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## Representativeness from Within: A Comparison between the ILO and the ISO

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**ABSTRACT** *Representativeness has become a keyword in reform projects of global governance. While it often appears as a cure for the legitimacy deficit of international organizations, this notion has hardly been defined at the global level. This article aims at filling this void by providing a socio-historical account of the meanings and uses of this concept based on a comparison of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), two of the oldest organizations in the global arena. Looking at the genesis of both organizations, the article shows that the categories and mechanisms used by international organizations to select their members are embedded in a broader socio-historical, political, and economic context. Moreover, they are subject to contestation and transformation. Representativeness may therefore be used both as a political resource for international players and as an analytical category for the study of the multilateral system over time.*

**Keywords:** representativeness, International Labor Organization (ILO), International Standardization Organization (ISO), comparison

### **Theoretical and Empirical Insights on Representativeness and International Organizations: The Gap in the Literature**

Over the last two decades, representativeness—which refers broadly speaking to the legitimacy criteria of the so-called representatives within organizations—has become key to reform projects of global governance. Starting with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), many international bodies, especially (but not exclusively) those operating as ‘clubs’ (such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the G8, and the G20)

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are frequently criticized for their lack of representativeness (Dubin & Runavot, 2013; Germain, 2001; Idris & Bartolo, 2000; Keohane & Nye, 2001). Didier Jacobs, special adviser to the president of Oxfam America, even called the WTO and IMF ‘apartheid organizations’ (2007, pp. 158–160). Yet, while representativeness often appears as a cure for the legitimacy deficit of international organizations, it lacks a clear definition at the global level.

Firstly, the large corpus of studies tackling this issue within the framework of national institutions is barely being referred to within international relations (IR) literature. However, many scholars in political theory have underlined elements of particular relevance to the study of IR such as the relationship between representativeness and democracy (Manin, 2008; Pitkin, 1967; Rosanvallon, 1998; Urbinati, 2006) and the construction of representativeness as a political claim rather than a measurable quality (Saward, 2010).

Secondly, the abundance of concepts related to representativeness leads to significant confusion. Within the IR literature, representativeness is referred to in different contexts as an equivalent to ‘enlargement’ (Sucharipa-Berhrmann, 1994), as an impetus for ‘civil society participation’ (McKeon, 2009), as a synonym for ‘fair’ or ‘equitable’ representation (Fitzgerald, 2000; Sucharipa-Berhrmann, 1994) or as ‘democratic representation’ (Kröger & Friedrich, 2011; Steffek & Hahn, 2010). While all these meanings clearly relate to essential features that make up the concept of representativeness, they cannot be treated as equivalent. A socio-historical account of their use is needed in order to provide a more comprehensive definition of the concept. Attempting a broader conceptualization, some authors rely on Fritz Scharpf’s distinction between ‘input’ and ‘output’ legitimacy (1999), thereby opposing the representativeness (input legitimacy) of an organization and its effectiveness (output legitimacy), especially within the framework of the UNSC (Hatto & Lemay-Hébert, 2007; Jan, 2005; Malone, 2004). This confrontation is problematic, however, for at least two reasons. On the one hand, it echoes the discourse of those players who are most dominant and who argue that focusing on representativeness (by enlarging executive committees, for instance) would be detrimental to the effectiveness of an organization. On the other hand, it conceals the fact that representativeness—as input legitimacy—may influence the outcomes of an organization and actually be necessary to achieve some degree of output legitimacy.

Thirdly, representativeness is hardly defined at the global level because it is considered a highly normative, subjective, and consequently unstable concept. As such, it is ‘always subject to review’ (Urbinati, 2006, p. 29) and depends on ‘what members do about it’ (Devin, 2016, p. 92).

Lastly, representativeness has never been seriously tackled as a standalone feature of global governance contrary to other concepts considered to be key dimensions of modern institutional legitimacy such as inclusiveness (Germain, 2001; Koenig & Zürn, 2006), participation (Bexell, Tallberg, & Uhlin, 2010; Steffek, Kissling, & Nanz, 2008), or accountability (Anderson, 2009; Charnovitz, 2006; Crack, 2013; Jordan & von Tujil, 2006; Scholte, 2011).

This comparison between the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), two of the oldest *and* the few multi-stakeholder organizations that exist in the global arena aims at filling this gap by raising the following questions: how and for what purpose do international organizations use representativeness? More specifically, why has it lately become a buzzword in their reform projects?

It is argued that the essence of representativeness is to justify who can legitimately be present within an international organization and influence its course of action. This legitimation process is contingent to the global context in terms of both institutional spaces (national then transnational and global) and subject matters (labor conditions, trade competition, health, environment,

etc.) to be regulated. This is why it is necessary to objectivize this process by retracing the evolution of rhetorical and practical meanings and uses of representativeness over time. While the purpose of this article is precisely to deconstruct the meaning and uses of the concept of representativeness within the framework of international organizations, we shall start by stressing that the two international organizations studied here both see representativeness as a means of selecting actors who best represent their members. The legitimate character of representation is therefore twofold since it has to be acknowledged by both the organization as a whole (top-down) and by the people the representatives claim to speak and act on behalf of (bottom-up).

This article looks at the concept of representativeness both as a functional resource for powerful actors but also as a source of contestation benefiting political and economic margins who advocate for reforms of the different representative organs within international organizations. This article adopts a socio-historical approach in which international organizations are seen as changing configurations (Devin, 2016) and which looks at the interactions and interdependences between different actors that constitute an organization (States, the bureaucracy, and civil society actors). The socio-historical approach allows us to see which actors have used representativeness as a political resource to achieve certain goals within international organizations over time. In addition, it contributes to denaturalizing the concept and unveiling its different political meanings. Finally, it sheds new light on a question that is (wrongly) perceived to have become fashionable in recent days by showing that representativeness has constantly been (re)defined and argued about since the very inception of international organizations.

This article is divided into three parts. In the first section, we argue that representativeness, both as a discourse and as a set of legal requirements, has been primarily thought of as a means to achieve broader functional goals. The latter essentially consist in the regulation of professional relations (for the ILO) and trade (for the ISO) in the context of the 'first globalization' (Berger, 2003). Returning to Scharpf's distinction, there is therefore neither theoretical nor empirical reason to oppose input legitimacy (representativeness) to output legitimacy (effectiveness). Moreover, we show that the impetus for representativeness as functional representation is expressed both at the country level (through the selection of the most representative organizations) and at the organizational level (through the composition of the general assembly and the executive committees).

The second section focuses on the redefinition of representativeness from the 1960s onward. Marginalized actors demanded to be 'better represented' within these two international organizations on the one hand and to set up reforms in order to open the ISO and ILO to developing countries as well as civil society actors on the other. The term 'margins' refers to categories of actors (States, non-governmental organizations (NGO), experts, advisors, etc.) who are neither completely excluded nor really included in the organization. As emphasized by Matthew Holden, every single institution relies upon an ambivalent dynamic of inclusion and exclusion (2009, p. 166). The concept of representativeness is deeply rooted in this dynamic. Indeed, it implies the definition of selection criteria (to determine who is and is not representative) which creates a *de facto* frontier between those who can legitimately be included and the others: the 'margins'. Given that the literature about the margins of globalization has been flourishing in the last 10 years (Gordon, 2004; Grant & Short, 2002; Held & McGrew, 2007; Vosko, 2010), we suggest to distinguish between two kinds of margins: internal margins (who only contest the representative arrangements within the organization, mostly the non-industrialized world) and external margins (who challenge the overall structure of representation, for instance, specific NGO).

The third and concluding section finally provides a more systematic account of our findings by distinguishing between representativeness as a political resource used by international players and representativeness as a (useful) analytical category for the study of the multilateral system over time.

The comparison between the ILO and ISO, which is the first of its kind, is based on research bringing together empirical data on both historical and recent developments within both organizations (Louis, 2016; Ruwet, 2009). While the ILO and ISO may seem quite different at first sight, they share a lot of similarities with regard to the question of representativeness. Starting with their differences, one must bear in mind that the main objective of ILO's conventions is to promote rights at work and enhance social justice (through social protection and social dialogue) on work-related issues. ISO standards are developed to facilitate trade through specifications for products, services, and systems, to ensure quality, safety, and efficiency. The legitimacy of these organizations is rooted in two different spheres: ILO conventions, although negotiated on a tripartite basis, are directed towards state actors and are binding, whereas ISO standards are primarily intended for private organizations, have to be purchased and are legally voluntary. However, these two international organizations share two crucial features. Firstly, they were both created after World War I to regulate the market. Secondly, they share the attributes of 'global hybrids'<sup>1</sup> since they were designed on a multi-partite basis (including state and non-state actors) and therefore claim to act in the 'general interest'. Established in 1919 and composed of 185 countries (as of 2015), the ILO has long been celebrated as a major political innovation because of its tripartite structure. Tripartism institutionalizes the representation of workers and employers alongside governments while the composition of the other international organizations of the United Nations system remains purely intergovernmental. The ISO is also often being referred to as a 'hybrid' organization (Graz, 2006; Murphy & Yates, 2009). It consists of a network of 162 (as of 2015) national standards institutes, some private, some public. This organization prides itself in offering an original procedure allowing 'stakeholders' (most of the time engineers from industries) to create consensus-based standards to respond to market needs. Last but not least, both organizations have, right from the beginning, made representativeness of their constituents part and parcel of their constitutional requirements. From an analytical standpoint, these organizations, whose existence spans almost a century, provide a particularly appropriate framework to compare the evolving meanings and uses of representativeness, thereby making the socio-historical approach even stronger.

### **Representativeness as Functional Representation**

At the time of their creation, the dominant conception of representativeness within both the ISO and ILO was rooted in the functionalist paradigm of international cooperation which can be summarized as follows: 'form should follow function'. In 1943, David Mitrany systematized this conception in *A Working Peace System* by arguing that any change in the structure of the organization—which includes representation—should follow the change of its objectives (1994). Thus, representation was, first and foremost, thought of as a *means* to achieve the goals of the organization. The legitimacy of any representative system was therefore essentially assessed in a utilitarian way, with regard to the ability of an organization's members to achieve the goals of the organization expressed in its constitutive status.

#### *Global International Context: Fear of Bolshevism and Economic Interdependence*

The genesis of both the ILO and ISO<sup>2</sup> goes back to the end of World War I in a context characterized by three main features: the upheavals caused by the industrial revolution, the fear of a

Bolshevik revolution, and the awareness of growing economic interdependence between the different industrialized nations. These two international organizations intended to meet the same challenges but with different means. Confronted with increased competition and deteriorating living conditions for workers, the ILO aimed at enhancing social justice through the harmonization of working conditions. Reaching an agreement on this issue among the industrialized countries was essential not only to mitigate the risk of a global workers' revolution but also to guarantee fair competition between those countries. This is how Emile Vandervelde, one of the founding fathers of the ILO, expressed it in a speech made at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, in which he praised the virtues of compromise against the excesses of the Bolshevik revolution.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the industrial revolution, with its complex division of labor, demanded a process of technical harmonization and unification: it was the main task assigned to the first generalist international organization for standardization created in 1926, the International Standardization Association (ISA), later called the ISO. The objective given to standards was to ensure the compatibility and the interoperability of products, to allow for the rationalization of production processes and to achieve economies of scale. At that time, conscious of their economic interdependence, industrialized countries were convinced that international collaboration in the activity of standardization was the most efficient way to improve their national productivity. Moreover, the standardization movement was also seen as a response to what most standard setters saw as the threat of Bolshevism. Indeed, increasing the productivity through technical standardization decreased the pressure on workers and offered more possibilities to raise wages. As Comfort Adams, professor of electrical engineering at Harvard and one of the founders of the international standardization movement, put it:

we are faced with a situation in which labor is beginning to feel its power, and it has power if it organizes in a democratic country [...] The productive capacity of the individual, on the average, is not sufficient to create the wealth he wishes as a return for his labor. We must either face the possibility of a Bolshevik movement in this country or devise some means for increasing the average productivity of labor. This can be done by cooperation and standardization, which go hand in hand. (Yates & Murphy, 2007, p. 16)

Thus, the two international organizations were facing the same challenge: how should they ensure the legitimacy of their action? Which actors should be accredited to carry out their projects and on which basis?

The issue of communism and the challenge of economic interdependence led to particular choices regarding the actors represented within both organizations. Both organizations justified their representative structure by referring back to the need of achieving their objectives as well as to the claim that they were serving the general interest. The choice of multipartite structures of representation was therefore considered as a necessity. It derived from the conviction that effective regulation needed to be negotiated by the actors in charge of applying them. This should be done moreover through technical negotiations made in a spirit of compromise and reform, as opposed to the clashes and violence perpetrated by the Bolshevik revolution. In the case of the ILO, tripartism was the materialization of this spirit of reform and compromise. At the ISO, international standardization was perceived to be the best way to promote cooperation thanks to the harmonization of national standards, hence boosting trade between those countries. Besides, most industrialized countries had to be involved in both organizations. This explains why countries such as the United States of America or Germany—although they were absent from the League of Nations<sup>4</sup>—were represented in both the ISA and the ILO.<sup>5</sup> In both cases, it was seen as imperative that highly industrialized countries participated in the making of

international regulations if the latter were to be effectively applied. Obviously, the question of representation was also dictated by political and diplomatic reasons related to the aftermath of World War I. However, what is striking in both cases is the shared conviction that representativeness, as both a foundation and a result of organizational success, should derive from functional rather than political considerations.

Yet, the ILO and ISO were initially designed with reference to national territories. They were intended to regulate *national* markets, namely to protect national sovereignty and national economies against external threats. This primacy given to a national logic at the international level is not confined to the ILO and ISO but common to every international organization created after World War II (Sassen, 2006). This conception of space, which derived from a nationalist stance, impacted the definition given to the representation criteria at the international scale. Both organizations are, above all, made of national-level members' networks officially recognized as authoritative by their own government, although the national character is tempered, in the ILO case, by the dynamics of tripartism.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, looking at the composition of both organizations over time, their Eurocentric and then Western character is striking. At the ILO, the executive committee (the Governing Body) remained clearly dominated by European and Western industrialized countries (some of them holding a permanent seat) until the 1970s. At the ISO, the original (and most influent) members (the 'member bodies') also came from Europe and North America.

#### *Selecting the 'Most Representative' Actors within each Country*

In order to select their members, both the ILO and the ISO established a similar accreditation mechanism. They both considered that the organizations to be selected should be the 'most representative' within their own countries and thus made members' representativeness a constitutional requirement. According to article 3 of the ILO Constitution, 'the Members undertake to nominate non-Government delegates and advisors chosen in agreement with the industrial organizations, if such organizations exist, which are most representative of employers or work-people, as the case may be, in their respective countries'.<sup>7</sup> In the ISO membership manual it is stated: 'ISO has one member per country. As the national representative of ISO, you are the organization most representative of standardization in your country'.<sup>8</sup> Notably, neither the ILO nor the ISO clearly specified the exact criteria in order to assess which organizations were 'the most representative' at the national level.

However, there are two important differences between the ILO and the ISO in the way this clause of the 'most representative' organizations operates. In the case of the ISO the organizations to which the representativeness claim applied were the national standardization bodies of the most industrialized countries, most of them founded between 1901 and 1926. It implied that countries that had no suitable candidate, particularly in the non-industrialized world, could not aspire to membership. This logic also affected all the governance positions (the Council, the General Assembly, etc.) that were filled according to the geographical representation of the different national members.<sup>9</sup> The ILO did not prevent non-industrialized countries from participating to the ILO's General Assembly (the International Labor Conference). However, the most industrialized countries were granted a privilege at the executive level (the Governing Body) where provisions were made to ensure their permanent representation.

Moreover, ISO delegates usually came and continue to come from organizations belonging to the networks of national standards bodies. At the ILO, most representatives came from inter-professional trade unions covering all branches within each country. As of today, the

majority of these organizations are affiliated with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)<sup>10</sup> or the International Organization of Employers (IOE) which respectively embody the voice of workers and employers at the international level and which have been, since the beginning, anti-communist organizations. Organizations representing specific sectors of the economy (textile, food, hotels, metallurgy, for example) or specific categories of workers (employees in the public service or education, for example), though they may occasionally be included in national delegations, most of the time are only given a consultative status.

In addition to that, the technical nature of their activities clearly impacted delegates' general profile. In both cases, specific directives and practical constraints such as financial resources or availability soon led to the professionalization of representatives who progressively became international experts within their own organizations. The production of an ISO or an ILO standard is a long process and the professionalization is exacerbated by the complexity of procedures and the technical jargon. Rich organizations therefore tend to be favored within these organizations. Moreover, at the ISO, both participation in the development and implementation of standards are done on a voluntary basis. Experts are not paid by the ISO but by the organization which sends them. The same holds true for the ILO General Assembly (the International Labor Conference) where the government is financially responsible for the non-governmental delegates. As a result of this technicality, we witness an increase of external consultants included in the delegations. They do not hold a specific representative mandate but their presence is due to their technical expertise or their network. This evolution has contributed to nurturing the criticism of a lack of proximity with the people really affected by these standards (see below).

In spite of some early complaints about the Eurocentric character of both institutions, these representative systems were seen as most appropriate in order for these organizations to achieve their goals. This dramatically changed during the second half of the century.

### **Representativeness as a Source of Contestation**

Starting in the 1960s, the representativeness of the ILO and the ISO has been questioned, leading to a profound identity and legitimacy crisis due to a series of upheavals in the historical context. Here, we distinguish two types of margins: internal and external, which express two distinct types of contestation. Internal margins designate actors who belong to the organization (they are officially 'members') but perceive themselves as 'second-class citizens'. Here, the margins are mostly embodied by developing countries that feel discriminated against in terms of representation and influence over decision-making procedures. However, as shown below, they do not necessarily question the structure of the organization. External margins, on the other hand, do not fit into any representative category designed by the organization and therefore question the whole system of representation and advocate for its expansion. Here it mostly designates civil society actors.

#### *The ILO and ISO Profoundly Shaken by Transformations in the Global Context*

Decolonization, the changing role of the State, and the growth of multinational enterprises questioned the effectiveness of nationally oriented regulations as well as the demands for a New International Economic Order during the 1970s. During the 1990s, the end of the Cold War—and with it of the 'Bolshevik threat'—and the unprecedented growth of world trade followed by the creation of the WTO in 1995 affected the ILO and ISO in their missions and structure. This emphasizes the strong relationship between representational issues and the logics of



‘structural power’ understood as the power to shape and determine the structures of the global political economy (Strange, 1994, pp. 24–25). At a time when an increasing share of production and labor is concentrated in multinational companies (Croucher & Cotton, 2009), what can the regulatory capacity of organizations primarily representing actors and national interests be?

The structure of the two international organizations built upon the representativeness requirement has been systematically challenged. More specifically, the transformation of the international context strongly impacted the *space* and the *object* of regulation leading internal and external margins to contest the legitimacy of *subjects* involved in these two organizations.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, the increased presence and power of developing countries, due to changes in the space of regulation such as decolonization or renewed relationships between the state and the market has been one explanatory factor. On the other hand, changes in the *objects* to be regulated (the existence of a lawless zone around multinationals, the rise of domestic work, the expansion of standardization to sustainable development and work-related issues, etc.) can explain the increased interest taken by new categories of actors, particularly coming from civil society in the ISO and ILO. In contrast to the ILO which experiences a global weakening of its position, the ISO is strengthened in this new social and economic context, despite being exposed to criticisms. On the one hand, the decrease in unionization rates in industrialized countries and the predominance of domestic work in developing countries question the capacity of tripartite members within the ILO to represent all workers and employers worldwide and produce effective regulations. On the other hand, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) (and later the WTO) contributed to the rising influence of international standardization through the ILO.

These changes further had an impact on the relations between the two international organizations. Previously evolving in two separate spheres, today the two organizations find themselves in competition but are also forced to cooperate due to the growing investment of the ISO in areas considered ‘reserved’ to the ILO. Hence, it is interesting to see how the ILO insists on the ‘superiority’ of its representativeness requirement. Its members and its structure are presented as more legitimate than the so-called inclusive and flexible structure of the ISO.<sup>12</sup> Analyzing the contestations from internal and external margins, it nevertheless seems that both organizations were subject to similar criticisms.

### *Contestation from Internal Margins*

In the history of the ISO and of the ILO, developing countries are generally ‘regulation takers’ rather than ‘regulation makers’. They remain marginalized at the executive level and in many negotiation processes. This issue of insufficient representation started to be really problematic for the legitimacy of both organizations in the course of the 1960s. Following the decolonization movement, the inclusion of developing countries started to become a real issue within the two international organizations. To be considered as truly international organizations, they needed to fully include developing countries in their structure and negotiation processes. Looking at the evolution of their membership (see [Tables 1](#) and [2](#)), a rise in the number of members during that period is noticeable. The claim of developing countries not only to be better represented within the institution alongside geographical-regional lines but also to be an integral part of the decision-making and to be actively involved in all activities is significant. Their claims led to some significant reforms of the executive bodies: in both organizations, executive committees were progressively enlarged (from 24 members in 1919 to 122 since 1995 at the ILO and from 11 members in 1947 to 20 members in 2015 at ISO) and seats were distributed in

order to achieve a ‘fair geographical representation’, an expression which rapidly—and until today—tends to be systematically associated with the representativeness requirement.

Another key argument emphasizes the relationship between representation and confidence as an essential element for the viability of an organization. This preoccupation can be found in both organizations. It is reflected in a 1946 ILO report on constitutional matters: ‘No important region of the world must be left without appropriate representation on the Governing Body’.<sup>13</sup> Olle Sturén, the ISO’s general secretary during that period (between 1968 and 1986), worked at enrolling many national standards bodies from developing countries as active members, and thereby ‘rebuilt the confidence in the ISO’ (Latimer, 1997, p. 64). To build that confidence, observer statuses were granted to developing countries in both organizations. Concretely, these observer categories often serve as a launch pad, pushing the member to become more active in the international organization.

A second period of inclusion of developing countries started in the 1980s. Membership within the two organizations significantly increased between 1989 and 2009 (see [Tables 1](#) and [2](#)). This can be linked to the liberalization of economies worldwide, leading to an increased importance of international regulation of the market. For instance, China was given a privileged status in the executive committee of both organizations. This decision reflected the preoccupation both governance structures had vis-à-vis the rising power of countries such as China and other so-called emerging countries such as Brazil or India in the new state of the world economy.

In both cases, these evolutions toward a greater opening of the institution ‘from the inside’ relied upon the argument that protests and discussions about the composition of executive committees tend to paralyze the institution and generate a climate of distrust seen as detrimental to the functionality of the organization. Moreover, there was a latent recognition of the fact that standards negotiated without taking into account the whole membership of the organization would not be effective and dismiss the international mandate of the organization. As emphasized by Boas and McNeill: ‘clearly the technocratic consensus on development has reached its limits. It is no longer

**Table 1.** Evolution of the ISO membership (1949–2014)

| Year                  | 1949 | 1959 | 1969 | 1979 | 1989 | 1999 | 2009 | 2014 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Member bodies         | 27   | 41   | 55   | 70   | 73   | 90   | 105  | 119  |
| Correspondent members |      |      | 11   | 17   | 14   | 34   | 45   | 42   |
| Subscriber members    |      |      |      |      |      | 8    | 11   | 4    |
| Total                 | 27   | 41   | 66   | 87   | 87   | 132  | 161  | 165  |

Source: ISO (2010).

**Table 2.** Evolution of the ILO membership (1919–2014)

| Year                    | 1919 | 1929 | 1939 | 1949 | 1959 | 1969 | 1979 | 1989 | 1999 | 2009 | 2014 |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Number of member states | 42   | 55   | 55   | 58   | 76   | 116  | 132  | 135  | 154  | 183  | 185  |

Source: Louis (2016).

in any credible way possible to define development solely in a technical and functional manner' (2003, p. 9).<sup>14</sup> However, our research on the ILO and ISO highlights that even though a preoccupation for representativeness as fairness was introduced by developing countries in the definition of representativeness, the structure of the organizations was generally not called into question. Contestation from external margins was more radical as is explored next.

### *Contestation from External Margins*

While from their inception the ILO and the ISO both included non-state actors in their representation and decision-making procedures, they remained selective and subject to others demands of inclusion by actors who do not belong to the representative categories contained in their Constitutions. These claims were linked to the expansion of both organizations to transnational objects of regulation such as human rights issues, domestic work, and the environment or corporate responsibilities. In the 1990s, new venues for the participation of NGO were opened in the ILO and the ISO following specific but nonetheless strategic negotiation processes: the Convention 182 on Worst Forms of Child Labor at the ILO and the ISO 14000 series on environment management at the ISO.

During the 1990s, NGO participation reached a peak.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, the 182 Convention is often mentioned by ILO members as well as by the Secretariat as the 'breakthrough' for NGO to be part of the negotiations (Hansenne, 1999). Given their expertise and proximity with situations of child labor, their presence was considered not only legitimate but also necessary within the committees in order to benefit from their direct knowledge of child labor situations and to adopt appropriate standards—an expertise that the tripartite constituents were mostly lacking. Ultimately though, the tripartite constituents took the lead during the actual negotiations.

On the other hand, ISO 14001 is one of the few 'organizational standards' that ISO started producing in the second half of the 1980s, namely standards focusing on organizations as a whole, especially on production processes and managerial systems. Given their generic character and their utility to rationalize organizations, they soon became a huge commercial success for the ISO and thus a strategic issue for the organization (Ruwet, 2011). Studies have shown that the majority of delegates were coming from the industrial sector as well as standardization institutes. Then, environmental NGO and consumers' associations, which were involved in less than half of national delegations (Morikawa & Morison, 2004, pp. 17–18), started to criticize the ISO for its lack of inclusiveness. This movement opened the door to a significant increase in terms of NGO participation in the second draft of ISO 14001 standard.

By and large, the common point of external margins within both organizations was to emphasize the need for proximity between representatives and the issue at stake. Therefore, representativeness of a specific category may vary according to the object of regulation.

In the case of the ILO, the margins stressed the limits of tripartism. Conversely, in the case of the ISO, the illusion of openness has been underlined. These are two sides of the same coin: in both cases external margins have questioned the meaning initially given to representativeness and specified the normative requirements that needed to be fulfilled to guarantee the legitimacy of the organization. The issue of domestic work—that refers to a work performed in or for a household—is a typical case of the ILO attempting to reach out to categories of workers who are not involved in a 'standard employment relationship'<sup>16</sup> and therefore are confined to the margins of the regulated work sphere and suffer from worse labor conditions than the traditional employees. Even more problematic for the ILO is the fact that the domestic sphere falls outside trade unions' scope of action. Created in 1972, the *Self Employed Women Association* (SEWA)

played a significant role in the recognition of domestic work as a legitimate issue. SEWA also criticized the exclusivity (even ‘sectarianism’) of trade unions and the disdain for non-industrial workers (and especially women), thereby contesting the monopoly of trade unions to represent the world of work as a whole. Whereas SEWA has maintained informal consultative relationships with the ILO for more than 30 years, it is only since the 2006 that it can represent domestic workers in its own right thanks to an arrangement with the ITUC.

At the ISO, the most symptomatic case enlightening this process of answering civil society claims as outsider margins is to be found in the negotiation of the 26000 ISO standard, which started in 2005 and related to corporate social responsibility. ISO 26000 is clearly an attempt of the ISO to answer some of the criticisms directed toward its selective character and its lack of equity (Ruwet, 2010). Although ISO negotiation processes are theoretically open to all stakeholder categories, in practice, due to the professionalization process (see above), most standard setters are coming from the industry or consulting firms. The ISO 26000 new directives required the involvement of various stakeholders distributed among six categories: industry, labor, NGO, consumers, governments, and ‘others’. Each stakeholder group could be represented by two individuals (one expert and one observer) to guarantee the fairness of the negotiation process. Significantly, these changes of the ISO procedure were driven by external margins acting within the ISO 26000 working group.

Finally, criticisms coming from their external margins led to some changes in the mutual relationship of the ILO and ISO. Their relative openness toward outsiders may indeed be linked to their rivalry on certain objects of regulation. By expanding its mandate toward the sphere of labor standards, the ISO engaged in a controversy with the ILO as to who should be the most legitimate organization to tackle an issue that has been on the global agenda (UNCTAD, OECD, and ILO). Whereas the ISO has intensified its efforts to include the ILO in the negotiating process—leading to the adoption of a memorandum of understanding between the two organizations in 2005—the ILO has always been cautious, even reluctant, to take part in a process that was seen as overlapping with the ILO mandate. Moreover, ILO members regularly challenged the legitimacy of the ISO, as a ‘private organization, composed of a limited number of partners and limited interests’<sup>17</sup> to adopt standards related to social policy within multinational enterprises. In spite of members’ reluctance to be involved in the negotiating process, for the ISO 26000 development, the ILO was granted a veto right in the negotiations in order to make sure that its conventions would not be misinterpreted or watered down. This resulted in the creation of new venues for cooperation between the two organizations, which are both still trying to answer the recurrent criticisms with regard to their deficits of representativeness.

### **Conclusion: Representativeness as a Political and Analytical Tool**

This unique comparison of the ISO and the ILO showed that despite their differences these two international organizations have faced similar challenges for almost a century with regard to the question of representativeness. While they built up their legitimacy on their representativeness, the latter also proved to be their Achilles heel. Insiders and outsiders have used this claim to contest their legitimacy. Both were founded on an intergovernmental multipartite basis and were yet faced with recurrent criticisms at different levels, relating to their exclusive scope of membership: too Eurocentric, too industry oriented, and disconnected from significant civil society actors that also shape the world of labor in the case of the ILO and the products or processes standardized by the ISO.

This study contributes to a broader socio-historical understanding of representativeness and legitimacy at the global scale in a number of ways. Importantly, it is shown that the inclusion of non-state actors and the ‘opening-up’ of international organizations (Tallberg, Sommerer, Squatrito, & Jönsson, 2013), far from being a recent development, is a key feature of the representativeness of both organizations from their inception until today. However, while this multi-stakeholder character is essential to the definition of representativeness, it is not sufficient to establish the legitimacy of the ISO and the ILO once and for all.

As argued here, one of the common features shared by the ISO and the ILO is that their foundations rest upon a *functional* and *nationally driven* definition of representativeness. The transformation of the international context strongly impacted the *space* and the *object* of regulation leading internal and external margins to contest the legitimacy of the *subjects* involved in these two organizations. The analysis of the rationales behind the claims brought forward by these two categories of margins (internal and external) show that different meanings are given to representativeness. The justification behind the need for a better representation of developing countries in the international arenas is not very different from the functional and national definition initially given to representation by the ISO and the ILO. It simply extends the geographical scope and reflects the rising economic power of some countries such as India, Brazil, or China. In contrast, the arguments developed by civil society actors promote another vision of representativeness which underlines the importance of proximity with the fields and the issues at stake. It introduces normative claims that question the meaning initially given to representativeness by the two international organizations. The added value of distinguishing between internal and external margins as proposed here is precisely to go beyond a unifying vision of ‘the’ margins and to show that not only their understanding of what representativeness means but also their claims toward international organizations may vary.

Hence, representativeness is not only a resource that international organizations use to assert their legitimacy and to select their members, it is also a resource open to anyone who claims to speak on behalf of a group that feels marginalized, even excluded, from the representational sphere. Although we show that the reforms undertaken in order to become more inclusive are less radical than controlled and incremental, one can say that the concept of representativeness also encapsulates a contentious potential. Moreover, analyzing international organizations from the perspective of representativeness sheds light on broader transformations of the international system as far as its relationships with the States, the societies, and the markets are concerned. Indeed, representativeness is a concept that enjoins us to follow Cox’s advice to examine multilateralism from two main standpoints: as the institutionalization and regulation of an established order, and as the locus of interactions for the transformation of the existing order (1992).

This article has hence underlined the major changes that occurred in the relationships between the two international organizations in the last decades. Major transformations of the international context have fueled criticisms regarding the ‘lack of representativeness’ of both organizations. As underlined by Strange (1996), the shift from state to market in the last decades turned transnational corporations (TNC) into important political players. They have become political entrepreneurs having political relationships with civil society. This situation is a challenge for the ILO and an opportunity for the ISO as the latter’s standard setting process allows specific TNC, if they decide to put in the price, to directly take part in the development of a specific standard. While the ILO and the ISO were evolving in two distinct spheres they are now rivals but also paradoxically need each other in order to compensate their respective flaws. The ISO needs the social respectability and universal legitimacy of the ILO while the ILO seeks the effectiveness and the connection to the field generally associated with ISO standards.

Drawing on the history of both organizations, this article demonstrated that the categories and mechanisms used by international organizations to select their members, far from being natural and obvious, are embedded in a broader socio-historical, political, and economic context and power relations. This in turn supports Ann Florini's claim that to be representative is probably 'the trickiest way for claiming legitimacy' (2000, p. 293). However, at a time where the legitimacy of these two international organizations is increasingly challenged (see, for instance, Maupain (2013) on the ILO and Clapp (1998) on the ISO), this article argued that the definition of representativeness, as an important dimension of legitimacy, rests upon power relationships but also compromises with marginalized actors and is always subject to contestation and transformation.

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### Notes

- 1 Global hybrid may be defined as a field of practices that tends to abolish the distinction between the constituent categories of subjects of authority (public vs. private, for instance), objects dedicated to each type of authority and spaces in which it unfolds (Graz, 2006, p. 768).
- 2 The official creation of the ISO in 1947 is the result of a long process that began after World War I after two fruitless attempts. Indeed two international bodies can be considered as the ancestors of the ISO: the International Federation of the National Standardizing Associations (ISA) created in 1926 followed by the United Nations Standards Coordinating Committee (UNSCC) founded in 1943 by the Allies.
- 3 ILO, *Official Bulletin*, 1919–1920, pp. 297–298.
- 4 Germany became a member of the League only in 1926.
- 5 While the USA only became an official member of the ILO in 1934, they were regularly present as observers.
- 6 At the ILO, delegates gather according to their group (Governments, Employers, and Workers) rather than national belongings.
- 7 See <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/leg/download/constitution.pdf>, p. 7.
- 8 See [http://www.iso.org/iso/iso\\_membership\\_manual\\_2013.pdf](http://www.iso.org/iso/iso_membership_manual_2013.pdf), p. 8.
- 9 United States, Britain, France, Germany, and Japan were given a permanent position at the ISO Council reflecting their powerful influence.
- 10 And previously the International Federation of Trade Unions from 1919 to 1949 and the International Confederation of Free Trade Union from 1949 to 2006.
- 11 This framework has been suggested by Jean-Christophe Graz in order to analyze the global hybrids and tackles three key questions: the 'where?', the 'what?', and the 'who?' (Graz, 2006).
- 12 ILO, Minutes of the Governing Body, March 2011, 310th session, § 257.
- 13 ILO, Constitutional questions: reports of the conference delegation on constitutional questions, 1946, §79.
- 14 They deal with the broader issue of global development that sustains the mandate of many multilateral institutions (mostly economic and financial in their case).
- 15 At the ILO, over a hundred NGO participated as observers over the decade, that is, a 30% increase compared to the end of the 1970s.
- 16 Defined as a long-term full-time bilateral relationship between an employer and an employee in the workplace (Vosko, 2010).
- 17 ILO, Minutes of the Governing Body, March 2011, 310th session, § 257.

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