

**“LESS IS MORE”? ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY IN SPAIN**  
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## **Introduction**

The old-fashioned ‘defensive’ research policy that sought to limit the range of economic topics amenable to sociological research to strictly non-market phenomena, such as collective bargaining or welfare benefits, still prevails in the Spanish sociological academy. Economic sociology in Spain is indeed almost completely subsumed under other academic rubrics, mainly Industrial Relationships and the Sociology of Work on one end of the research spectre<sup>1</sup>, and the New Political Economy on the other.<sup>2</sup>

One recent partial exception to this state of affairs is Fernandez-Anguita (1998) textbook revision of the New Economic Sociology English corpus published over the last twenty years. If, following the later corpus (or, say, the guidelines of the Economic Sociology Section of the American Sociological Association), were one to adopt a strict criteria for assessing the consistence of some research piece with the spirit of the New Economic Sociology, there would be very few works eligible. Well, that’s what I have done here. In order to provide a substantive report on the state of economic sociology in Spain I have chosen to deviate from the established format of a comprehensive review. Instead of speedily enumerate a (non-existing anyway) large research body of literature, I will give an slightly more informative account of a small, strategically selected sample of (what are for me) five exemplary economic sociology pieces. These have been selected by way of their combining both elaborate theoretical and empirical work on some key topic of the New Economic Sociology list, such as entrepreneurial culture, market networks or economic policy-making. To be sure I will also refer to other relevant works all along my presentation of the five pieces.

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most internationally prominent research work in these areas is the one by Juan-José Castillo on the division of labour among firms (1990) and new trends in the sociology of labour (1999), together with Carlos Prieto publications on labour force control strategies and employment policy (Prieto, 1993 & 2000; Prieto y Homs, 1995). Research on business organisation is best represented by the comparative studies of J.A. Garmendia (1998) on ‘firm cultures’.

<sup>2</sup> The most finished exemplar of this strand of research is Boix (1997), comparative research on the different impact of political-ideological variables in the making of macroeconomic policy in Great Britain and Spain during the 80s. The studies of Perez-Diaz (1993) and Maravall (1995) on democratic transitions and economic development are also well-known to the internationally oriented sociological academy. As are those of Espina (1998 & 1999) on competition policy and bankruptcy law reform. Mauro Guillén’s pioneering study of the Spanish economic profession (Guillén, 1989) can also be included in this chapter.

## 1. The catholic spirit of contemporary Spanish capitalism

Published in 1975, the same year dictatorship Francisco Franco died, Carlos Moya's book *Economic power in Spain (1939-1970)* provided a canonical model for later research work on economic sociology.<sup>3</sup> This ambitious sociological project to retrieve the National Catholic sources of traditionalist and modernist attitudes among entrepreneurial elites in Franco's Spain, sprang up from a seemingly unrelated initial research problem. In the introduction of the book Moya states that his original aim was to provide a broad cultural explanatory argument for a somehow curious statement made in a 1969 interview by would-be Governor of the Bank of Spain L. Angel Rojo, then serving as director in chief for the research department of the Bank. "Though many people would find it irritant, the fact is that this country has industrialised, basically, between 1939 and 1959. What is used to be called the industrial take off has occurred in Spain after the Civil War and not before. This development process has not have an autonomous character, but has been directed from above" (quoted in Moya, 1975: 9).

To try account sociologically for the fact of authoritarian politics leading to economic modernisation, Moya devises a weberian ideal-types theoretical model of National economic elites. He distinguish, on the one hand, a traditionalist "financial aristocracy". From its central headquarters located at the Counsel of the Bank of Spain, this old (mostly banking) capital formed during the nineteenth century helped finance the victorious war campaign of Franco's army. Later on, at the steering-wheel of the flagship of autarchic imports substitutions industrial policy, the Instituto Nacional de Industria (INI) [National Industrial Institute] created in 1941, this financial aristocracy was the real strategist behind the industrial take off referred to by Rojo.

Going beyond this initial problem, Moya pass on to characterise a new type of economic elite that raised to prominence during the second half of the authoritarian regime of General Franco. This ascent social fraction of 'technopols' and modern business managers is theoretically defined as an ideal-type of rational bureaucracy and empirically identified with the craftsmen of the successful Plan of Economic Stabilisation of 1959. Strategically located at the brand new, French-inspired Secretaría General del Plan [Central Planning Bureau], the new administrative "Corporate Catholic" elite of public clerks commanded over the second economic development wave that ended with the oil crisis of the 70s.

The distinctive weberian flavour of the model comes out in the identification of the peculiar National-Catholic ideology from where this modernist fraction of the economic elite extracted a set of practical symbolic tools that helped legitimise the otherwise authoritarian enforcement of the economic reforms. "For the development of a bureaucratic-entrepreneurial ethics in Catholic Spanish society, the spirituality of *Camino* [*Path*] -the principal work of the founder of Opus Dei, Monsignor José María Escrivá de Balaguer- could have accomplished the same impeller function that Max Weber exposed for Calvinist ethics in the development of the 'spirit of capitalism'" (ibid, 176). The half poetic, half disciplinary discourse spread by the ascent economic elite, the new "Corporate Catholic" credo of Opus Dei, a religious movement created in 1928 by Escrivá de Balaguer, was presented as "a symbolic synthesis to reconcile in theory and practice the traditionalist values that attained victory in 1939 with the

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<sup>3</sup> Several theoretical and empirical works have followed the path of Moya's pioneer study. On entrepreneurship culture see Romero (1990) study of women's business culture in Spain. The thesis of the religious basis of capitalism ideology has been developed by Bilbao (1997) works on classical economic thinking and Christian theological discourse. See also the special 1996 issue of *Política y Sociedad* on Sociology and Economics.

demands of neo-capitalism modernisation”. Moreover “the (catholic) ecclesiastic faith of Opus Dei, and the peculiar “disorganised organisation” (Escrivá de Balaguer) of the acts of compassion and asceticism of its members, provided this secular religious movement a singularly effective means to rationalise individual behaviour in bureaucratic-corporate terms... This form of religiosity thus had a highly functional impact on the ‘motivational structure’ of the new corporate executive class, helping to adjusting their professional demands to the required organisational tasks.” (ibid., 179-80).

## 2. Bars as employment agencies

Being social networks analysis the very acme of the new sociological approach to status-based competition in economic market, Spanish economic sociology should also be represented in this review by its own exemplar of social networks research. Largely inspired for its methodological design by Mark Granovetter’s 1974 classic *Getting a Job*, Felix Requena (1991a & 1991b) administered a survey questionnaire about personal contacts, job searching and job finding procedures to a sample of 609 persons in the city of Malaga, with the aim of mapping the distinctive social structure of the local labour markets.<sup>4</sup>

The bulk of relational data obtained by the survey procedure were highly consistent with the main structural features of labour markets documented by Granovetter in his study. A first well-know trait of the social structure of job markets that was corroborated by the Malaga study was the characteristic density/efficiency parameters of insiders/outside personal networks. While young newcomers massively reported “family contacts” as the distinctive and almost exclusive type of relational resource used to enter the market, the use of “friends and colleagues”, a more diversified and efficient variety of social capital that depends on market experience was the very privilege of adult insiders. Men also presented denser social networks than women.

A second structural feature of labour markets that was also validated by Requena for the Spanish case was the precise relation between the network machinery of personal contacts and *type* of employment. The study showed that the effectiveness of informal allocation channels decreases in direct proportion with the increase of the level of education/qualification required for the post. Informal channels are most effective to find jobs that require a low level of education/qualification. And while institutional channels for job allocation (i.e. public employment agencies) conserved some relevance (30%) in the case of wage employment, self-employment was mostly attained via informal channels (only 5.6% of interviewees used institutional information to launch a business).

Among the more informative findings of the study was the estimation of the average number of contact ‘steps’ needed to ‘bridge’ social distance in the local labour markets. The highest number of personal contacts used by respondents to get a job

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<sup>4</sup> In this case the selection wasn’t problematic at all: this is in fact the only one explicit social networks application to the study of empirical market structures! Other interesting essays with social network analysis are Pizarro (1990) structural model of command and communication lines in public administrative hierarchies; and Molina (1995) on communication networks and the development of organisation culture. On the theoretical side, Pizarro (2000) has developed an original network model of economic exploitation.

through informal channels was three, with a great majority of cases (86.9%) needing only to activate one direct personal relationship (with a relative, friend or neighbour) to access a job. A more mediated two-step procedure (the friend of a friend) was needed in a 11% of the cases. And only 2.2% reported having to pass through a longer three-step contact channel (the friend of a friend of a friend), thus requiring the intervention of a relatively “distant”, i.e. impersonal intermediary.

But the most original insight of the Malaga study was the one about the role contextual factors, such as characteristic spatial settings, in the weaving of social relationships with high labour market value. “It is during leisure time where informal networks of social contacts tend to develop. Those interviewees that pass more time going to bars, cafeterias, etc. show networks that are denser and are better distributed among the different levels of relationships that the networks of those who do not show in this kind of places with the same frequency.” (Requena, 1991a: 137). This finding may perhaps lend some intellectual credit to our local common sense understanding that it is not marketplaces or board meeting rooms but bars and restaurants the very public places where deals are done. This should come as no surprise to anybody that has ever take a walk through some city district in Spain! After all, as it said in a recent song by popular rock singer Joaquín Sabina “Only in Antón Martín [a neighbourhood in downtown Madrid] there are more bars than in the whole country of Norway.”

#### **4. Mining and Memory: A Social Systems Approach to Regional Economic Policy**

Undertaking empirical research under the protective umbrella of some avant-garde (preferably French or German) ‘great social theorist’ (Foucault, Bourdieu, Luhmann, and more recently Latour) has been a most typical exercise for the self-identified Spanish economic sociologist during the past decade.<sup>5</sup> Among the most accomplished works in this genre is the one by Jose M. García-Blanco on endogenous development policies as dissipative, self-referential systemic structures<sup>6</sup>.

Building on Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic systems, this author has devised a concept of *social memory* modelled, after Prigogine, as a ‘dissipative structure’ to give an alternative, non-Panglossian account of the failure of both ‘old fashioned’ Keynesian demand policies and the new ‘groovy’ varieties of supply-side policies aimed at promoting endogenous regional economic development. “The formation and use of a memory, though an exigency of every self-referential system, is not an special capacity but a mere sub-product of the operations that reproduce the system.” (García-Blanco, 1998: 103). In a system modelled as an organisationally closed, self-reproducing machinery for absorbing exogenous fluctuation into higher orders of complexity, the primordial function of memory is not so much that of remembering as that of forgetting

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<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic violence has been applied by Martín-Criado & Izquierdo (1993) to human resource policies and managerial control strategies. The post-foucaultian thesis of advanced-liberal governmentality has been explored for the case of “participation” policies against poverty in México (Bascones, 2000) and OECD intellectual capital programs (Luque, forthcoming). Another variety of Parisian sociological avant-garde -Latour & Callon actor-network theory- also inspires the pioneer work of Muniesa (2000a & 2000b) on the heterogeneous (computer, economic, legal, political) engineering of double auction stock market automata.

<sup>6</sup> While retaining Luhmann and Baecker basic model of self-referential market economies, García-Blanco (1991) also uses Ulrich Beck’s theme of the ‘Risk society’ to account for emergent phenomena of flex-ploitation in Spanish labour markets.

“because only oblivion impedes the self-blockade of the system caused by the traces that its history leaves in it, allowing to dispose of enough capacity for attention and, in the case of social systems, communication.” (ibid, 103-104).

The distinctive explanatory power of this theoretical model is tested for one prototypical case of regional industrial decline, that of Asturias, in the north of Spain. The present state of the economic structure and capacity of this region which, under a national strategy of energetic independence and military nostalgia, specialised in the mining and iron & steel industries during the nineteenth century, is heavily marked by a past of protectionism and corporativism. Sustained by a highly specialised and combative labour force with strong statutory identity, the powerful trade unions of the region have conserved bargaining power and political initiative through successive reform programs and re-industrialisation plans. Seen from an historical point of view the author finds “understandable” that members of a social formation like this “traditionally habituated to have its economic problems solved by way of political protection” tend to consider that “the maintenance of its productive activities and of a certain income level” calls for the preservation of economic protectionism. Being finally inclined to preserve preservation through the use “adequate or inadequate” of large social capital resources for collective action and political pressure (ibid., 107)

Faced with the failure of previous Keynesian-type programs of fiscal and financial incentives to attract private investment capital, State and Regional governments have recently embraced a new set of regional economic policy receipts. The final part of the article examines, from a social-systems conception of the global market economy, the paradoxes of this new economic policy regime, the very mantra of endogenous development, sustained as much by orthodox supply-side macroeconomics as by heterodox institutionalist-evolutionary thinking. If the previous theoretical modelling of the paradoxical, dissipative operations of the memory capacity of an autopoietic social system is accepted as correct, the stated political aim of self-sustained economic activity generation inside a region is only attainable if the target economic system “is capable of emerge dissipative structures”. In the particular case of an old industrial area like Asturias this means that “the traditional stability of its highly specialised economic structures must be substituted by a capacity to use a wide range of exogenous fluctuations to generate functional orders of growing complexity.” (ibid, 112).

From this systemic interpretation of the concept of endogenous regional development follow some highly problematic recommendations for the practical design of regional development policies. The author indeed concludes that this can only be a paradoxical undertaking: “for a decline industrial region, born, bred and grew under the mantle of public initiative and protection, future endogenous development policy must be inspired by the idea that *not having* a general and detailed development plan must be the condition for beginning a plan for development.” Indeed an effective strategy for regional economic renovation “should be devised in a decentralised and autonomous way” (ibid, 114-115)

## **5. The gendered economic sociology of production time**

What radical economists are desperately in need to try figure out really alternative economic policy options, is a type of quantitative data that is out of reach for conventional applied macroeconomics and national income accounting. To create more

refined demand policy instruments we need reproducible data about what occurs *outside* the “economy”, i.e. detailed information on the nature and context of everyday life-world activities. Because social research about “time allocation” patterns can offer robust clues as to the real market value of non-market productive activities, it is an invaluable tool for those discontent applied economists that seek to expand the calculus of GNP to include the value of non-remunerated productive activity. Using the kind of rich, original data sets obtained by the massive administration of time-budget survey questionnaires, M<sup>a</sup> Angeles Durán 1991 influential article “Time and the Spanish Economy” presented a proposal for designing just this type of new economic policy tools.<sup>7</sup> The article presents a panoramic review and a theoretical justification of new social research methods, such as time-budget social surveys, with the aim of orienting discontent applied macroeconomist on how to figure out a reliable proxy estimate for the different ‘hidden factors of production’ contribution to gross national product. The most important of which, household work, is still for the most part socially segregated and economically devaluated as the (in)visible, (un)productive territory of women’s daily activity.

Durán accompanies her theoretic-methodological picture with some striking, preliminary figures of the size of the non-monetary sector of the Spanish national economy, estimated from available time-budget social statistics. According to her data, during the decade of 1980 Spanish consumers devoted an average of 0.63 daily hours, during labour days, to the consumption of market goods. This time investment is motivated mainly by the purchase of food and cleaning goods for everyday use, and equals 23.6% of the gross labour time invested in the *production* of those same market goods that are consumed. “It can be interpreted that the whole national production is sold only at a 76.4% of its total productive cost: the rest of the cost is externalised to others outside the monetized sector.” (Durán, 1991a: 36).

A closer look at a particular sub-sector of the informal economy, the non-remunerated activity that supports the hidden costs of the institutional health sector, is finally offered as a test-case for the hypothesis of the radically gendered, radically unfair economic contents of non-monetary production (Durán, 1991b). The data for the health system show that though institutional activities contribute to health and care production with expert diagnostic and treatment, the enormous labour demand generated by illness and incapacity is satisfied mostly outside the institutional health system, under the form of voluntary, non-remunerated work. Disaggregated figures of gendered economic inequality for this case are even more eye-catching: in a 72% of cases of illness and 79% of cases of incapacity they are housewives the ones who have to satisfy the institutionally non-satisfied labour demand (Durán, 1991a: 44-45).

One of the most vigorous research programs of this mostly virgin, theoretically polycentric territory of economic sociology in Spain has since developed along this methodological lines, also building on authorised sociological models of the “informal economy” by R. Pahl, A. Bagnasco and J. Gershuny. Recent empirical studies about the real size of women’s large but officially neglected contribution to aggregate sector and national economic income have continue “surfacing” interesting economic data.<sup>8</sup> In a

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<sup>7</sup> Work by Sanchís (1988) was also pioneer in describing the specific socio-cultural and economic structural mechanics that determine the cyclical dynamics of concealing-surfacing real economic transaction to the (fiscal) accounting eye of the State.

<sup>8</sup> García-Sainz et. al. (1995) estimate that more than 60% of total women population in the Autonomous Region of Madrid performs a non-market economic activity which main component, household work, is stimulated to have an average cost of 41 weekly labour hours. For an overview of the most relevant theoretical and empirical insights of this research program see the introduction of M<sup>a</sup> Angeles Durán to

later moment, the research program on time allocation social patterns and the gendered character of the non-monetary sector of Spanish economy became hybridised with theoretical developments coming from the field of gender studies. Substantive conceptual research on the intersection between economic sociology and gender studies have recently been published (e.g. García-Sainz, 1998) that builds on neo-Aristotelian categories such as H. Arendt's concept of 'labor' to cut across the conventional sociological divide between the economic system and the economic life-world.

## **6. Population statistics and fiscal paranoia: Accounting for a naturally occurring political economy 'breaching experiment'**

Mostly developed outside academia during the 60s and 70s, qualitative sociological research on lifestyles and consumption practices is my final exemplar of a major research program in Spanish economic sociology. The most outstanding -though somehow oblique- contribution to this program<sup>9</sup> -and, in my view, perhaps the most original research work produced by Spanish economic sociology during the past decade- was authored by Angel De Lucas, professor of sociology of consumption at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Published in 1992 under the long title *Social Attitudes and Representations of the People of the Madrid Autonomous Region in relation to the Population and Housing Census of 1991*, the work of De Lucas can be understood as a kind of jazzistic research variation upon a classic economic sociology theoretical theme (James O'Connor's fiscal crisis of the State thesis). The jazzy variations on O'Connor's theme are almost 'casually' performed through an empirical study of a sort of ethnomethodological "naturally occurring breaching experiment" with the taken-for-granted assumptions supporting the routine operations of a national economy's statistical information system.

If the uncanny design of Florida voting ballots recently exposed US. electoral machinery to radical public scrutiny, in 1991 Spain it was the new design of the population and housing census standardised questionnaire the 'little thing' that suddenly and surprisingly exposed the whole State tributary machine to a comparable public test. The unexpected phenomenon of a non-statistically negligible number of interviewees that refused to fill a Census questionnaire previously seen as wholly innocuous, was studied by De Lucas using as research material transcriptions of tape-recorded round-table conversations among common people. Seven meetings with groups of eight persons were arranged, each group construed as an 'structural sample' of the members of a distinct sociological fraction of the Spanish population (manual workers, new middle urban classes, rural petit bourgeoisie, etc.)

The sociological discourse analysis of De Lucas eventually gave an apparently trivial answer to the Census questionnaire reject mystery: because it was so *visibly amenable* for computer processing, the new design of the Census questionnaire very easily came to be integrated in an already existing but previously inconsequential "paranoid picture of the [Spanish] State" (De Lucas, 1992: 116).

The formerly unexplained and unexplainable massive negative to answer

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the 1997 special issue of *Política y Sociedad* on Non-Monetary Economics.

<sup>9</sup> See Alonso & Conde (1994) and the special issue of 1994 of *Política y Sociedad* devoted to the sociology of consumption.

formerly innocent census questions, emerged in the course of the groups' discussions as plausibly motivated by (an abstract) fear to database cross-examination of the Census information by some other public institution. To wit: the Ministry of Finance. A second emergent group conversation topic took the form of direct complaints against the legitimacy of the public function entrusted to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) [the Spanish National Institute of Statistics]. Popular references to modern information technologies also reinforced the dominant intimidating vision of state bureaucracy that surfaced in the group discourses. Most interestingly, those very individuals (mostly pertaining to the urban professionals and middle-range public employees categories) that showed a better understanding of both the administrative procedures of State bureaucracy and the technical possibilities of the new information technologies, expressed the strongest distrust against the new census questionnaire.

These persons often “expressed their conviction that the census information will be *computationally* analysed and combined with other official records and be so disposable for every kind of administrative verification of individual cases, especially for tax confirmation.” (ibid, 116). De Lucas characterises this picture as *paranoid*: a vision that (mis)construes the heterogeneous set of government agencies as an unitary organism “which ‘Hacienda’ [‘the Treasury’, a popular shorthand for the National Income Revenue Service] at its centre”. A political monster that takes advantage of all data sets contained in its records, combining all kinds of administrative information recorded for every individual taxpayer into a ‘risk-profile’ amenable for automatic surveillance.

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