematical theoretical hypotheses (Solow, 1997) this unsurprisingly also had an impact on labor economics and IR and ended up marginalizing the institutionalists. Thus, labor economics developed from an original institutional focus towards increasingly neo-classical (rational choice) paradigms (Boyer and Smith, 2001; Jacoby, 1990). Strauss and Feuille (1978: 535) argue that 'if collective bargaining represents industrial relations central core, then labor economics has largely divorced itself from that core'. Labor economists are currently more interested in micro level studies such as skill-wage differentials, labor contracts or training (for example the leading Cambridge School in US labor economics) than institutional research. Thus, institutionalism may have lost its theoretical link to labor economics (Jacoby, 2003). This development can be linked to the

declining importance of institutions in the US labor market such as trade unions or collective bargaining.

In sum, it comes as no surprise that labor economics has dominated much of US IR research from its very beginning. Not only are most authors of American IR publications labor economists but research methods, theories and paradigms of the majority of US publications are also shaped by labor economics (Frege, 2005). As outlined above, this does not deny the existence of a large contingent of US labor scholars who use non-economic, multi-disciplinary theories and methodologies, but compared to other countries the share of labor economists dominates the field. Thus, mainstream American IR research is commonly characterized by empirical, quantitative, deductive research with multi-variant statistics and mid-range hypotheses and focused on the micro-level (individual or groups of employees) (Frege, 2005; Mitchell, 2001; Whitfields and Strauss, 2000). Moreover, most IR theories are borrowed from economics or psychology and produce rational choice or strategic choice hypotheses or behavioristic, social-psychological approaches (Cappelli, 1985: 98; Godard, 1994). There is also evidence that research published in American IR journals, has increasingly focused on HR rather than IR issues (Frege, 2005). Finally, with regard to the underlying research paradigms it is commonly suggested that mainstream US research has generally interpreted IR as a labor market outcome and has been driven by a paradigm of contractual *laissez-faire* which was traditionally defined as free collective bargaining and is now increasingly perceived as an individualistic contractual system (Finkin, 2002).

### **Britain**

British universities were initially more reluctant than their US counterparts to welcome a new field of social science research and the first university course in IR appeared in the early 1930s when the Nobel-prize economist John Hicks offered a lecture series at the

London School of Economics (LSE) entitled 'Economic problems of industrial relations'. Only in the 1950s were academic appointments in IR made, first at the LSE, and then Manchester and Oxford. The British counterpart to LERA, BUIRA (British Universities Industrial Relations Association), was established in 1950 and in the beginning only targeted academics and hesitated to accept practitioners for a long time. This was very different to LERA, respectively IRAA, of course which in the beginning was composed largely of business people with an interest in HR (Kaufman, 1993: 5).

Scholarly work on IR issues in Britain however started much earlier with Beatrice and Sidney Webb, who wrote the first classics in the field (*Industrial Democracy*, 1897; *History of Trade Unionism*, 1920) with their insights into the dynamics of unionism and bargaining and which have been constantly referred to by later generations of IR scholars. It could easily be argued that the Webbs were the true founders of the Anglophone field of IR rather than Commons (Gospel, 2005: 5). Also G. D. H. Cole, the outstanding Fabian of the post-Webb generation (McCarthy, 1994: 201) had a huge influence on the field. Cole founded Labor Studies in Oxford. Cole's early 'memorandum' advocated public ownership and workers' control (McCarthy, 1994: 202). However, most of these scholars, though utterly political and interested in transforming the country by reforming the institutions of capitalism ultimately stayed within the parameters of liberalism similar to their counterparts in the US (Katznelson, 1996: 27).

In contrast with the US however, though British economists had an interest in the field, IR as a more institutionalized study was mainly developed by a heterogeneous group of scholars who founded the so-called Oxford School of Industrial Relations, such as Fox and Clegg who studied PPE (Politics, Philosophy and Economics) in Oxford and Flanders (who did not have an undergraduate degree at all). The field was characterized by 'a strong current of positivist Fabian social engineering, common sense and Anglophone

empiricism' not too dissimilar to the early US research (Ackers and Wilkinson, 2003: 8) though it stayed more inter-disciplinary and kept its institutional and historical approach to IR for much longer. Gospel (2005: 3) characterized this approach as mainly focused on the 'institutions of job regulation', especially trade unions and collective bargaining.

There was no real split between IR and HR scholars in Britain. This was partly because the field was less under the control of institutional economists than in the US, partly because behavioral sciences such as industrial psychology were much less developed in British universities at that time. Moreover, the leading paradigm was a pluralistic approach to IR, thus the acceptance of different interests between labor and capital and the conviction that conflict can be regulated benefiting both parties (positive sum game). This pluralistic perception of the labor market and of industrial unrest became a defining characteristic of the academic field in Britain, more so than in the US. It was also more accepted by the wider British public.

The 1970s saw the rise of a more radical Marxist frame of reference which opposed the pluralist desire of reaching stable employment relations and focused instead on class struggle and the subversion of the capitalist system. The radicalization of the 1968 student revolution affected IR scholars and a new generation of academics, in particular sociologists, rejuvenated the personnel of the discipline and added much needed rigor to its theoretical and methodological approaches (Gall, 2003). Prominent examples are Hyman's *Industrial Relations: A Marxist Introduction* (1975), or Fox's later work *Beyond Contract: Work, Power and Trust Relations* (1974). This Marxist stream was much less dominant in the US. The general absence of Marxist social sciences in the US has been widely documented (Ross, 1991) and British social sciences are commonly perceived as more progressive and ideological than those in the US (but less progressive and more pragmatic compared to continental Europe) (Katznelson, 1996: 18 and 40).

What developed from this Marxist approach were sophisticated ethnographic case studies mainly by industrial sociologists such as Batstone et al. (1977), for example, and studies of the 'Labor Process' school. Yet, this radicalization did not last. As Wood (2000: 3) describes, 'in the 1980s sociology as the key discipline within IR tended to give way to economics. This partly reflected the advent of neo-liberalism, as well as the past failings of the institutionalists to analyze economic problems such as productivity'. Ackers and Wilkinson (2003: 12) put it into a political perspective:

the discipline's best response to [Thatcher and] the New Right was a skeptical empiricism. Following political defeat, and in the absence of any new ideas, there grew a highly quantitative new empiricism, centered around the Workplace Industrial Relations Surveys (Cully et al., 1998; Millward et al., 2000), a unique national, longitudinal data set on the state of British workplace relations. IR spent much of the 1980s and early 1990s counting, measuring, and at times denying, the very obvious dismantling of Clegg's 'system of industrial relations'.

In a nutshell, British IR developed a co-existence of sociological qualitative and econometric quantitative studies, the latter being as exemplified in particular in the publications of the *British Journal of Industrial Relations*.

Finally, with regard to the research practices there is evidence to suggest that the field has been traditionally dominated by IR/HR scholars rather than by labor economists as in the US but also that the field remains more inter-disciplinary than in the US. Based on a longitudinal cross-country survey of IR journal publications during the 1970s and 1990s authors publishing in the UK are mostly affiliated as HR/IR scholars rather than economists but that there is nevertheless a wider range of other affiliations compared to the US (Frege, 2005). Also, there is no evidence that the decline of traditional IR institutions such as trade unions and collective bargaining in Britain has led to a declining academic interest. In contrast, research on IR issues such as unions has been stronger during the 1990s in British publication

outlets compared to the 1970s, for example. Moreover, the majority of British IR research has been characterized as mainly empirical but more qualitative, inductive and if quantitative then less based on econometrical analysis compared to the US (Capelli, 1985). The major focus of research tends to be the level of the firm rather than of the individual as in the US (Frege, 2005). Finally, IR has been traditionally defined as labor market outcomes as in the US though over the years the state and legislation became to be seen as increasingly important in shaping IR. Moreover, there is a long tradition of analyzing workplace relations in political terms (labor process debate). The traditional research paradigm can be described using Kahn-Freund's famous terminology 'collective laissez-faire' (Davies and Freedland, 2002) though individual employment contracts are increasingly taking over collective regulations.

### Germany

In Germany employment studies have a long tradition going back to Karl Marx, Max Weber, Lujo Brentano and Goetz Briefs. During the twentieth century the field became dominated by law, political science, but most prominently by sociology with the first university institute specializing in industrial sociology in 1928 at the Technical University Berlin (Keller, 1996; Mueller-Jentsch, 2001). Despite the fact that the relationship between capital and labor and the emergence of interest institutions were discussed in German social sciences from the mid-nineteenth century, IR was, however, not established as an independent academic discipline (Keller, 1996: 199). There is no IR department in any German university. The same is true for all other continental European countries.

Research on work and employment issues remained the subject of various social science disciplines. A few indicators should suffice to support this observation. First, although there have been increasing attempts in recent years to establish an IR discipline in Germany (for example the establishment of *Industrielle Beziehungen* – the German journal of

industrial relations) the academic community directly associated with IR is still quite small. The German section of the IIRA (GIRA, established in 1970) counted 80 members in 1995 (vs. 520 BUIRA members in Britain or 3850 LERA members in the US in 1995). Of those members virtually all are affiliated with a department of sociology or another social science discipline.

Moreover, an overview of *Industrielle Beziehungen*, the only specialized IR journal in Germany, between 1994 (its founding date) and 2004 reveals that published research has been conducted by researchers with a wide array of specializations: industrial sociologists, labor lawyers, political scientists, business administration scholars, and economists (Frege, 2005). Rarely does anyone call themselves an IR scholar. Industrial sociologists are in the clear majority. One should also note that there is hardly any cross-disciplinary communication. Business administration or law scholars for example are rarely cited in the industrial sociology literature and vice-versa (Muller, 1999: 468). The field is really multi-rather than inter-disciplinary.

Industrial sociology has made the most significant contribution to the study of IR (Keller, 1996). Its central focus are core IR issues such as bargaining policies, working time, technical change and rationalization, and their impact on work organization and social structure, but not labor market issues (Baethge and Overbeck, 1986; Kern and Schumann, 1984; Schumann et al., 1994). From its very beginning industrial sociology included a much larger field of topics compared to industrial sociology in Anglophone countries. German industrial sociology was closely connected to social philosophy and general sociology and in fact regarded as its major sub-discipline (Mueller-Jentsch, 2001: 222; Schmidt et al., 1982). It positioned itself within the broader societal context of industrialization, and focused in particular on the role of organized labor.

Max Weber initiated the first systematic sociological research on German industry under the patronage of the 'Verein fuer Socialpolitik' (first empirical research on

industrial work in large German firms) in the late nineteenth century. The famous 'Verein fuer Socialpolitik', founded in 1872 by academics of the German historical school, intended to establish social fairness between capital and labor (Mueller-Jentsch 2001: 223). Goetz Briefs developed the field of 'Betriebssoziologie' (sociology of the firm), later subsumed under 'Industriesoziologie' (industrial sociology) which became a major approach of research during the 1920s and 1930s (Mueller-Jentsch, 2001: 222). Another major research project of the 'Verein' was launched in the first decade of the twentieth century on the selection and adjustment of workers in different segments of German industry (1910–15). According to Mueller-Jentsch (ibid.: 224) this was the beginning of systematic industrial research in Germany. The core question was what kind of men are shaped by modern industry and which job prospects (and indirectly life chances) do big enterprises offer them? Weber wrote a long introduction to the research project and outlined various questions to be addressed: social and geographical origins of the workforce; the principles of their selection; the physical and psychological conditions of the work process; job performance; pre-conditions and prospects of careers; how workers adjust to factory life; their family situation and leisure time (Mueller-Jentsch ibid.: 224). Methodology was based on interviews and participant observation in selected companies.

Mueller-Jentsch (2001) argues that industrial sociology at that time was heavily shaped by the notion of workers exploitation and this was advanced not just by Marxists but also by liberal scholars. Lujo Brentano, for example, was an early liberal economist and antipode of Marx and Engels but argued that 'trade unions play a constitutional role in capitalist economies since they empower employees to behave like sellers of commodities. Only the unions enable workers to adjust their supply according to market conditions' (ibid: 225).

After WWII sociology was gradually (re)established as an academic discipline

(Mueller-Jentsch, 2001: 229). Industrial sociology quickly became a major focus (Maurer, 2004: 7). In the early years after the war sociologists were primarily concerned with whether the political democracy introduced by the Allies would stabilize in Germany. There was a common conviction that democracy is not only about institutions but that it also needs a cultural basis in society. According to v. Friedeburg (1997: 26) the fear was that class conflicts either become too strong that they endanger the democratization process or that they become too weak and endanger the reform potential of the labor movement. Thus, the belief was that only self-conscious workers could be a counterweight to the restorative forces in postwar Germany. As a consequence many sociologists focused on exploring worker consciousness and beliefs, traditional IR topics.

The first explicit project on IR after WWII was conducted by industrial sociologists in the late 1970s at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt (Bergmann et al., 1979). The project entailed a large empirical project on trade unions in Germany from an explicitly sociological point of view (Mueller-Jentsch, 1982: 408). In the same year IR was first introduced as an official topic at the German sociological congress (Berliner Soziologentag, 1979). It is also symptomatic that the first German textbook on IR was written by an industrial sociologist, Walther Mueller-Jentsch (1986) and called *Sociology of Industrial Relations*.

To conclude, German IR research has traditionally been dominated by industrial sociologists. Research focuses on IR rather than HR issues, is more theoretical or essayistic than empirical and if empirical favors qualitative, inductive research (Frege, 2005; Hetzler, 1995). The focus is on the firm level like in Britain. The dominant paradigm is to interpret IR as a socio-political process, thus as being shaped by economic as well as political forces, and the emphasis is on corporatist social partnership approaches rather than collective bargaining (Hyman, 1995: 39; 2004).



### RESEARCH VARIATIONS AND THEIR NATIONAL EMBEDDEDNESS

The above brief overview has revealed different national developments in the IR research field. In the US labor economics was, from the early days, the leading discipline in IR research, initially with a strong institutional, policy orientation which was subsequently taken over by a more neo-classical approach to labor markets. In Britain prominent social reformers started the field and hence IR developed a strongly pragmatic public policy orientation which was less influenced by labor economists. Moreover, it received a strong Marxist influence during the 1970s which was unparalleled in the US. The field became more inter-disciplinary than its US counterpart and became dominated by scholars who received a degree in IR. Finally, Germany has a long intellectual (Marxist and liberal) tradition on researching work and employment issues which has been traditionally dominated by industrial sociologists. Whereas the field has not established institutional independence in Germany but remains multi-disciplinary, IR became an independent academic field in the US and Britain.

At the same time it comes to no surprise that all three countries reveal variations in their research practices: their major methodologies, theories and research paradigms. These variations have been shown to be long-standing national academic profiles (Frege, 2005; Kaufman, 2004; Whitfield and Strauss, 2000). Such diversity of research styles undermines assumptions of a universal, linear evolution of social sciences and it also challenges recent claims that globalization will evoke a convergence of scientific research to a universal, if not US-led model. Thus, at this stage there is evidence of a continuing national embeddedness of IR research despite the growing internationalization of academia (international conferences, cross-national research collaborations, exchange programs etc.) and despite the increasing globalization of IR practices throughout the advanced industrialized world. To conclude, there remains distinctive national research

patterns which seem, so far, astonishingly resistant to processes of universalization.

How then can we explain the ongoing diversity and persistence of national research traditions? The chapter now turns to explore the longstanding roots of national IR research profiles in specific structural, institutional and political constellations within which social scientists have tried to develop discursive understandings of their IR systems. For example, a theory may gain acceptance in the field not simply because it provides the most 'adequate' explanation for a phenomenon, but, rather, because the explanation it does offer is in a form that is particularly attractive to a specific national culture or a particular group of scholars who are leading in the field.

Explaining research variation is of course an ambitious enterprise. No one single factor can explain the variations across the different research traditions. The inquiry seems to require a complex set of multiple factors, reaching into various disciplines, and in need of a historical and comparative analysis. Thus, for the study of IR research, ideally, it seems one would need a comparative history of IR and its ideas in Britain, Germany and the US, a history of knowledge production, a history of the relations between IR and related disciplines, a history of influential academics in the field, and a social history (students and their background). We would also need a theory to interconnect historical, structural and cognitive determinants and the actions of scientific community (Weingart, 1976). However, as Fourcade-Gourinchas (2001: 398) argues, we do not yet have a satisfactory encompassing theory of knowledge formation that would allow us to account simultaneously for the social structures and institutions of knowledge production and for the latter's intrinsic, substantive ideational nature. And we have no theoretical framework to analyze cross-cultural variations between social science disciplines.

The remaining part of this chapter, therefore, introduces three preliminary approaches which highlight the embeddedness of IR research in its national-specific context.

These are heuristic tools rather than a tight theoretical framework, exploring interrelations between variables rather than determining causalities. The first provides a substantive approach and focuses on how the subject field of academic inquiry and national IR practices, shape research traditions. The second approach highlights the institutional embeddedness of IR research in national scientific traditions. The third and final approach discusses the relationship between national political traditions, in particular the conception of political and industrial democracy, and IR research.

### ***IR practices***

This approach provides a contextual explanation of cross-country research variations by linking 'external' IR practices to 'internal' research practices. It is assumed that in particular research topics, author affiliations and academic paradigms will mirror the development and practice of IR institutions in a specific country. This position is essentially functionalist since it assumes an independent scientific space organized around specific self-referential understandings of the subject field, thus in our case IR practices (Wagner, 1990: 478). In other words, academic disciplines and specializations develop essentially as structural reactions to changes in the external environment.

This assumption is widely acknowledged among social scientists today and is in stark contrast to the original positivist position which argued that scientific inquiry is independent of the phenomenon observed (Delanty, 1997). Moreover, because IR is a problem-oriented field of study it is even more likely to be shaped by the real world of IR which differs from country to country. As Dunlop states, 'different interests of academic experts seem largely a reflection of their type of IR system' (1958: 329). Hyman (2001) points out that the different national IR systems provoke different research topics: for example an emphasis of Anglophone research on collective bargaining and in Germany on social partnership and codetermination.

Thus, the traditional lack of academic interest in the state or in social partnership in the US can be explained by the traditional absence of the state and of workplace democracy in American IR, whereas their dominance in German research mirrors their continuing relevance for the German employment system.

In a similar vein, scholars have highlighted that research follows changing policy questions (Derber, 1964; Dunlop, 1977; Strauss and Feuille, 1978). In particular, Capelli (1985) argues that shifts in research topics easily occur as a reaction to shifts in government, union or employer policies. For example, the increasing interest in HR issues in the US can be understood as a reaction to the increasing number of non-union workplaces and anti-union employer and/or state strategies. Moreover, should IR regulations and practices increasingly converge in a globalizing world (see Chapter 7) one would expect a simultaneous convergence of research patterns across countries. So far however this does not seem to have happened (Frege, 2005).

There can be no doubt that this approach helps to explain research shifts over time in one particular country (for example the decline of IR and the increase of HR topics in the US) but also cross-country variations in research. Moreover, this approach provides an explanation of why different professions get interested in researching IR topics. For example, the more legalistic and corporatist IR systems in continental Europe attract more legal scholars, political scientists and sociologists whereas labor economists are primarily attracted in Anglophone countries where market forces play a larger and more accepted role in determining IR outcomes. The substantive approach is not a sufficient explanation, however, and for example is not helpful in exploring the different development of the field of study, thus its institutionalization.

### ***Scientific traditions***

A second approach is introduced which is historical in nature and embraces the

embeddedness of IR research within national social science traditions.

It is now widely recognized that social sciences and their disciplines are social constructs, embedded in specific historical contexts and shaped by national cultures and philosophies (Levine, 1995: 100). They are not just the outcome of a universal, automatic progress of science, nor are they natural, pre-determined categories, but can vary from country to country. In Ross' words (1991: 1), 'the content and borders of the disciplines that resulted in the beginning of the twentieth century were as much the product of national cultures, local circumstances and accidental opportunities as intellectual logic'. In particular, the development of social sciences was closely connected to the rise of modern universities and were shaped by national epistemological traditions.

### **University structures**

It is during the late-nineteenth century in particular that universities were resurrected as primary knowledge-producing institutions and that the idea of a research-oriented university became predominant in Europe and the US (Wittrock, 1993: 305). This development was closely related to the rise of the modern nation-state and the new economic capitalist order. Universities therefore came to be key institutions both for knowledge production, in particular technological progress and for strengthening a sense of national and cultural identity (ibid.: 321). As we will see, however, they developed in different ways in different countries. Major questions which were debated in all countries were, for example, between the pros and cons of a liberal versus vocational education and pure versus applied research.

The national-specific structures of universities are useful in explaining the institutional differences within IR research, thus its institutionalization as a field of study in the Anglophone world but not in continental Europe.

The close relationship between knowledge structures and research practices has been widely accepted in the literature. Already Merton (1968: 521) observed that research patterns are influenced by specific forms of knowledge organization. Fourcade-Gourinchas (2001: 400) points out that 'scientific discourses [research patterns] are inevitably driven by broader, nationally constituted, cultural frameworks embodied in specific institutions of knowledge production'. And Ringer (1992: 26) convincingly proposes that intellectual communities such as academic disciplines cannot be adequately discussed without reference to the history of educational systems in each country which are heavily dependent on the specific relationship between state and society.

Applied to our context, this trajectory links the existence or absence of the institutionalization of the IR field to the different national university structures. Arguably, the development of the German university structure of professorial chairs enabled a broader research agenda for the individual professors but hindered the institutionalization of interdisciplinary fields. In contrast, the more formal departmental structure as developed in the US in the early-twentieth century, which was later also introduced to British universities, narrowed the individual's research area but facilitated the creation of institutionalized inter-disciplinary fields.

In other words, the strict classification of disciplines in US universities, which became more dominant than in Europe (Wagner, 1990: 236), made it more difficult for individual scholars to integrate IR topics into their own discipline but on the other hand created the opportunity to establish specific interdisciplinary programs. US social science disciplines tend to follow a strict methodological and theoretical canon and are more likely to discriminate alternative views. In Ross' (1991: 10) words,

the importance of disciplines and disciplinary professions to stabilize academic positions in the US system lead frequently to an ontological purification of disciplinary discourses by excluding outside factors to strengthen disciplinary identification

whereas in Europe disciplines were less inhibited to use theoretical concepts from other disciplines.

The fact that in the US, IR institutes were first created by institutional economists who felt increasingly left out of their own discipline, substantiates this point.

In Germany, the Humboldtian reforms in the second part of the nineteenth century supported an organizational structure around chairs which traditionally allowed a slightly less rigid definition of the disciplines. Individual professors were more able to follow their own interests independent of the mainstream. Thus, a sociology or law professor interested in labor found it easier to follow this research topic even if it did not fit completely with disciplinary boundaries. Therefore there was less need to establish inter-disciplinary forums. An additional reason was that inter-disciplinary, specialized or vocational fields had less chance to get accepted because of the traditional German emphasis on general, pure knowledge creation which was fostered by Humboldt.

Finally, Britain is characterized by a less rigid disciplinary structure than the US but also by weaker professorial chairs than in Germany. Britain for a long time almost exclusively focused on elitist undergraduate education dominated by colleges and neglecting the development of graduate or professional schools like in the US (Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001: 165). The great British universities in the nineteenth century were strongly anti-professional. Professional education was dominated by practitioners outside universities (Burrage, 1993: 155). Moreover, British universities for a long time developed as relatively insular, elitist institutions emphasizing the classical subjects while neglecting natural as well as social sciences. The first social science research which arose out of a response to the increasing social problems of industrialization developed outside the university such as in the famous Manchester Statistical Society (1833) (Manicas, 1987: 196). Thus, all these factors help to explain why IR as an interdisciplinary study was delayed for a long time in Britain.

### ***Epistemological traditions***

In addition to the university structures, epistemological traditions also shaped the development and patterns of scientific disciplines in each country. These traditions help explain, for example, why a German and a US sociologist working on similar labor issues may use different research tools, in particular different methodologies, despite their shared profession. And why a British economist and a British sociologist may have something in common despite their different professions. In other words, it may provide an explanation as to why the US is generally leaning towards quantitative empirical research whereas German IR research is usually characterized by qualitative research and Britain exhibits traces of both; or why both US and British IR research tend to produce intermediate, middle-range theories whereas Germany is biased towards more abstract, general social science theories (Bulmer, 1991).

Modern philosophies of knowledge developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and influenced the countries' conception of knowledge creation. In short, the idealist philosophy and humanistic university reforms during the nineteenth century in Germany were strongly oriented towards science for its own sake ('pure science') rather than to be an instrument for larger societal purposes (for example improving social conditions) as it became the norm in particular in the US. There was an emphasis on holistic thinking in broad historical cultural categories and being informed by a philosophy which rejected narrow-minded specialization which provided a challenge to mechanistic and compositional thinking prevalent in Europe at that time. As a consequence, when social sciences (including the academic treatment of work and employment) were slowly established at the end of the nineteenth century they became mostly concerned with elaborating a coherent theoretical framework for societal analysis based on philosophical foundations (Witrock et al., 1991: 41). Social sciences were originally interpreted as historical sciences

embedded in the humanities. This shaped the tendency of the social sciences towards descriptive, historical, qualitative and theoretical research as we can still observe today, for example in the case of IR research. Efforts at empirical research were very fragmented as well as policy-oriented research which could hardly develop in the shadow of formal theorizing (Wittrock, *ibid.*). This may have induced the strong presence of hermeneutic and Marxist epistemological approaches and heuristic methodologies in German social sciences. In a nutshell, one can argue that these traditions may have facilitated a more political and critical awareness of social conditions and problems. Social science was understood as a tool to explore the genesis of modern society and it fostered the importance of academic freedom and supported the pursuit of pure knowledge rather than of instrumental, pragmatic research.

In Britain social sciences were caught in the bind between the positivistic heritage of moralistic reformism and administrative (empirical) knowledge (Delanty, 1997: 26). Thus, they were characterized by a strong positivist-utilitarian tradition, methodological individualism and a naturalistic morality. British social sciences essentially go back to Hobbes' utilitarianism and his ideas based on the methods of natural science (Halevy, 1966: 153). J. S. Mill for example, who was heavily influenced by Hobbes, was critical of scientific politics and stood for a model of 'useful' knowledge. Empiricism was praised as an inductive science of general causal laws. On the other side, British social science was characterized by a moral focus and science was linked to the idea of moral improvement and a humane secular ethic (Delanty, 1997: 26). As Manicas (1987: 197) highlights, the social problems of the industrializing British Empire were interpreted by the British academic elite as a moral problem and were, accordingly, a problem of how to restore the morals of individuals.

The US developed in similar ways to Britain but with a more scientist, pragmatic approach to the sciences, in particular social sciences which was seen as a tool to improve

the social conditions of modern society. Thus, whereas British social sciences started as a fusion of analysis and (moral) prescription, the US eventually favored a more scientific, detached approach to social questions which was modeled upon natural sciences (Bulmer, 1991: 152). This ultimately induced a bias towards an empiricist ideology with a focus on quantitative scientific methods in the US (Ross, 1991).

In sum, these national knowledge systems, which originated in the nineteenth century, shape the different ways social sciences and therefore IR research have been organized and practiced in the three countries. British IR research, for example, always had a stronger public-policy agenda than the US and was less interested in perfecting econometric tools for measuring IR practices and outcomes. German IR research on the other hand has been heavily theory driven and if empirical has mainly pursued hermeneutic, descriptive methods.

### ***Political traditions***

The cross-national variation of subject fields, as well as, the scientific traditions are a necessary but not sufficient explanation for cross-national research variation. For example, similar research topics can be researched in very different ways. The fact that the US traditionally has a strong interest in HR policy whereas German academics are more interested in the labor process – both approaches look at the workplace – indicates the existence of different paradigms and aims of research. German social scientists have traditionally been more concerned about the labor process and its outcomes for workers as a social class than their mainstream US counterparts who are more interested in individual work attitudes and workplace efficiency. These variations cannot be sufficiently explained on the basis of different subject fields or scientific traditions.

A third and final factor then, is the political embeddedness of the research field. The assumption is that political traditions have a certain independence of their subject matter

and of their academic institutionalization and can shape research patterns in different ways. In particular research paradigms, aims and also theories are likely to be influenced by political ideas.

I focus on the national political discourse on work and democracy which originates in the nineteenth century. I argue that the philosophical traditions of idealism in Germany or of liberalism and positivism in Britain and the US shaped the political understanding and subsequent writings on the state, democracy and the economy during the nineteenth century. In particular, the relationship between political and industrial democracy crucially influenced the development of different research paradigms. The three countries developed during the nineteenth century rather different political traditions on the relationship between state, society and economy which shaped two different streams of interpretations of industrial democracy: an Anglophone and a German (continental European) stream. Germany developed a legalistic, state-oriented approach (co-determination) whereas Britain and the US developed a free collective bargaining approach (and eventually voluntary, employer-led direct participation schemes). Both constitutional traditions are based on two distinct concepts of industrial democracy which I call '*contractual*' and '*communal*'.

In essence, the US and Britain regarded the capitalist enterprise as a 'private affair' (firm as private property) and the economy as an assembly of free individuals joining in contractual relationships. Private contracts rule. Industrial democracy is therefore focused on the free bargaining between employers and employees. Moreover, the law privileges individual rather than collective employment rights. One should note the differences between Britain and the US: between a social democratic and a liberal divide on industrial democracy the US emerge virtually exclusively on the liberal side of the line (Katznelson, 1996: 40). Britain, on the other hand, is slightly more infatuated with markets and experienced times, in particular after WWI and II, of socialist attempts to

nationalize important industries and is in general more committed to state intervention than the US (Jacoby, 2003: 49).

In Germany, the main understanding was to perceive the firm as a 'quasi-public affair', as a social community, a state within the state, a constitutional monarchy, where workers would receive certain democratic rights and the monarch/owner would not have absolute power as in a constitutional monarchy. 'The employment relationship is not seen as one of free subordination but of democratization'. This was the declaration of the famous Weimar labor law scholar, Hugo Sinzheimer (Finkin, 2002: 621). One could also say that the US and Britain focused on 'private contracts' whereas Germany focused on a 'social contract' within the firm, to adopt Rousseau's phrase.

The distinction between a private and public view of the firm has a clear reminiscence to the mechanic and organic state theories and to civil and common law traditions. The role of the entrepreneur is seen differently in both traditions. In the Anglophone common law tradition the enterprise is the property of the entrepreneur with workers relegated to contractual claims, at best, on the surplus from production (Deakin, 2005: 12). The continental or in our case German entrepreneurs are members of the enterprise community and share duties and privileges that this position entails.

One can conclude therefore that democracy in the US and to a lesser extent in Britain has been mainly conceptualized at a political level and developed a much weaker place in economic life where democracy is limited to certain individual rights and a minimum of collective rights (for example free labor contracts and collective bargaining). In other words, the individual has only very limited democratic rights at work, the main right being to be in a free contractual relationship and therefore to be able to leave the contract. The focus of Anglophone labor law on individual rights therefore has a long tradition. Today this is emphasized even more in the increasing decline of collective labor law and the dominance of identity-based employee

rights in particular in the US. In contrast, in Germany industrial democracy has been much more linked to the development of political democracy and has legally restrained managerial discretion. The focus of labor law is on collective rights.

In sum, this approach highlights the importance of linking national research patterns to the historically embedded discourses on democracy at work. The different state philosophies as they developed in Germany, Britain and the US during the nineteenth century shaped the perception of the capitalist firm and subsequently the conception of industrial democracy.

Applied to the context of IR the different intellectual traditions of political and industrial democracy can explain certain cross-national research differences. For example, the fact that German scholars traditionally work on topics related to worker participation may not just be due to their labor institutions promoting democracy at work ('subject field'), but also because of a long-standing intellectual tradition in German social sciences to interpret industrial democracy as an important adjunct to political democracy and hence as a value itself. This also explains the interest of German political scientists and lawyers in IR research. In contrast, industrial democracy in the US for example has not generally been seen as a precondition or attribute of political democracy and has been traditionally perceived as individual rights, property rights on one side and no forced labor on the other side. Recent discussions on employee voice (Freeman and Rogers, 1999) exemplify this individualistic conception of industrial democracy (but see exceptions such as Derber, 1964).

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has offered a brief description of the historical development of IR as a field of research in Britain, Germany and the US, which represent trends in the Anglophone world as well as in continental Europe. It suggested that social sciences, such as the

IR field, do not necessarily develop in similar ways across countries but are embedded in broader national-specific cultures. There is no reason to assume that these varying research styles are deviations from a standard, or delays in reaching that standard. On the contrary, the persistence of national intellectual profiles over time undermines assumptions of a universal, linear evolution of the social sciences and instead highlights their national historical embeddedness.

This chapter further explored the embeddedness of these research patterns in their national contexts. On one hand it highlighted the significance of national institutions and practices of IR in shaping research outcomes. On the other hand, the chapter also reminded us to conceptualize IR research as a social scientific field of study which is inevitably embedded in long-standing national traditions of scientific knowledge production, such as university structures and philosophical traditions of knowledge creation. Finally, the chapter outlined the importance of intellectual conceptions of political and industrial democracy and to what extent and how the workplace was regarded as part of a wider political democracy.

To conclude, IR research has developed differently in different countries and there is reason to suggest that this will continue for some time. As of today there is no evidence of a significant convergence of research styles across countries. Sustained divergence is the result so far. This also challenges predictions of various globalization and convergence theories of the diminishing significance of the nation state. This chapter argues instead for the nation state's enduring importance at least for the field of scientific knowledge creation.

However, this does not mean that research patterns should be seen as historically deterministic. They are potentially open for change. Scholars may have had good reasons for choosing their scientific path, which was subsequently institutionalized, but they were reasons consistently shaped by specific historical and cultural intentions (Ross, 1991). Given hindsight, we may find that there are

better reasons for choosing differently in the future, in particular given the increasing academic crisis of the IR discipline. Becoming aware of different national approaches, and thus of different research options, is a first step. What should follow is a dialogue between the research patterns; how one could benefit from each other to ensure the long-term viability of the discipline.

## NOTES

1 For the purposes of this paper, I use this term to refer to the following countries: Great Britain, Ireland, United States of America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (see Crouch 2005).

2 For more detailed country overviews see Frege and Kaufman (2004).

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