Competitors, intruders, or partners?
The relationships between Spanish political parties and civil society

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The paper aims at mapping the relationships between the three country-wide Spanish political parties and social organizations along the period 1977-2004. This mapping allows identifying three different strategies implemented alternatively or simultaneously by political parties in relation to civil society: competition, co-optation, and collaboration. While the first consists of parties creating their own social organisations to promote their agenda in civil society, the second one is about either co-opting social activists into the party’s ranks and/or executive boards, or incorporating party members into social organizations so as to both spread the party message and make civil society more receptive towards party proposals. Collaborative relationships entail the creation of common fora or the participation in the other actor’s advocacy campaigns and programmatic workshops. It will be shown that competition and co-optation were mostly replaced by different collaboration mechanisms with social organizations along the 1990s.

Introduction

The paper aims at mapping the relationships between the three country-wide Spanish political parties and social organizations along the period 1977-2004. This mapping allows identifying three different strategies implemented alternatively or simultaneously by political parties in relation to civil society: competition, co-optation, and collaboration. While the first consists of parties creating their own social organisations to promote their agenda in civil society, the second one is about either co-opting social activists into the party’s ranks and/or executive boards, or incorporating party members into social organizations so as to both spread the party message and make civil society more receptive towards party proposals. Collaborative relationships entail the creation of common forums or the participation in the other actor’s advocacy campaigns and programmatic workshops.

The three analysed parties are the social democratic Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, PSOE), the centre-right Popular Party (Partido Popular, PP), the Communist Party of Spain (Partido Comunista de España, PCE) and its successor party, United Left (Izquierda Unida, IU). The PSOE and the PP are the largest parties obtaining together over three quarters of the national vote share and accounting for about 90 per cent of seats in the lower house. Since 1982 they have alternated in the national government. PSOE’s landslide in 1982 initiated a fourteen-year rule which ended in 1996 with the PP’s victory. In 2004 the PSOE won the legislative elections and it is currently the governing party. The PCE and the IU have had an irregular electoral performance. While in 1977 the PCE obtained a vote share of 9.3 per cent, by 1982 its electoral support had more than halved. The creation of the IU in 1986 produced electoral pay-offs during the 1990s when the party reached its peak at 10.5 per cent of the vote but since 2000 it has suffered a continued electoral decline – it only got 3.8 per cent in the 2008 legislative elections.

The interest of the Spanish case lies in the high dependency of political parties from public funding, which might lead to the cartelization of both the party organization and the party system: 82.5 of PSOE’s revenues, 86.8 of PP’s, and 95.5 per cent of IU’s come from public transfers. Party members’ contributions represent about 8 per cent of PSOE’s and PP’s total revenues and about 4.3 per cent of IU’s (Tribunal de Cuentas, 2006). Party membership has been increasing in Spain in the last decades but the members/voters ratio is one of the lowest amongst European countries (Mair and
Biezen, 2001). Nonetheless, we argue that a weak membership might well incline parties to search for other sources of linkage with society.

Political Parties and Civil Society

Changes in party relationships with interest groups in Western democracies have long been examined by political parties’ researchers. From Kirchheimer (1966) to latter attempts by Katz and Mair (1994, 1995) the decline of the integrated relationships between parties and social organizations has been used to document party transformation – either from mass to catch-all parties or to catch-all to cartel parties.

However, though contemporary party-interest group relationships seem rather weak (Webb, 1994: 129), there is no single pattern of links between both actors across countries and maybe not even within countries (Allern, 2007; Poguntke, 2006; Selle, 1997; Thomas, 2001a; Wilson, 1990; Yishai, 1991). At the same time, civil society has changed. New social movements tend to prefer formal independence from political parties and to avoid strong ties with them (Poguntke, 2002), and trade unions under competitive union settings might consider that classic links with parties are harmful for their interests (Burgess, 1999). Hence, shallower links may be in demand from interest groups too.

Yet, lack of formal affiliation does not entail complete separation between parties and social organizations. Links may exist through joint committees, through the invitation of a broad array of external groups to the elaboration of party platforms, or through the membership of party members in other social organizations (Pedersen, 2003; Schmitt, 1989; Verge, 2007).

These links can still be used to reincorporate society into politics once parties can not rely on stronger incentives (be it material or solidarity incentives) to secure voter loyalty (Koole, 1996; Yishai, 2001). Social organizations are information providers and parties might approach them to obtain the inputs through which policies or party manifestos are designed (Bartolini and Mair, 2001: 335). Endorsement of parties and candidates by social organizations may also report significant benefits to parties (Rozell et al., 2006). Simultaneously, the incorporation of civil society

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1 The members/voters ratio was 1.81 in 1980, 3.42 in 2000 (Mair and Biezen, 2001), and 4.67 in 2008 (own calculation).
representatives might well rend party’s commitment with social demands more credible before the electorate and signal the openness of the party towards society (Paramio, 1999: 92).

As Allern (2007: 29) argues, each historical period creates a specific system-level incentive structure that shapes a particular type of party-interest group relationships. To date, insufficient data on contemporary relationships has been produced.

The remainder of the article will analyse the case of the Spanish country-wide political parties in light of these considerations. In the analysis that follows we will apply Allern’s broad definition of relationship which includes “the links that connect interest organizations to party members, decision-makers and/or decision-making bodies, i.e. links that open up for contact and potentially provide communication about information, know-how, opinions and policy views between parties and interest organizations” (2007: 44). The data used is derived from party documents and interviews with party politicians as well as from secondary sources. The second section describes the evolution of the strategies implemented by political parties in relation to civil society. The third section discusses the rationale behind these strategies and organizes groups of links by type. The last section presents the conclusions and main findings of this research.

Party strategies: Competition, Co-optation, and Partnership

Competition

In the 1980s, the PSOE sought to create social organizations in areas of “strategic interest”, such as environment, peace, third world development, and women, so as to boost the Socialist presence in society (PSOE, 1988: 82). This aim materialized in the creation of the Progressive Women Federation (Federación de Mujeres Progresistas, FMP), the Movement for Peace, Disarmament and Liberty (Movimiento por la Paz, el Desarme y la Libertad, MPDL), and International Solidarity (Solidaridad Internacional, SI). The will to attract new party members as well as young voters – the
social group the party considered to be more concerned about these issues – was evident. Besides, during those years, young Spaniards had been very active organizing protest against some of the Socialist government policies such as the marches against the Youth Employment Plan and the anti-NATO campaign for the referendum held in 1986 (Craig, 1995: 25).

The party also aimed at reacting to the creation of new social organizations which might end up being political rivals such as the environmental movement. Simultaneously, in the electoral arena, the PSOE was challenged by the launching of the United Left as a coalition of the PCE with other political and social groupings. Hence, it was not only about winning new supports but also about preventing losses. This strategy was defended for strategic, sociological and practical reasons. According to party leaders, there was a high coincidence between socialist goals and those of the feminist, environmental and peace movements. Furthermore, society was increasingly supporting these values, i.e. 30 per cent of the Spaniards showed an “active sympathy” for the potential emergence of a green party, and more than 20 per cent (37 per cent amongst young voters aged 18-21) would vote for it.

The following reflection on the environmental movement is very illustrative of the party’s concerns: “We need to broaden social support for the Socialist project, assuming the inconveniences to be experienced by an organization barely dynamic which needs to be renewed in order to give an answer to new social demands; we might otherwise face the competition with alternative movements that already exist in other European countries” (PSOE, 1988: 52).

Regarding the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), in the 1960s, the party had promoted the creation of two large popular organizations which operated underground during Franco’s dictatorship. The majority of their affiliates were party members. The Popular and Citizen’s Movement (Movimiento Popular y Ciudadano, MPC) focused on the reconstruction of social networks and on providing civic and political education (PCE, 1978: 34). The Democratic Movement of Women (Movimiento Democrático de Mujeres, MDM) was created in 1965 as a support network for political prisoners and successively evolved as a feminist organization. With the advent of democracy and the demobilization strategy introduced by left-wing parties, the PCE stopped sponsoring these movements.

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3 Survey carried out by Instituto IDES in April 1986 with a sample of 2,017 respondents, Estudio Sociológico sobre el Medio Ambiente en España (see Tezanos, 1987: 170).
From 1973 onwards, Spain experienced a process of high popular mobilization which was initially not directed by political parties. Gradually, opposition parties got control over popular platforms and encouraged party members to join them as a means to expand their social supports and to condition the negotiations with the liberal groups of the Francoist regime. This objective was particularly evident in the multiparty platform led by PCE, the Democratic Joint (Junta Democrática). Conversely, PSOE-led Democratic Convergence Platform (Plataforma de Convergencia Democrática) favored top-down negotiations over mass actions.

The last approach triumphed when the two platforms converged in the Democratic Coordination (the so-called ‘PlataJunta’). On the one hand, parties realized that imposing a rupture was not feasible and that high social mobilization levels might cause a military intervention. On the other hand, the dismantling of those incipient social movements was very beneficial to the PSOE as it weakened PCE’s social support. As to the PCE, the party feared being cornered from the negotiation process so it bitterly renounced to mass mobilization (Oñate, 1998: 158-166).

Albeit the PCE claimed it had stopped creating or sponsoring social organizations because the party believed in their necessary independence⁴, the party still held control over them for some years as many social organizations were made of or led by PCE members.

Later on, the economic crisis reaffirmed the need to keep mobilization under control. In December 1977, the PSOE and the PCE agreed to stop demonstrations in order to implement the Moncloa Pacts (Acuerdos de La Moncloa) (Sastre García, 1997: 54). Social unrest could be effectively put under control due to the strong linkages between the left-wing parties and the main trade unions.

The PSOE had historically been linked to the General Union of Workers (Unión General de Trabajadores, UGT). The UGT was founded 12 August 1888 by Pablo Iglesias who had also founded the PSOE eight years before. Traditional fraternity links were established between the party and the trade union to the point that being a member of the UGT supposed an affiliation to the PSOE and vice versa. When democracy was restored the union rejected links with other parties and PSOE’s members were obliged to belong to UGT by the party constitution. The double membership reached very high percentages at the national directory boards though members obedience was looser: in

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⁴ Marisa Castro, former IU’s Women’s Secretary and one of the leaders of the MDM, face-to-face interview, 7/3/2005.
1990 about 50 per cent of party members belonged to the UGT whereas only 12 per cent of the UGT members were affiliated to the PSOE (Astudillo, 1998: 265). Some relevant trade unionist were included in electoral candidatures. In the second half of the 1980s the party-union relationships were very tense as the UGT contested the government’s economic policies. Discontent was dramatized when the UGT leader resigned his seat in parliament in protest against government policies. In December 1988, the UGT, along with the communist-controlled union, the Workers’ Commissions (Comisiones Obreras, CC.OO), mounted a highly successful, nationwide general strike. Over the next few years the UGT and the PSOE severed the remaining symbolic and institutional ties. In the 1989 legislative elections the UGT failed to back the PSOE for the first time in its history. Meanwhile, the PSOE launched a project to create a network of militants in the factories to fulfill the UGT’s earlier role of disseminating information and mobilizing support. In November 1990 the delegates at the PSOE’s conference voted to eliminate obligatory affiliation with the UGT (Burgess, 1999: 115; Astudillo, 2001).

The CC.OO were organized in the 1960s by the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) and workers’ catholic groups to fight against the dictatorship and for labor rights (in opposition to the non-representative “vertical unions”). In 1976 the various organizations formed a single entity. The CC.OO is the union to which the majority of the IU and the PCE members belong. However, the proportion of communist members within CC.OO is small and has been gradually decreasing since the democratic transition years. Overlapping membership between the leaderships of the PCE and the IU with the CC.OO has also reduced dramatically – currently it is almost inexistent. During the 1980’s several union leaders were present in communist governing bodies and party candidatures. The party-union link began disappearing in 1991 due to strong disagreements over the future of the PCE (the union leaders preferred its dissolution), the organizational model for the IU, and the required degree of social mobilization the union should maintain so as to erode the Socialist government (Ramiro-Fernández, 2004).

The IU has not created any social organization and due to constant party factionalism it has lost influence over those organizations the PCE had long controlled through overlapping membership.

The Popular Party (PP) has also searched for social roots through the creation of its own organizations. In 1978, PP’s predecessor, the Popular Alliance (Alianza
Popular, AP), programmed the creation of leisure time associations, cultural organizations and citizen action platforms so as to sound citizens’ demands out (AP, 1978: 70). In that year the Humanism and Democracy Foundation was born as an organization devoted to third world aid, the same field the Foundation Iberoamérica Europe would address their activities since 1984. As a reaction to women’s left-wing associations, the party leader Manuel Fraga promoted the creation of Conservative Women (Mujeres Conservadoras) in 1982. The party still considers this association as an affiliated organization (PP, 2002). Indeed, the Conservative Women’s headquarters is placed at the same building as the Popular Party’s headquarters and about 30 per cent of its affiliates are party members (Ruiz-Jiménez 2002: 354).

Regarding collateral organizations, the PP’s close ties with the Spanish Business Organization (Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales, CEOE) have been quite conflictual. Up to 1981 the CEOE had actually backed Alfonso Suárez’s UCD, a coalition of newly formed centrist and rightist parties which led the Spanish government from 1979 to 1982. It was not until it was clear that the UCD would collapse that the CEOE approached the PP, since the CEOE had long considered that PP’s leader, Manuel Fraga, was an electoral liability. By the beginning of the 1980s some CEOE members were included in party lists for the legislative elections. It also played a relevant role collecting funds for the electoral campaigns and offered the PP its public opinion research cabinet. During PP’s rule a handful of CEOE members, who had also advised the party in previous electoral campaigns, took over government responsibilities.

The PP has not renounced to the competitive strategy and keeps on sponsoring the creation of organizations, particularly in the fields of social assistance and third world aid. Under PP’s government (1996-2004) an important number of religious organizations transformed into NGOs to participate in the share-out of the official development aid (CONGDE, 2004; Revilla, 2004: 213-14).

Many of these new NGOs are headed by PP prominent figures. For instance, with regards to the funds the government allocated to the reconstruction of Iraq, three of the five NGO which received more money were linked to the PP: the Fundación Iberoamérica Europa led by the popular MP who presided over the parliamentary committee on International Cooperation; Mensajeros de la Paz, headed by the Prime Minister’s wife; and the Fundación Humanismo y Democracia, affiliated to the PP and headed by the former ambassador of Spain in Washington (Intermón-Oxfam, 2003).
Finally, with regards to the neighbourhood associations, dominated by the PCE during the transition to democracy and by PSOE during the 1980s, they have often become supportive organizations of the PP which encompass the party’s opposition strategy in cities with a left-wing government (Pont Vidal, 2003: 25). In other cities governed by the PP, the party has promoted the creation of urban social movements linked to it (Recio and Naya, 2004: 74).

**Intrusion and co-optation**

By the beginning of the 1980s the PSOE urged their members to participate in social organizations so as to “analyze social reality and to bring to social foras the Socialist message” (PSOE, 1981: 203). Social influence was a permanent concern at the time: “If the Citizen Participation Secretaryship does not seriously worry about the participation of our members in every single sphere of society which is democratizing, we will face the paradox that whereas society advances the Socialist influence erodes”.

After the general strike of 1988 called by the two larger trade unions (CC.OO and UGT), the PSOE substituted the mandatory affiliation to the UGT by party members to the recommendation to join this trade union. Complementarily, a new members’ duty was included, that of participating in a social movement (PSOE party constitution 1990, article 10). According to the report presented by the party leader at the 1990 party conference, about 40 per cent of members joined at the time a social organization, and the PSOE sought to increase this figure to 50 per cent (PSOE, 1990b). To accomplish it, the party set up a registry in order to keep updated records of the Socialist presence in social organizations (PSOE, 1994b: 133). Joining a social organization is still a members’ duty albeit the perspective has been slightly modified: members are no longer supposed to spread the party message to social organizations but to inform the party about their demands (PSOE, Party constitution 2004, article 10).

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5 Rafael Román, PSOE’s former Secretary of Social Movements and Participation of the party branch in Andalusia, in the party journal *Participa* number 1(1988).

6 There is no evidence of this registry having been kept updated along the 1990s as this initiative was proposed again in 2001 and 2004. In the 2001 *Quality Plan* and the 2004 *Federal Plan for the Modernization of Local Branches* the party planned to create a new registry with members’ social interests.

Co-optation of social leaders into public office was very frequent during the first legislatures. The most salient examples are the neighbourhood movement and the feminist movement. The neighbourhood movement was one of the largest in Europe since the end of the Second World War (Castells, 1983). From the late 1960s up to the first democratic local elections in 1979, neighbourhood associations led the struggle to improve service and infrastructures provision and they also became schools of civic participation. Many of their leaders integrated left-wing party candidatures in the first local and general elections (Álvarez Junco, 1994). With regards to the feminist movement, equality feminists maintained a close relationship with the PSOE through a double membership. They were also brought into public office and were in charge of the creation of the Women’s Office, the central government department responsible for promoting gender equality (Valiente, 1995; Threlfall, 1998).

On the other hand, in 1984 the party created a “collective affiliation” figure for those ideologically-close organizations which “develop an effective task within socialism” (PSOE, Party constitution 1984, article 6). To make this option more appealing, in 1990 organizations signing the agreement were entitled participation in the party directory boards as non-voting members (PSOE, Party constitution 1990, articles 24 and 30). Only two organizations have ever applied for this status, amongst them the Progressive Women Federation.

With regards to the PP, the presence of party members in civil society has also been a strategy pursued since the creation of the party (AP, 1982: 55). The party argued: “[m]embers have access to, and even control of, several organizations that contribute to the formation of public opinion, so if, properly articulated, they could serve as important elements for social penetration” (AP, 1984: 69). Simultaneously, the party sought to recruit “prestigious and representative” persons in party candidatures (AP, 1984; PP, 1990).

Although the PCE decided to stop sponsoring its own social organizations, amongst its priorities we find the increase of the communist social presence. This was believed to be decisive for the implementation of Eurocommunism, specially at a time when PCE’s electoral performance was very poor (particularly amongst young voters and women) and when membership was languishing (PCE, 1978: 36). According to the party, the causes for these phenomena were to be found in the party’s deficient combination of “institutional struggle” with “popular struggle” (PCE, 1981: 11). The PCE regretted having co-opted social movements’ leaders due to the need to recruit
candidates for public office (PCE, 1983: 42). Hence, the party aimed at strengthening the work of party members within social movements in order to listen to their demands as well as to defend the party’s positions (PCE, 1987: 21). Party membership was considered to be closely linked to social participation. Party leaders were imposed to pay special attention to mass organizations (PCE, party constitution 1981, article 66) and to “head the struggle of popular sectors” (PCE, party constitution 1981, article 26).

So as to the IU, a close relationship with civil society has been one of the main party goals. On the one hand, the party aims at incorporating inputs from social organizations in the party manifesto, and, on the other hand, at preventing institutionalization (IU, party constitution 2004, article 8.8). The IU fosters members’ social volunteering as a means to participate in the debate of social demands. Social activism is also considered to be crucial for the electoral mobilization of left-wing voters (IU, 1997: 60).

Nevertheless, very soon after its creation the party regretted that extending IU’s roots in society was a pending work (IU, 1994: 62). Although many IU members are activists in a wide array of social organizations, there is no party communication with them and no registry has been created. Some factions do also claim that the IU has neglected PCE’s historical relationships with some social organizations.

Social organizations and political groupings are also invited to collectively integrate into the party (integration has to be ratified by the party conference). They are recognized as an ideological faction and their members have individual voting rights (IU Party constitution 1997, article). At the national level only two groupings have applied for this status (and one of them abandoned the party in October 2008).

The traditional hegemony of left-wing parties in civil society has gradually weakened and, especially since the second half of the 1990s, PP’s members and party leaders are present in many social organizations, in particular those linked to social assistance (i.e. charities) and third world aid, as it has been presented in the previous section. The PP has also tight links with social organizations that defend the traditional family. The vicepresident of the Foro Español de la Familia, the organization which was more aggressive towards the law on gay marriage passed by the PSOE government in 2004, was head of department in the conservative government between 1996 and

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17 Mariví Montserín, PSOE’s ex Coordinator of the Secretary of Social Movements and Relationships with NGOs, face-to-face interview, 30/11/2004.
2004. The PP is also very influential on organizations that gather victims of terrorism, in particular on the national Association of Victims of Terrorism (AVT), which has often been instrumentalized against the Socialist government, such as during the last cease-fire declared by ETA in 2006.

**Collaboration**

By the mid 1980s the PSOE created the Parliamentary Cabinet of Relationships with Society as a means of communication between public officers and the electorate and civil society at the constituency level.

Up to 1984, within PSOE’s Federal Executive Commission, the Secretaryship of Citizen Participation was in charge of establishing close ties with social organizations – renamed as Secretaryship of Social Movements and Relationships with the NGOs in 2000. Other areas have been also created since the late 1990s in order to relate with particular social groups, such as the Secretaryship of Environment and the Secretary of Consumers.

The period in government, especially its last years (1993-1996), deteriorated and cooled off relationships with social organizations (PSOE, 1994b: 39). Reflecting on the stagnation and the incapacity to reconnect with civil society while being in opposition, by the end of the 1990s, the PSOE sought to transform the organization into a more participatory structure (PSOE, 1997a: 205). Social demobilization and change in the composition of the Socialist electorate worried the party’s Secretary-General, Joaquín Almunia (1997-2000): “The social impact of various electorates is dissimilar. Over the years, our urban, dynamic and expressive electorate has been displaced by other sectors with less capacity to connect with and communicate to society (…). If we are to get over the political majority we have to attract again the urban electorate, reconnect with the academia, with opinion leaders, social leaders and the youth” (Valcárcel, 1997: 31-2).

In 1997 the PSOE substituted the (rather unsuccessful) “collective affiliation” by the “collaboration agreement”. This form of less formal relationship, according to the party, was meant to facilitate a more comfortable implication of social organizations in the Socialist project and to grant them a non partisan use (PSOE, 1997a: 191). From the second half of the 1990s it has been a common practice. The collaboration agreement
materializes in specific agreements in order to implement joint actions (sectoral platforms, campaigns, etc.)

Another action designed to encourage collaboration with social organizations was the relaunching of the Sectoral Organizations. The Sectoral Organizations were created in 1990 as a permanent channel of relationship with social organizations through which the party would obtain inputs from civil society (PSOE, 1990b: 90). Sectoral Organizations have voting rights at the party conference. From the late 1990s social leaders were incorporated into these instances so as to improve social movements’ involvement in the party. Since 1998 Sectoral Organizations have been relaunched on various occasions in order to broaden the party’s social bases. Between 1998 and 2004 participants in the Sectoral Organizations increased from 570 in 1998 to 13,652 in 1999 and to 24,154 in 2004 (PSOE, 2000: 40). In 2004 the party set up a new campaign to recruit social activists.

Relationships with social organizations developed during the years in opposition (1996-2004) at three levels: one, celebration of workshops to analyze the demands put forward by social organizations and to publicize the bills presented by PSOE in the lower house; two, establishment of special relationships with some organizations with a particular importance for the party; and, three, the main innovation, the creation of party-social organizations platforms to articulate a common response to the conservative government policies (PSOE, 1997b). Rapprochement to civil society materialized after the electoral defeat suffered in 2000. The party conference resolution passed that year reflects the following way on the type of relationships with social organizations the new party leaders sought to define: “We want to be connected with social movement and this requires a sustained adaptation (…). It is essential that the PSOE increases its presence in social networks and that our presence in institutions is backed up by a close relationship with the citizenry” (PSOE, 2000: 34-38).

The relationships of the party leadership with social organizations intensified in the period 2002-2004. Social platforms rallying against the PP government (on issues like secondary education and university reform, labour reform, or the Iraq war) provided for various meeting points with civil society, which helped social organizations overcome distrust to PSOE: “We gradually got our own room in these fora. We have been in all meetings with humility. Listening to social organizations was our obligation given our past records. In some forum someone told us ‘we have been always here, you

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17 Óscar López, PSOE’s Coordinator of the Secretary of Organization, face-to-face interview, 26/11/2004.
left and now come back’. But we were very responsible; we were not demagogic at all. We were united in a goal: ousting Aznar from government19. Amongst these fora, we can find the Social Forum (created in 2002) and the platform Not to (the Iraq) War (created in 2003).

The Quality Plan (2001) and the Plan for the Modernization of Local Branches (2004) include the analysis of the associative density of the constituency so as to identify the social actors and listen to their demands. During the presentation of the executive report before the 2004 party conference the PSOE leader, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, urged public officers to construct stable alliances based on confidence and mutual comprehension as a structural organizational characteristic to render the party an active member of civil society (PSOE, 2004: 58-59).

Some other mechanisms to relate to social organizations have been recently established. Since 2001 the party celebrates programmatic conferences for the elaboration of the different sections of the party platform in which social organizations are invited. In 2004 the party established the Youth Parliamentary Office in which MPs and senators under 31 years are responsible for making more accessible the connection between youngsters and public officers. Last, Rodríguez Zapatero’s campaign team for the 2004 legislative elections also incorporated informal meetings with students, NGOs or professional sectors in order to show closeness to citizens.

Regarding the IU, the participation of social organizations in the design of party manifestos was an integral part of the organizational model the IU adopted. The IU defined itself as a “political and social movement” which wanted to avoid traditional party hierarchies. On the one hand, sympathisers and social organizations are invited to participate in local party assemblies at least twice per year. On the other hand, the party has a permanent structure in which social organizations can participate: Sectoral secretaries at the directory board were not created. Instead, the “collective elaboration areas” (áreas de elaboración colectiva) were conceived as an arena to discuss the inputs from social organizations, to establish permanent channels of communication, and to impulse social mobilization (IU Party constitution 1992, article 24). These areas do also organize programmatic workshops and advise the party in public office.

Nevertheless, the party recognizes the “golden age” of the areas has faded. In the 1980s participation in the areas by party members was large and there was a significant

19 Marivi Monteserín, ex PSOE coordinator of the Secretary of Social Movements, face-to-face interview, 30/11/2004.
presence of social organizations. However, in 1992 the party created sectoral secretaryships so as decision-making was quicker and more efficient. The areas strongly opposed the creation of the secretaryships as with this move they would be downgraded in decision-making processes and the collective programmatic elaboration with party members and social organizations would be distorted (IU, 1992; IU, 1995).

Decrease in participation has to do as well with the increasing factionalism the party was experiencing by the time as control over the areas was used against the dominant coalition. Consequently, there was a lack of coordination between the secretaryships and the areas. In every successive party conference since 1995 the malfunctioning of the areas and their inability to foster social participation has been stated in the annual report and a couple of plans have aimed at relaunching them (IU, 1995). No doubt that the recurrent internal crisis and disputes amongst factions has refrained participation from members and social organizations.

Several executive secretaryships were subsequently established to forge ties with social organizations: the Secretaryship of Social Movements, Sustainable Development, Ecology, International Solidarity, Human Rights, and Globalization and Youth.

IU has a long record of relationships with social organizations. In fact, though the party is formally a coalition of parties it defines itself as a “political and social movement” (IU, 1994: 7). The very same party was actually created after the success obtained by the “Civic Platform for Spain’s exit from NATO” (the referendum yield a very minimal victory for the remaining in NATO but seven million voters cast a no-vote). This was the germ that led the PCE to establish the first electoral coalition in 1986 under the banner of “United Left”.

IU participated in other social platforms along the 1990s such as the “Civic Platform for Social Rights” (1995-1998) articulated against the labour reform approved by the Socialist government and the “Platform for the 0.7” (1994) whose claim was to devote the 0.7 per cent of the GNP to international solidarity.

In this period the party also established close relationships with political ecologist groups and the Greens (Los Verdes) integrated in some regional party branches. In 1994 United Left launched the Coordinating Committee for a Green and Alternative Left were party members and non-affiliated social activists cohabited. It aimed at mirroring the (anti-NATO) social mobilizations of the 1980s the target being the 1994 European elections. Some party candidatures were even offered to social

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activists (Pastor, 2004: 35). These actions were part of the political strategy defended by the leadership at that time, namely the electoral overcoming of the PSOE – the so-called *Sorpasso* (IU, 1994: 25).

The high social mobilization experienced in Spain since 2000 eased IU’s reconnection to civil society. The party joined social platforms against the conservative government and launched common proposals (IU, 2004: 20). As well as the PSOE, the IU joined the Social Forum and the platform Not to War.

With regards to the PP, the party established in 1978 a national secretariaship for Sectoral Organization and Social Movements which was transformed into the secretariaship for Social and Sectoral Policy in 1986. It was aimed at channeling the relationships with social movements from each policy area. However, relationships were more frequently articulated through the parliamentary group at the national lower house as the party sectoral structure followed parliamentary committees.

In 1999 the party created the area of Participation and Sectoral Action, which included the Secretariaship of Citizenship Partipation and Social Movements. The inclusion of the word participation aimed at showing that the party was receptive to social organizations’ inputs and at visualizing that it granted prominence to civil society in the party structure (PP, 1999b: 4).

Towards the end of 1999, Forums 2000 were created to involve social actors in the elaboration of the party manifesto for the 2000 legislative elections and to give public projection to the party’s proposals in that phase. Forums 2000 are based on the celebration of meetings with professionals, social activists and party officers. These operate on the internet but periodic workshops are also held. The collaboration of social groups can materialized as well through the permanent National Commissions of Study. These thematic Commissions prepare documents which shall be use for the elaboration of the party platform or for the preparation of the bills presented by the party when being in government. In 2000 the party also set up the Parliamentary Office to foster the connection between MPs and voters and social organizations at the constituency level.

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23 Julio Sánchez, PP’s Secretary of Participation and Sectoral Action, face-to-face interview, 16/3/2005.
Finally, the three parties allow for the invitation of social representatives to their respective party conferences. Parties also send communications to social organizations to collect their views on it, particularly when the party manifesto is being prepared, though this practice is more frequent amongst left-wing parties.

**Party-interest group relationships**

In the previous section, through the description of the main strategies displayed by the three country-wide Spanish political parties in the period 1970s–2000s, the various links providing contact with interest group at the national level have been presented. These can simultaneously be classified into four distinct categories that organize party-interest group relationships: Overlapping organizational structures, inter-organizational links for contact, unorganized links for contact, and participation in socially organized platforms. Table 1 classifies these different links.

The first two types of links are established by political parties within their organization while the latter are arenas jointly created by parties and social actors or are made of personal overlaps in the governing bodies of both organizations. Overlapping organizational structures include the collective affiliation of an interest organization to the party (with or without access to the party’s decision-making bodies). Inter-organizational settings for contact might be permanent or temporary and more or less intense.

Overlapping organizational structures have only been established by left-wing parties but they have proven to be quite unpopular and few social organizations have signed up for this status both in the PSOE (Fundación Europa and Federación de Mujeres Progresistas) and in the IU (Espacio Alternativo and Colectivo Unitario de Trabajadores).

Conversely, inter-organizational links for contact have gradually expanded in the three parties and there is nowadays a broad variety of possibilities through which interest groups may have a say in the programmatic design of political parties, be it permanent committees, joint conferences, specific dialogues, etc. The two largest parties, the PP and the PSOE, have also set up parliamentary offices as a mechanism to receive civil society’s inputs. The limited and declining institutional representation obtained by the IU has prevented the creation of a similar setting, though, according to
the party, open assemblies and “collective elaboration areas” do perform a similar role regarding hearings on specific policy.

As Allern posits, the links constituting relationships can be seen as manifestations of the party’s constituency and represented interests (2007: 47). There is a significant difference on the type of social organizations left-wing and right-wing parties relate to. The PP puts emphasis on social organizations that represent “the more socially disadvantaged groups”27, which shows a particular connection between social organizations and social welfare. For instance, whereas left-wing parties have strong women’s offices which have the same status as other offices such as Organization or Campaigns, in the PP the Women’s Secretaryship falls under the control of the Social Action Secretaryship, along with the Elderly, the Disabled, etc. As to the PSOE and the IU, left-wing parties seek to establish preferential relationships with those social movements which are believed to have a higher potential for electoral mobilization and that connect with the urban electorate (such as the feminist, peace or environmental movements). Both parties have traditionally associated social mobilization with electoral mobilization (and electoral mobilization is strongly related to left-wing parties’ electoral performance, in particular in legislative elections), therefore they have tried to gain influence in the social arena.

Parties have modified their relationship with civil society over time. The PSOE and the PCE initially created their own social organizations and subsequently used the co-optation of social activists and the entryism of their members into social organizations as a means to (try to) grant their support as well as to cover the supply of public offices opened by democratization (see Table 1). These strategies were later used by the PP, which has not renounced to apply them yet (though collaboration is also present amongst party strategies).

Conversely, by the 1990s, left-wing parties replaced competitive and co-optive strategies by different collaboration mechanisms with social organizations. Competition and co-optation are seen today as strategies that distort the autonomy of social organizations and that result in negative mid-term effects for the relationship between civil society and the party28. After the weakening of the linkages with trade unions (PSOE-UGT and IU-CC.OO) due to deep confrontation along the 1980s and 1990s, left-wing parties focused on social organizations.

On the one hand, collaboration might be functional to electoral mobilization and, on the other hand, it facilitates the obtaining of the necessary inputs to elaborate the party manifesto. Furthermore, it reinforces the party’s credibility before the electorate regarding its commitment to certain social demands. It is also addressed at improving parties’ external legitimacy in a context of weak partisanship, negative evaluation of parties by citizens and increasing demands for the democratization and openness to society of parties, and for the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes.

Concluding remarks

In this paper we have mapped the different links providing contact with interest group at the national level of the three country-wide Spanish political parties along the period 1977-2004. The diachronic analysis has allowed us to show the evolution of the different mechanisms used to establish ties with social organizations as well as the main strategies implemented by political parties.

Formal types of affiliation have been abandoned and looser links have been set up as a means to overcome social organizations’ distrust to being instrumentalized by political parties. In the same vein, collaboration is seen today as the most fruitful strategy by the three parties, although the PP still makes use of the competitive and co-optative strategies; that is the party fosters party-created organizations and encourages party members’ entryism in social organizations. There is a high level of coincidence on the links provided by the three parties, irrespective of their leaning towards the left or towards the right, though the social organizations they establish relationships with do significantly differ.

Last, the main rationales behind collaboration with interest groups relate to elections and legitimacy. On the one hand, the party seeks for civil society’s inputs particularly when the party manifesto is being defined. On the other hand, collaboration looks at improving external legitimacy by showing that the party is receptive to social demands and committed to its fulfilment and that it makes room for citizen’s involvement in party activities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of link</th>
<th>Political parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overlapping organizational structures</strong></td>
<td>PSOE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National collective affiliation of an interest organization</td>
<td>Yes (+ representation in decision-making bodies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent joint committees</td>
<td>Yes – Sectoral Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary joint committees</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint conferences</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal invitation to the party congress</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal invitations to party meetings, seminars and conferences</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific dialogue seminars/hearings</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal meetings and other forms of contact with official representatives</td>
<td>Yes- Parliamentary Cabinet of Relationships with Society, and Youth Parliamentary Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inter-organizational links for contact</strong></td>
<td>PSOE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unorganized links for contact</td>
<td>Personal overlaps – UGT (up to the 1980s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in socially organized platforms</td>
<td>Yes–Social Forum, Not to War</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Party documents**

**PP**

**PSOE**

**PCE**

**IU**
- (1995). *Plan para el Relanzamiento de la Elaboración Programática*