

RESEARCH PAPER FOR PH.D THESIS

‘Social Partnership in the Greek System of Industrial Relations’

GALINOS ELIAS

**2 HOPE RD./ ANSON RD., PHILIPS COURT B 5c,
M14 5EW, MANCHESTER**
elias.galinos@stud.umist.ac.uk

**UMIST
Manchester School of Management**

October 2001

Abstract

The following paper endeavours to highlight the specific factors and parameters that have shaped the current form of Social Partnership (SP) arrangements within the Greek IR context. In other words, it aims to investigate the empirical and academic evidence regarding the practical implementation of the partnership concept and sheds a light on the specific processes, the interrelationships between different institutional contexts/levels and IR actors' interactions that hinder or facilitate the diffusion of consensual initiatives in the Greek IR system. This 'different path' of SP implementation followed by the national IR actors is investigated within a broader analytical framework that emphasises the divergent SP orientation between the Anglo-American and EU countries.

1. What is the topic/issue of the analysis?

The aim of this research paper is to investigate the different 'starting points' and associated processes that have subsequently generated the particularities of the conceptualisation and the practical implementation of consensual initiatives in the Greek context of industrial relations (IR). In other words, the main focus of this analytical approach is to shed an impartial¹ light on the particular trajectory followed by the Greek IR actors and critically examine the underlying processes (political, socio-economic) that have shaped the current form of Social Partnership in the Greek IR system.

2. Why is this issue important/interesting to analyse?

2.1. Historical / Political Importance

The latter is frequently characterised as an 'immature' IR system, mainly due to the weakness of the social partners and the relevant organised institutions to achieve a position of influence in the socio-economic development (Kritsanonis, 1998). That is, partly, a product of the historical evolution of Greek industrial relations and the profound governmental paternalism of Greek labour movement. The emergence and

¹ The majority of the studies, concerned with the social interaction of the Greek IR actors, have been immensely influenced by (if not subserved) political expediencies.

evolution of the Greek IR context is tightly interwoven with the political history of the Greek State. Greece won its independence and its democratic constitution much later than other European countries and the Greek union movement was severely suppressed during long periods of dictatorships (Fakiolas, 1985). Thus, Greek unionism was unable to keep pace with the rest of West European countries, where the seeds of industrialisation bred the urge for the formation of the first trade unions from the start of 19th century. This considerable time lag, regarding the institutionalisation of the Greek labour movement, accompanied with the adherence of the state to a legalistic approach on IR issues have formed a *'legal-administrative'* environment for labour relations, which has subsequently influenced the mentality and the actions of the national IR actors (Ioannou, 1999).

Repeated -and in many cases unrefined- governmental interventions have endeavoured to manipulate the entire labour movement, in order to achieve specific political, economic and social ends. The most common means for the realisation of this tactic was the legal path and a series of suppressive laws, restricting free collective negotiations, unionisation and strike activity². The regulatory repercussions of this legalistic IR framework had a determinant impact on the structure and the subsequent form of trade unionism, as the law prohibited TUs from concluding collective agreements at the sectoral-industry and company level³. Hence, the result of this legislative initiative was the development of an intermediate type of bargaining system, which *'was neither centralised nor decentralised but rather widely*

² One of the most determinant laws, which shaped the entire IR system, was ratified in 1955. This last Act (3239/55) provided the legal framework which facilitated the imperative of state control in the Greek IR system for 35 years by imposing compulsory governmental arbitration in cases of industrial disputes (Politis, 1998).

³ The law specified certain categories of collective agreements (National General, National/Local Occupational, Special) (Ioannou, 1999).

fragmented, based as it was on the structure of occupational, cross-company and cross-sectoral unionism' (Ioannou, 1999). This evolution has emasculated the development of free collective negotiations and has hindered the amplification of a consensual approach on bargaining, fostering thus a conflictual character for Greek industrial relations thereafter.

Consequently, after the restoration of democracy in 1974 and the following accession of Greece in the EC, Greek industrial relations witnessed an unparalleled strike activity, mainly due to the '*inherent contradictions*' of the previously imposed conflict-sterilised IR climate (Mihail, 1995). Nevertheless, the newly emerged institutional framework paved the way for the crystallisation of the novel IR context and the subsequent reformation of the Greek social milieu as a whole. The Constitution of 1975 guaranteed workers' right to strike, the right to reach collective agreements and the freedom of trade unions, which had been euphemistically enacted before. However, the reforming procedures were significantly slow and lagged behind equivalent modernistic trends in Spain and Portugal (Kravaritou, 1995).

Hence, the radical shift of the Greek IR system took place with the reforming laws of 1982 and 1990. These Acts determined and amplified a wide array of issues vis-à-vis the content and structure of collective bargaining and industrial disputes, while signalling the gradual disengagement of trade unions (TUs) from political and governmental paternalism, with the acquiescence of political parties, employer and labour organisations. The law 1876/90 repealed the manipulative regime of compulsory governmental arbitration, institutionalised an independent body of mediation and arbitration (OMED) and stimulated the decentralisation of collective

bargaining towards the company level by regulating labour issues -such as union rights, working time/work organisation negotiations, work contracts, social insurance- at this level (Politis, 1998; Katsanevas, 1998). Since then, there have been clear indications of a revised role of collective bi-partite negotiations at each level and a clear policy by the Greek government to avoid the previous interventionist character.

During the last decade we have witnessed a series of governmental initiatives aiming at the modernisation of the IR system and the gradual emancipation of the Greek social partners. These innovative steps encompass the replacement of the obsolete¹ system of compulsory arbitration by a newly established voluntary system of conciliation and arbitration, the institutionalisation of individual employment rights and benefits and *a priori* consultation with the social partners regarding labour legislation (Kritsantonis, 1998; Spyropoulos, 1998). Moreover, a changing process seems to be underway in the last couple of years, which endeavours to eliminate the climate of mistrust among the IR actors and to facilitate the amplification of co-operative initiatives amid Greek TUs and employer organisations⁴.

This evolution does not pursue the complete ‘ostracism’ of government’s role as a social partner. On the contrary, it cultivates a more stable and viable type of tripartism, within which each actor plays an equivalent role in the formation of a joint view of national competitiveness and of a new type of solidarity between the social partners for the accomplishment of common national objectives (e.g. development of the economy and the human resources -similar to tripartite agreements and social pacts agreed in Italy, Spain, Portugal) (Spyropoulos, 1998; 1998; 1996). In addition to

⁴ ‘Confidence Pact between the Government and the Social Partners on the Way to the Year 2000’ signed in 1997 (Mouriki, 1998)

that, the content of the national collective agreements and the social pacts has been revised and the emphasis is on qualitative⁵ issues, such as flexibility, work organisation and security (Ioannou, 1999).

Nevertheless, the Greek system of collective negotiations -despite the recent decentralising trends- remains an '*intermediate*' system of multi-level bargaining, characterised by the co-existence of both centralised and decentralised structures, whilst the state still constitutes a powerful intervening actor (Ioannou, 1998). Therefore, despite the revision of the relevant legal framework, the reforming process is still in an embryonic phase and is substantially influenced by crystallised pathogens of the paternalistic past (Kouzis, 1999). Even during the 1997 tripartite negotiations, the success of Social Dialogue was limited, as for most of the '*burning*' issues the social partners did not manage to reach an agreement (e.g. 35 hour working week). However, the partial success of this agreement is still quite important, as it constitutes the only tripartite agreement ever signed in Greece and thus, it paves the way for more innovative and effective procedures of tripartite partnership and dialogue in the future (Spyropoulos, 1998).

2.2. Theoretical Importance

During the last decade a significant part of the academic literature on Employment Relations has been devoted to analysing the economic and social record of Social Partnership (SP). This has been in the context of an escalating trend among enterprises towards organisational restructuring and flexibility, and the overt shift of employees' attitudes and demands towards job security and quality of working

⁵ As opposed to earlier quantitative demands related solely to incomes policy and wages.

conditions. In some extreme cases, Social Partnership has been identified as the only viable approach to contemporary industrial relations (IR), a panacea able to remedy the distortions of global capitalism and outflank the sclerotic character of neo-corporatist decision-making structures. Conversely, others have argued about the treacherous pervasive function of partnership, which constitutes a '*poisoned chalice*' for unionism and a '*Trojan Horse*' of unions' erosion (Marchington, 2000; Claydon, 1998). The aim of this study is far from being the hagiology of another universal *best practice* in the face of partnership or conversely the 'inquisitor' that will anathematise the model as a whole. On the contrary, its scope is to analyse the empirical and academic evidence regarding the practical implementation of the partnership concept and to investigate whether the current experimentation in industrial relations is capable of providing a novel and distinct SP approach.

The Greek approach to Social Partnership and consensus and subsequently the proliferation of Social Dialogue (SD) between the social partners face structural and functional limitations. This phenomenon is not merely an outcome of the enduring interventions of the political parties that foster the manipulation of the trade union movement. It is also a result of the limited binding ability of the central agreements *vis-à-vis* the decentralised negotiations at the lower levels, which constitute the recent trend in the Greek IR context (Ioannou, 1998; Koutroukis and Tzekinis, 1998). In other words, there is a clandestine form of *dualism* in collective bargaining, which allows the co-existence of firm-level bargaining, in parallel with centralised developments (according to a survey by Kufidu and Mihail, 1999). This articulated approach (having many similarities with the Italian notion of '*informality*') is reflected in the results of the aforementioned survey, according to which over 59% of

Greek employers still negotiate at industry level, whilst at the same time 35% of the surveyed organisations have reached specific decentralised agreements (company, plant-level settlements) (Kufidu and Mihail, 1999).

Therefore, Greece comprises a representative case of a ‘top-down’ approach to Social Dialogue that overtly pursues broader societal objectives, whilst allowing an open space for flexible adaptation of framework peak-level agreements at lower levels of collective negotiations. Yet, one of the particularities of the Greek approach is reflected in the anaemic espousal of these national-level initiatives by the IR actors at the company level, which -in some cases- *de facto* circumvents the general guidelines and the standards set by the framework agreement, either due to the specific requirements of the company/industry or as a result of the imbalanced distribution of power amid the IR actors. Under these circumstances, the asymmetry of power among the negotiating parties can easily alter the general framework provided by the central agreements and use it as a ‘*starting point*’ for further negotiations that may exceed the final outcomes reached centrally (Ioannou, 1998).

The most important issues that permeate consensual agreements and bi-/tri-partite negotiations are primarily concerned with the battle against unemployment⁶ and the gradual reduction and/or re-arrangement of working time. Both these issues (unemployment – working time) have dominated Social Dialogue in Greece for the

⁶ It is crucial here to be highlighted another idiosyncratic characteristic of the Greek economy and labour market. Paradoxically enough, Greece constitutes perhaps the only member-state of the EU and the OECD with steady annual GDP growth of more than 3%, whilst at the same time there is a parallel increase of unemployment rates (Economikos Tahidromos, 30/9/1999). The principal reason of this peculiar phenomenon has a supply-side basis, mainly due to the rapid expansion of women employment in the labour market, the belated implementation and proliferation of structural⁶ changes in the Greek economy and the massive influx of immigrants during the last five years (Drettakis, 1999).

last five years and have provided ample space for consensual bargaining among the social partners. According to the Greek TU Confederation, the ultimate objective is a reduction in unemployment, which can be obtained with the progressive reduction of working time (35hour working week) without any cutback of labour income (Ioannou, 1999). Other issues that concern Greek unionism are the regional development and industrial policy, the viability of SMEs and the efficient operation of public sector enterprises, the legalisation of immigrants and the intensification of the inspections regarding the consistent implementation of labour law (Ioannou, 1999; INE, 1997).

On the other hand, the polymorphous character of Greek employer organisations is expressed through a wide diversity of objectives and interests among them (especially between large companies and SMEs), which in many cases has evoked stark differences and internal rivalries (Kravaritou, 1995; Spyropoulos, 1998). Yet, in recent years the most representative employer organisation (SEB) has pursued a modernistic strategy, embracing favourably the concept of ‘Social Dialogue’⁷ and demanding extended flexibilisation and deregulation of labour market. Nevertheless, government’s presence in the Greek IR system remains robust, due to the fact that it represents by far the largest employer and hence is very active in transforming and imposing new labour policies (Fakiolas, 1985).

Governmental interference has also played a decisive role in the formation of the Greek IR system and cemented a complex, concentrated -albeit fragmented- structure of highly legalistic and paternalistic relations **between** the IR actors (similar to the Spanish one). Hence, the regime of employee participation and information sharing

⁷ In parallel with similar shifts of attitude of employer organisations in Italy, Portugal and Spain.

amid the social interlocutors has a strictly legalistic character, which allows an indirect and merely reactive role to employee representatives. This situation mirrors the lack of participatory tradition of the Greek IR system -combined with TUs' lack of professionalism⁸ and relevant training- and the equivocal legal intervention, which evokes internal contradictions between TUs and other participatory institutions, regarding their roles and responsibilities (Koutroukis and Tzekinis, 1998; Metzidakos, 1997). It is obvious that the above regime has many similarities with equivalent systems in Spain, Italy and Portugal, where the inflated legalism deprives TUs of a proactive role and restricts them to an anaemic, *post-mortem* recipient of information, regarding pre-decided management policies (Knudsen, 1995).

According to Knudsen (1995), all these parameters have given rise to an evident dichotomy of the EU model of participation between a *North* and a *South* sub-type, which allocate different magnitude to workplace employee participation mechanisms. In general, the North-European countries appear to have strongest forms of joint regulation and consultation at the workplace level, whereas the Mediterranean alternative promotes a more legalistic and centralised form of participation. Nevertheless, the latest decentralising trends and the subsequent diffusion of workplace representative apparatus (such as the WCs) have blunted this geographical bifurcation and have highlighted the imperative of social partners' role during consultation procedures and partnership negotiations, both at the national and workplace level (extensive details about the different systems of participation can be also found in Hammarstrom and Nilsson, 1998; Van de Toren, 1998; 2000;

⁸ Mainly at the company level, as the third-degree TU organisation has lately developed a rather sophisticated and professional approach to employment relations by utilising scientific evidence and results derived from the Institute of Labour (INE/GSEE-ADEDY).

Furstenberg, 1998; Goetschy and Jobert, 1998; Tchobanian, 1995; Knudsen, 1995; Escobar, 1995; D'Aloia and Gennari, 2000).

Yet again, the Greek labour movement -despite the latest institutional and legal alignment- has not managed to be completely transformed from a quasi-state organisation into an autonomous social partner, which represents a vital part of civil society (Ioannou, 1998). The relationship between TUs and government has remained an amalgam of clientistic, financially dependent transactions, whereas the relationship between the centralistic TU organisation and the rank and file has been marked by a one-way, downward communication and a significant representation chasm. On the top of that, TUs are still overtly interrelated with the policies of the Greek political parties and function -in many cases- as transmission belts of parties' strategies in the labour movement⁹ (Kouzis, 1999). This situation constitutes another idiosyncratic characteristic of Greek unionism and deprives TUs of a unity of action and an effective representation of their members' interests.

Regardless of all these recent evolutions and particularities of the system, Greek industrial relations -and in particular partnership arrangements- has not yet been the subject of a multidimensional and interdisciplinary scientific analysis (Spiropoulos, 1998). Most of the existing studies are focused on the political or legal aspect of labour issues, giving therefore a restricted view of this multilateral field. The utter lack of an evaluative research on SP and Social Dialogue in Greece -particularly related to the perceptions/attitudes/ambitions of the IR actors directly involved and affected by these arrangements- begets the need for a thorough and detailed

⁹ The formation of a new political party entails the automatic establishment of an equivalent political organisation in the labour movement (Kouzis, 1999).

qualitative analysis of the partnership developments in Greece. This research project endeavours to provide useful insights regarding the processes of formation and implementation of SP initiatives and also to create a robust platform of academic knowledge in relation to the evolution of Social Dialogue in the Greek IR system, contributing in that way to the existing literature concerning the Mediterranean/S.European IR model. This urgent need for an 'IR' approach on these issues becomes even more intensive if we consider the aforementioned idiosyncratic characteristics of the Greek IR system, which is marked by the continued presence of class politics and a segmented bargaining structure.

3. How do you propose to examine this issue?

For that reason, this thesis attempts to compare and juxtapose the starting dynamics and consensual initiatives in Greece with other European SP models and approaches, so as to highlight the 'different paths' followed by the national IR actors and their subsequent effect on the final form of cooperative relations and collective bargaining. Why has the Greek approach to Social Partnership developed a set of idiosyncratic characteristics and processes, regarding its mode of implementation? To what extent have the different degrees of emphasis laid by the Greek IR actors on certain SP principles/objectives shaped the current form and perspective of Social Dialogue in Greece?

The broader analytical framework, within which these questions are going to be answered, deals also with a salient divergence of SP orientation between Anglo-American countries (mainly the UK) and the rest of the EU, namely the adherence of the Anglo-Saxon model to SP at the workplace level -targeting primarily firms'

performance- contrary to EU countries experimentation and focus at ‘higher’ levels (national/sectoral), which aim at the enhancement of national competitiveness. In other words, the backbone of partnership concept both in UK and the EU countries is presented schematically, together with the resulting disparities and the potential overlapping objectives of these two approaches. It is also clear that this bifurcation of SP orientation influences the whole set of ancillary SP objectives, which underpin the partnership concept and constitute the areas within which the exchange of interests between the IR actors takes place. However, this schematic distinction does not imply that each SP approach utterly disregards the respective aims of the other and vice versa. Yet, they endeavour to achieve these aims through *different paths* and disparate levels of IR regulation.

Many IR analysts have attributed this differentiated approach to the ‘*different starting points*’ and ‘*different paths*’ between dissimilar institutional contexts (Locke, 1995; Sisson, 1999; Turner and Auer, 1994). An excellent analysis by Lane and Bachmann (1997) regarding ‘*the different modes of social interaction between German and British workplaces*’ has attributed this differentiation to the different socio-economical institutional context. Their research has emphasised also the decisive role of the legal framework¹⁰ vis-à-vis the development of the individual-centred, ‘*atomised*’ system of the British capitalism, compared to the German form of ‘*Organised Capitalism*’, which is characterised by a social-centred legal framework and a long-term approach to IR (Lane and Bachmann, 1997).

¹⁰ And of what they characterise as ‘*institutional authority*’ (for more details see also Lane and Bachmann, 1997).

Other socio-political and economic factors that have equally influenced the development of these SP orientations are embedded within the particular IR contexts. In the **British** IR context, the rapid transformation of TU organisation and strength, which was reinforced (if not caused) by restrictive anti-union governmental legislation, has substantially weakened the magnitude of centralised collective bargaining (industry level, multi-employer) and indicated a shift towards more decentralised forms of collective negotiations (Tailby and Winchester, 2000). The latter along with the subsequent deregulation of labour market and the blossom of an individualistic approach to workplace employment relations, have cemented the supremacy of managerial prerogative vis-à-vis the distribution of regulatory and bargaining power amid the IR actors. On the top of that, the rise of unitaristic personnel strategies (HRM, TQM) and the latest structural changes in the labour market (growth of service-sector, part-timers, feminisation of employment, downsizing) have seriously challenged TUs' representative role (Undy, 1999; Jefferys, 1996). Thus, many TU organisations (including the TUC) have fostered the modernisation of the British IR framework, through the introduction of novel forms of cooperation and mutuality in the employment relationship. This evolution has been also buttressed by many business organisations, which identified the partnership concept as a vehicle of change for the IR climate in their workplaces¹¹ (Tailby and Winchester, 2000). Finally, the election of New Labour government and the resulting amplification of a '*Third Way*'¹² approach to employment relations have boosted the proliferation of the partnership concept among the British IR actors (Marchington, 2000).

¹¹ Moreover, the espousal of new management styles (JIT, TQM) by many British organisations has compelled the minimisation of disruptions of the production process and highlighted the importance of stable and cooperative employment relations in the workplace (see also Knell, 1999).

¹² Despite its overt individualistic orientation and vague definitional approach (Ackers and Payne, 1996; Marchington, 2000).

In an analogous way most of the **European** countries have faced strong pressures to reform their national IR systems, due to the intensified international competition (attenuation of cost-quality competitive differentiation¹³) and the escalating economic internationalisation (Hyman, 1999). According to Hyman (1999), these trends have managed ‘*to undermine established structures of economic (and employment) regulation*’ and have also posed the threat of replacing pre-existing trust relationships among the IR actors with market ‘*opportunism*’, jeopardising in that way long term ‘*economic efficiency*’ and ‘*social cohesion*’. Thus, most of the continental European countries have been engaged in a novel form of *political exchange*, by introducing central partnership agreements that were founded on the notion of a ‘*beneficial trade-off*’ between the national social partners and promoted a consensual approach to collective bargaining decentralisation¹⁴ (Hyman, 1999).

Prior to the latter investigation of the different approaches to SP, the study also analyses the most prominent IR theories and theoretical conceptualisations of the wider scientific field, namely Dunlop’s systems conceptualisation of IR, along with the Pluralist and the Marxist theoretical frameworks of the field. The Neo-Corporatist perspectives of IR, as well as the School of Regulation are also presented as distinct IR conceptualisations -despite the view of many academics that they represent sub-theories of earlier theoretical frameworks-, due to their exceptional role and influence in the European systems of IR. The detailed examination of the most resonant IR theories is considered extremely useful in justifying the subsequent adherence of the

¹³ This evolution has also given rise to phenomena of social (or union) dumping and a subsequent revival of unemployment pressures.

¹⁴ This approach has been characterised by Negrelli as ‘*deregulation by consent*’ (quoted by Hyman, 1999).

research project to a specific theoretical framework, which subsequently cements a robust analytical platform for the ensuing analysis of the notion of SP and the Greek IR context.

The structure of analysis of each IR theory starts with a general presentation of their central issues and research foci (role of IR actors, role of power, conflict, IR interests, values), whilst emphasises internally the view of each theoretical framework regarding partnership and cooperation, in order to establish an ‘umbilical cord’ between the traditional IR theory and the following analysis of SP in the Greek IR context. In that way, the study demonstrates also the theoretical origins of the research approach espoused throughout the different parts of the thesis.

It is obvious that this pattern of analysis resembles a V-shape ‘descending’ from the more abstract theories and conceptualisations of the broader IR field to the more specific ones, so as to reach its extreme specialisation at its empirical part (fieldwork). After the latter, it starts to ‘ascend’ again towards theoretical abstraction, through the thorough analysis of the research findings that allow us to infer valuable conclusions concerning our primary research aims.

3.1. Concepts: Operationalisation and Measurement

The presentation of the theoretical load and conceptualisation of the wider scientific field represents a habitually omitted part of many academic analyses of Industrial Relations (IR). Most scholars and students of IR usually rely on their implicit mode of analysis in order to manifest their theoretical origins. Contrary to this analytical approach, this paper attempts to highlight the salient characteristics of the most

resonant conceptualisations of the IR field, which have shaped the notional evolution of the term heretofore. In that way, this thesis establishes a palpable theoretical framework, an organic link between the abstract articulation of the IR theory and the subsequent analysis of Social Partnership in the Greek context of Industrial Relations. Thus, apart from a mere exhibition of the various notional streams, this study also displays the distinct theoretical approaches of these *IR schools*, regarding the conceptualisation of partnership and cooperation between the IR actors. What is the theoretical weight that each notional approach allocates to cooperative relationships? What is the role of partnership in the edifice of each school of thought? Does cooperation always constitute the *sine qua non* for a well-founded IR system or it merely contributes to an insidious preponderance of the most powerful actor over the interests and aspirations of the other ‘partners’? What is the relevant criticism regarding this erosive attribute of partnership arrangements? The answers to these questions will be also accompanied with a critical approach to the more general hypotheses and views of each IR theory¹⁵.

Perhaps the most influential (and definitely most cited) definition of IR is provided by J.T.Dunlop (1958), who defines the field as ‘*the complex of interrelations among managers, workers and agencies of governments*’ and allocates to IR theory the responsibility to ‘*explain why particular rules are established in particular industrial relations systems and how and why they change in response to changes affecting the system*’ (Dunlop, 1958; Blyton and Turnbull, 1998). Similar to this approach, A.Flanders described the study of IR ‘*as a study of the institutions of job regulation*’, with a central emphasis on ‘*rules*’ and the accompanying ‘*regulated or*

¹⁵ Usually, from the standpoint of its rival theories (as most of the critical views against a specific IR theory comprise the main beliefs and assumptions of its critics).

institutionalised relationships in industry' (Flanders, 1970). Finally, and quite remote from the '*conservative tendency*' of the aforementioned definitions, R.Hyman argues that '*industrial relations is the study of processes of control over work relations*' (Hyman, 1975).

Apart from these fundamental conceptualisations of IR, which identified the most prevailing theoretical perspectives of the academic field, there is a great number of relevant IR theories and analytical approaches presented in the study. The categorisation of these approaches into broader theoretical perspectives is a priori precarious, as most of the IR theorists walk on a tight rope above the border lines of these general schools of thought. However, this analysis attempts to present schematically the views of each IR theory regarding central IR issues, by classifying these approaches according to their theoretical points of departure. In that way, this method of analysis is expected to establish a comprehensive and accessible structure of the existing IR theories, which can be useful for purposes of comparison and contrast.

It is apparent from the presentation of the most prominent IR theories that it is almost unfeasible to conclude in a single, all-embracing conceptualisation of IR, which could potentially encompass the manifold character of the wide spectrum of social relationships and interactions associated with this scientific field. According to Bain and Clegg (1974), '*a definition (and subsequently a theoretical framework) cannot by its very nature be right or wrong...it can only be more or less useful for purposes of analysis*'¹⁶. In other words, every IR conceptualisation evidently reflects the aspects

¹⁶ Parenthesis mine.

of social reality that seem to be more relevant to the particular interests and objectives of each specific research project (Hyman and Brough, 1975). Hence, the espousal of an IR theory clearly has a formative influence upon the utilised method and structure of analysis and thus, upon the final characteristics and the theoretical burden of the research findings (Blyton and Turnbull, 1998). As a result, the particularities of the 'points of departure' of each study indicate and permeate its consequent research foci and accordingly reveal the broader theoretical -and sometimes ideological- framework of analysis¹⁷.

For all the above reasons, the ensuing investigation of Social Partnership in the Greek context of Industrial Relations -notwithstanding its overt **pluralistic** theoretical predisposition- attempts to integrate specific elements of different IR conceptualisations, so as to compensate the inefficiencies of a single IR approach with complementary analytical tools of related theories. The latter does not mean that this analysis represents an amorphous mishmash of disparate IR approaches, with no clear analytical framework or underlying theoretical orientation. On the contrary, the ambition of this approach is to supplement its evident pluralist character with research objectives lent by related theories, in order to investigate the idiosyncrasies of the Greek approach to Social Partnership within a rigorous and comprehensive framework of analysis.

In an analogous way a mere categorization of social partnership according to its particular components and covering issues could easily leave gaps and/or overlaps in

¹⁷ In practice, this function of choosing the most comprehensive framework of analysis usually starts from the opposite direction. For instance, the distinctiveness of the research interests between different national IR research approaches clearly reflects the determinative influence of ideology upon the adopted IR conceptualisation (for details see Doeringer, 1986).

the conceptualization of this term and significant inconsistencies during its analysis, as most of these issues are mutually dependent and interlinked to each other. Thus, the presentation of SP adopts an articulated structure, which encompasses the **different conceptualizations of the term** - and the subsequent **principles, values** and **IR practices** that they entail -, the **content**, the main **objectives** and the **levels of implementation** of this concept, the **role** and the **strategies** of the participating **IR actors** and finally the debate concerning the **efficiency of the SP model** and its hitherto impact on **performance**. In this way, any potential overlapping issues among the different categorisations will help us achieve a systematic understanding of the term. This mode of analysis and operationalisation enables us to design our research tools and the content of the topics that are covered in the empirical part, according to these particular constituents and parameters of the SP concept.

3.2. Research Design

The method of analysis followed is comprised of an intensive review of the relevant Greek and English literature, combined with a sufficient amount of empirical evidence. The latter will be derived from an in-depth investigation of pioneer Greek companies (in terms of partnership structures and equivalent cooperative initiatives). These case studies are combined with a parallel analysis of analogous developments and consensual agreements at higher echelons of collective negotiations, namely the national level. This form of combined case study analysis enables us to conduct a thorough examination of partnership arrangements embedded in a dynamic (real life) context and hence to apprehend the meaning and the processes of SP in the Greek IR

system¹⁸. It attempts also to highlight the associated SP practices and processes -by using qualitative evidence- whilst being highly theoretical and analytical, as it reveals which of the accompanying principles of partnership are most prominently espoused and pursued in the Greek framework of IR and in what way.

In particular, this research project investigates the perceptions and SP approaches of the main protagonists of the Greek IR actors at the high-peak level of collective negotiations, namely leading participants from the three poles of tripartite bargaining and Social Dialogue: the state (Ministry of Labour), the General TU Confederation (GSEE) and the most representative employer organisation (SEB). On the other hand, the two case study companies display considerably different industrial, economic (size, profits, labour force) and geographic background characteristics, yet they are linked with their pronounced cooperative initiatives and SP orientation.

This method of analysis enables us to investigate and trace which are the factors/parameters that **hinder** or **facilitate** the development and diffusion of SP initiatives within the Greek IR context (both at national and company level). In other words, instead of having a mechanistic and descriptive presentation of those SP principles/values/practices espoused (or not) by the Greek IR actors, the study alternatively highlights the specific processes and IR actors' predispositions that comprise the particularities of the IR system and subsequently of the current form of Social Partnership and Dialogue. In that way, we can easily infer valuable conclusions and policy implications, regarding the internal link and relationship between the two

¹⁸ These are potential research findings that quantitative research methods could not possibly shed a light on (realism - scientific analysis).

different institutional contexts – levels and highlight the formative influence of this relationship¹⁹.

3.3. Sample: companies, time & space -- Data and Sources

The first case study company²⁰ represents an almost **textbook partnership company**, with well-developed cooperative structures and participative style of management that failed though to sign a consensual agreement regarding the reduction of working time during the last negotiations. The second potential case study²¹ investigates one of the **first partnership agreements (out of four)** that have been signed in Greece (concerning re-arrangement of working time) after the latest legal reform of the Labour Regulations. It is obvious that both of these companies represent pioneer SP cases, which they also allow us to analyse and evaluate synchronically the associated SP arrangements and processes at different stages of development. In other words the study investigates a *de-facto* partnership company, in juxtaposition with a *de-jure* one and attempts to infer valuable conclusions regarding their internal processes and final objectives.

The research tools utilised in this investigation are comprised of a set of semi-structured personal interviews with trade union officials, government officials, employers' organisation representatives, CEOs, personnel managers and individual employees, together with a detailed review of secondary data (relevant academic literature, statistical figures, research documents, newspapers, e-databases). This research approach might also use a number of questionnaires in samples of employees

¹⁹ In particular, the direction of this influence (is it always a top-down impact or can it be also a reverse influence?).

²⁰ A sizeable and highly profitable group of petroleum companies (based in Athens).

²¹ A considerably smaller clothing industry in Northern Greece.

of the investigating companies, in order to ground the impressions gained by the interviews (Marchington et al, 1992).

4. Future Research and Policy Implications

This research topic has a great potential for future investigation and analysis, shedding an original light on the dynamics of the Greek SP model and stimulating a comparative approach and study of industrial relations. On the top of that, this analysis contributes to the constructive debate concerning the efficiency of the partnership model and the outcomes derived from its implementation. It might also suggest further changes for the development of a common mentality between the Greek IR actors, which will subsequently facilitate the fast and unimpeded implementation of all the structural reforms currently needed and promote the amplification of robust and transparent structures of participation and partnership amid the social partners. Finally, the ambition of this study is to rouse the interest of the academic community in Greek IR and subsequently to promote the further development of the field in Greece.

ⁱ The above assertion is justified by the fact that straight after the abolition of the system of compulsory arbitration there was a gradual decay of the role of arbitration as a whole, with a sharp decline in the number of industrial disputes resolved by arbitration (65.1% in 1986 – 16.6% in 1998) (Ioannou, 1999). In parallel with that, during the 1990's there is a precipitous growth of collective agreements reached on the company and sectoral level -which were not allowed by the previous IR system-, a fact that facilitates the adjustment of central, peak-level agreements according to the needs of social partners on lower levels.

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