

Expanded abstract

Collaboration (and conflict) in the relations between Trade Union and Third Sector

Relations between Trade Unions and Community Organizations of Social Action (COSA), part of the Third Sector of Social Action, have a long history. When unions and COSAs have collaborated forming coalitions, the impact of their joint action on addressing social problems and demands is greater and increases the possibility of achieving successful outcomes: when they have drawn back from collaboration the impact of their individual action has been significantly less and, if they have had any success this success has been limited. In this respect it is considered that co-operation between unions and COSAS enables social progress to be made more rapidly.

This collaboration between unions and COSAS has become much more necessary over a number of decades in our societies as the impact of globalization has resulted in the deterioration of social problems. Nonetheless the relations are not easy because in neither the unions nor in the COSAS there is a common approach to collaboration. Even so there are possibilities of collaboration in that both are social actors and specific objectives for social progress. Collaboration depends upon a specific convergence of objectives and a compatibility of focus and methods of operation among the different members of the coalition.

As far as the unions are concerned, they have promoted this form of collaboration with the idea of recovering their influence, improving their public image, and having more success in the defense of and improvement of the employment conditions of particular groups of workers. This strategy has been considered as one of the approaches to union renewal as the joint mounting of specific campaigns enables them to make contact with particular groups of unorganized workers as well as providing them with an additional source of legitimacy because it strengthens their image as defenders of a wider public interest; in addition it strengthens their capacity for mobilization, above all when the coalitions are established with COSAS which have an important base of activists.

Objectives

The **general objective** is to explore several coalitions established between unions and COSAS in the Valencian Community to collaborate in addressing specific social problems via campaigns.

The **specific objectives** are to examine:

- The issues and demands which have resulted in the formation of coalitions and their compositions.
- The circumstances in which the coalitions have been established and have operated.

- The reservations and disagreements which have arisen during the campaigns.
- The type of gains and advances which have been attained in the campaigns

Methodological Approach

The research has focused on case studies of specific campaigns with a qualitative approach. The campaigns have been selected after carrying out an inventory of collaborations which involved the participation of the most active COSAS and the most representative unions. Three have been selected: Zero Poverty; Fiscal Justice; No to Internment Centers for Foreigners.

Information was obtained from the webs of the campaigns or the participating COSAS: in addition in depth interviews were carried out with 6 activists from the campaigns who in addition provided documentation. The people interviewed were chosen because they belonged to the principal organizations participating in the campaigns, had some responsibility in their organizations and had been in post for more than 5 years. In the analysis the information extracted from the interview transcriptions has been combined with the documentation obtained from the organizations.

Results

First the results confirmed the existence of collaboration between COSAS and unions in the Valencian Community which has manifested itself organizationally in coalitions in which are present nearly always the most representative unions and a good proportion of the COSAS with the highest involvement in social issues.

Secondly the results established the existence of common concerns which form the basis of collaboration: the eradication of poverty and inequality, fiscal justice or the closure of the Internment Centers for Foreigners. Each of these issues are based on corresponding human rights. These common concerns were addressed through campaigns aimed, above all, at governments to influence their policies. Campaigns aimed at private sector companies have been unusual.

Thirdly relations between unions and COSAS are prolific. They have continuous interaction. In this respect, one must emphasize the importance of the permanency of the personnel from the most established COSAS as well as the mediation skills and global perspective of the unions.

These relationships are based on mutual respect so that each organization recognizes that the other organizations have objectives that can be different as well as having their own areas of action. In addition they are based on the mutual recognition of the value of each organization in helping to confer legitimacy on each other. These two factors have favoured the functioning of coalitions. Collaborations have also been facilitated by the existence of structures for consultation and the sharing of political opinions at various levels. Finally one must emphasize that the organizations which make up the coalitions are involved in decision making on the establishment of concrete objectives and action on equal terms.

The present co-ordinators have promoted information and training activities in the three campaigns; collective demonstrations and public claims in some of them; as well as providing legal and labour advice to people. They have also responded to requests for their views from government and political organizations as part of consultation processes and engaged in lobbying political representatives- these activities are aimed at different audiences- the ordinary citizen; political representatives.

Fourthly, despite the smoothness of their relations and their common approach to jointly held concerns and the action which needs to be taken, there have been disagreements from time to time, problems in the development of campaigns and even in relation to a specific area of co-operation between a COSA and the unions. In addition there have been certain tensions in the negotiation of collective agreements for the sector as a whole or specific organizations, particularly in times of economic crisis.

Finally the actions initiated by the co-ordinators in the different campaigns have given greater visibility to social problems as well as to the jointly agreed proposals to deal with them. They have also resulted, in some cases, in the approval and implementation by local and regional governments of some of the proposals put forward by the co-ordinators to resolve problems. Generally speaking the co-ordinators and their organizations have become more established over the course of time.

Limitations of the Research

Given the exploratory nature of the research one of the limitations is the number of cases analysed- similarly the number of people interviewed could be extended by including people from other COSAS. Additionally the research is based on qualitative data and could be extended quantitatively via a survey. Finally the scope of the study is regional/local and it could be extended to national level.

Conclusions

The research confirms the existence of strong, lasting and harmonious coalitions, resulting in the promotion of joint activities throughout their existence. In addition progress has been achieved on the issues which have been addressed. We can see that in all the campaigns investigated the tests set by Tattersall were relevant. The reasons for this lie in the way the coalitions were formed and functioned and the need to know the how to take advantage of political opportunity. The research confirms the hypotheses which inspired the study about the importance and value of coalitions as argued by Gallin.

Originality

This article provides one of the first syntheses of the collaboration between COSAS and unions in Spain. It addresses issues raised by collaboration: the conditions necessary for collaboration; the improvements and advances which have taken place; some of the difficulties which arise. As a result area of research has been opened up in Spain. In addition it makes a mod-

est contribution to research in the area at an international level because it has confirmed the findings of other research ; it also facilitates the development of some hypotheses for future research i.e. the collaborations take place in relation primarily to campaigns; collaborations in relation to the provision of services take place when the COSAS are involved in employment issues; finally problems in the collaboration can occur when the unions get involved with the claims of the workers of COSAS.