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Converging Divergences?

An International Comparison of the Impact of Globalization on Industrial Relations and Employment Careers



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abstract: Profound social and economic transformations have taken place over the last two decades in modern societies. These changes are often referred to as globalization. The aim of this article is to examine whether processes of globalization have produced increasing convergence of employment-related aspects of national-level welfare regimes, industrial relation systems and mid-career employment paths among a set of industrialized nations. A theory of convergence is developed to explain the coercive-isomorphic and mimetic-imitation effects of globalization, followed by potential reasons for growing divergence. The study concludes that globalization has produced 'converging divergences' and not resulted in a simple convergence based on neoliberal and market employment-related policies that leads to a rise of patchwork careers for all employees. Rather, it has served to intensify existent differences between industrial relations in the welfare regime clusters of countries and accentuated within-country occupational class, educational and gender inequalities.

keywords: coercive isomorphism ♦ convergence of institutions ♦ globalization ♦ isomorphic mimetic imitation ♦ job mobility ♦ path dependence ♦ welfare state regimes

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Introduction

Profound social and economic transformations have taken place in the last two decades in modern societies. These changes are often referred to as globalization, which involves (1) the declining importance of national borders for all kinds of economic transactions; (2) rising worldwide interconnectedness through the information and communication technology revolution; (3) tougher tax competition between countries accompanied by the deregulation, privatization and liberalization of domestic industries and markets; and (4) the rising importance of and exposure to a world market with unpredictable disruptions (see Mills and Blossfeld, 2005). A central argument is that globalization unleashes a spate of market-led, neoliberal processes that will result in an inevitable convergence by generating a 'race to the bottom' (Teepie, 1995). The promises of globalization, such as lower prices, more choice, greater freedom, higher living standards and prosperity (Edwards, 1998) appear to be accompanied by painful adjustment consequences, in particular in the more advanced industrial societies. Salary cuts, lost jobs, layoffs, bankruptcies and failing companies have resulted in the perception that globalization is eroding the welfare state, decreasing job security and increasing job mobility and job hopping, signalling a break with the internal labour markets of the past.

Has globalization unleashed competitive forces across all countries to the extent that they have converged? If this is the case, have these neoliberal measures filtered down to impact individual employment careers? Some have argued that the forces of the world market breed a widespread convergence of employment flexibility, leading to the rise of the 'patchwork career' that produces unstable, fragmented and contingent employment careers. As Castells (1996: 268) has posited: 'the traditional form of work, based on full-time employment, clear-cut occupational assignments, and a career pattern over the lifecycle is being slowly but surely eroded away.' Or as Beck (2000: 2) argues, 'The "job for life" has disappeared.' Others contend that stable and secure employment, such as the standard lifelong employment contract of the 'job for life', has altered slowly and is only gradually being replaced by unstable patchwork or portfolio employment careers (DiPrete and Nonnemaker, 1997; Heery and Salmon, 2000). However, there is growing evidence that globalization may not necessarily entail convergence. In fact, societies may have the capacity to maintain distinct institutions in the face of globalization by filtering directives and interpreting and tailoring them to their own needs (McBride and Williams, 2001). Different social groups within particular societies may also be more shielded from globalization forces, which in turn abate the impact on their individual labour market careers.

The aim of this study is to examine whether globalization has produced increasing convergence of employment-related aspects of national-level welfare regimes, industrial relation systems and mid-career employment paths among a set of industrialized nations. We first propose a theory of the mechanisms of convergence, divergence via path dependence and convergent divergence. A framework that further specifies how globalization can be linked to either the convergence or divergence of employment-related institutions and labour market careers follows this. Longitudinal macro-level indicators are then used to examine the evolution and convergence of welfare regimes and industrial relations over the last decades. Via a summary of results of individual-level employment career analyses (see Blossfeld and Hofmeister, 2006; Blossfeld et al., 2006a), this study then empirically examines whether globalization has produced increased convergence or divergence of unstable labour market careers among selected industrialized nations. We then conclude with a critical reflection and discussion.

Convergence or Divergence?

The relation between globalization and convergence has been examined in various ways within the social sciences. Political scientists often show how globalization produces the convergence of political institutions, systems or political economies (Radice, 2000). A prominent economic approach has been to chart the convergence of markets and real wage dispersion (e.g. Alderson and Nielson, 2002). Other sociologists have engaged in studies of the convergence of the welfare state (Montanari, 2001; Montanari et al., 2007; Navarro et al., 2004), social policy (e.g. Taylor-Goodby, 2003), with several exploring industrial relations (McBride and Williams, 2001; Marginson and Sisson, 2002). An overarching hypothesis that emerges from the globalization literature is that there will be more policy and nation-state convergence of the neoliberal, market-led variety. Three central issues are lacking in existing literature. First, there is no satisfying theoretical explanation of the underlying mechanisms or 'why' globalization generates convergence. Second, there is a lack of attention to the significance of path dependence, distinct national values and norms, different political histories and institutions and the legacy of past policies in different nations. Third, existing literature is overwhelmingly focused on convergence at the institutional level only, thereby neglecting an examination of the impact that changing institutions may have on the individual.

For the purpose of this study, convergence is defined as the growing similarity of key patterns in employment-related aspects of welfare regimes,

industrial relation systems and employment career paths of individuals in selected industrialized societies. In other words, we are concerned with whether employment-related institutions within industrialized countries have adopted similar neoliberal deregulated or regional (e.g. European) policies; and, as a result of converging policies, whether employment careers have become increasingly destabilized, uncertain and unstable for all individuals. Here we develop three central hypotheses and mechanisms, which we term: coercive convergence, mimetic convergence and path-dependent converging divergences. We conclude by exploring whether convergence will alter and even intensify inequalities within employment careers.

Coercive Convergence

Building on the institutional theory of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), a first hypothesis is that globalization generates coercive institutional isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism – or convergence – occurs when there is resource dependence, a primary characteristic of the increased interdependence of nations and organizations in the era of globalization. It stems from political influence and problems of and need for legitimacy. Globalization is often equated with a growth in external supranational bodies (e.g. European Central Bank, IMF, ILO) that operate as pressure groups on national governments and policy-makers (Mills and Blossfeld, 2005). These in turn promote coercive convergence by effectively ‘forcing’ nations to follow similar directives. Additional forces of globalization, such as the internationalization of markets and the legal pressures of entry into trade pacts, economic monetary unions and regional agreements, also have the potential to result in the renegeing of national sovereignty, resource dependence and legitimacy needs, leading to a great unity of nations.

An opposing argument is that the policy pressures of globalization are not as coercive and concrete as they seem and are based on voluntarism, particularly for highly industrialized nations. In fact, many nations often have the prerogative to implement or even disregard these policies. As Streeck (1995: 45) argues: ‘What really distinguishes the emerging European social policy regime from traditional national ones is its low capacity to impose binding obligations on market participants, and the high degree to which it depends on various kinds of voluntarism.’ Broader globalization arguments therefore mistakenly merge the impact that supranational institutions and policies have on developing versus developed countries. The IMF, for example, forces less industrialized nations to meet the financial convergence requirements. The coercive pressure of the IMF on highly industrialized countries is mitigated by the fact that these countries often already hold a majority of the convergence criteria.

Mimetic Convergence

The rapidly accelerating uncertainty that globalization generates may produce a second type of convergence, which we term mimetic convergence. Instead of being coerced, there may also be the voluntary copying of policies or approaches that appear to be successful, which DiMaggio and Powell (1983) coined as isomorphic mimetic imitation. The spread of ICTs and ability for governments, policy-makers, organizations and individuals to monitor each other's behaviour encourages copying and convergence. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), in the face of uncertainty and ambiguity actors attempt to gain a competitive edge by engaging in an imitation of what they perceive to be legitimate and successful policies or models. The highly flexible and neoliberal models in the US or post-Thatcher UK appear to operate as 'flourishing' models to reduce welfare state expenditures, unemployment levels and gain more flexibility and openness. A diffusion of 'best practices' or 'global benchmarking' therefore leads to increased homogenization. If we are to believe this hypothesis, the high-productivity 'best practices' of the neoliberal economies would mean that we should witness an increase in changes in industrial relation practices related to a deregulation of employment protection legislation to augment flexibility, privatization of the public sector or reducing benefits or the quality of jobs. A final point is that imitation may not necessarily result in convergence. When 'best practices' are imitated, they undergo an active process of translation into a particular context, which may result in (un)intended diversity or innovation.

Path-Dependence and Converging Divergences?

The simple polar dichotomy of convergence and divergence may also be problematic. Here the concept of 'converging divergences' of Katz and Darbshire (2000) is useful as it acknowledges some convergence within institutions, organizations and between domestic systems, but maintains that globalization may be simultaneously promoting tandem divergence. We develop a 'converging divergences' hypothesis, which recognizes the importance of path-dependent institutional structures, but also acknowledges regionalism and clustering of welfare regimes. When institutional settings and social structures are path dependent, we assume that they have different starting points and packages of contributions. This means the importance of the state, market and family varies (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Mayer, 2004a, 2004b). We therefore expect that path-dependent histories, cultures and institutions operate as a strong 'filter' or intervening variable between globalization and responses at the micro level of the firm or individual worker (Hurrell and Woods, 1995).

If the world is indeed becoming closer through globalization (Mittelman, 2000), physical and geographical distance should also be of

less importance in predicting the similarity between nations. A converging divergence prediction is that economies, historical and cultural systems or subgroups of countries remain more integrated with one another than with the broader global system or supra-entities of Europe, North America or Asia. The reason is that these subgroups often have similar industrial relations and welfare regime structures and traditions, which implicitly allow them to coordinate with each other. The economic integration of the Nordic countries, or loosely what has been characterized as the 'Deutschmark zone' of Austria, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, for example, is based on a history of trade union and bargaining initiatives (Marginson and Sissen, 2002).

Intensifying Inequalities

An implicit assumption is that convergence or changes in institutions impact the employment careers of individuals. The uncertainty produced by globalization and the move to less state protection would generate the shifting of risk from governments or firms to individuals, often referred to as the individualization of risk, stemming from Beck's (1992) risk society thesis (for an overview, see Mills, 2007). Contrary to Beck (1992) and others, our expectation is that there will not be a convergence of 'new inequalities', where all individuals experience the forces of globalization in an equal manner. Rather, we expect that risk will continue to be transferred towards the more disadvantaged and less powerful groups within the labour force meaning that risk will remain stratified by gender, educational and occupational level (Breen, 1997; Goldthorpe, 2002; Mayer and Hillmert, 2003). Workers in a 'service relationship' or higher occupational levels, for example, can more easily avoid precarious employment (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992). The effects of globalization are also highly 'gendered' (Blossfeld and Hofmeister, 2006; Blossfeld et al., 2006a; Standing, 1997). Men's labour market careers, for instance, differ greatly from women's, who have more family-related career interruptions. Normative expectations also mean that men often hold a more prominent role in the workforce, have stronger obligations as a breadwinner and more freedom to develop an identification as both family member and worker (Bielby and Bielby, 1989). This differs from the balancing of work and family identities and subsequent tradeoffs that are central when we examine women (Blossfeld and Drobnić, 2001).

Globalization and its Impact on Industrial Relations and Employment

To understand how globalization generates different types of convergence, it is essential to first define this inherently complex concept.

Globalization represents a set of economic, political and cultural processes that operate simultaneously (see Guillén, 2001; Held et al., 1999; Raab et al., this issue, pp. 596–631). Globalization is often viewed as the intensification of worldwide social relations, where the local meets the global (Giddens, 2000) or as a compression and intensification of a consciousness of the world around us (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2006; Robertson, 1992) or compression of time, space, communication and the horizon of the world market (Jameson and Miyoshi, 1998). The obstacle to these broader definitions is apparent when we attempt to examine the consequences of globalization for the convergence of institutions and employment careers (see also Raab et al., this issue, pp. 596–631).

Our definition follows the specification outlined by Mills and Blossfeld (2005) as four interrelated structural shifts, which are linked with domestic institutions (welfare regimes, employment, training and transnational production systems) and in turn impact the individual life course (see Figure 1). This definition is rooted in the globalization literature and captures the contemporary period of globalization that has occurred since the late 1980s.¹

Internationalization of Markets and Decline of National Borders

A first feature of globalization is the internationalization of markets and subsequent decline of national borders. The engine behind this phenomenon is changes in laws, institutions or practices that make various transactions (in terms of commodities, labour, services and capital) easier or less expensive across national borders. It refers to the growth of international regulatory institutions and political agreements that facilitate capital flows, which also have generally liberalized financial markets (Fligstein, 1998, 2002). The result is the internationalization of trade and the liberalization of financial transactions. This includes key areas such as the deregulation of interest rates, privatization of government-owned banks and financial institutions, as well as the removal of credit controls (see Raab et al., this issue, pp. 596–631).

This facet of globalization may generate coercive convergence due to the pressure of informal rules and formal supranational organizations that guide and subordinate workers, unions, companies and nation-states. Privatization strategies, for instance, were often requirements of 'structural readjustment loans' from organizations such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which implicitly promotes convergence. The International Labour Organization (ILO), with its tripartite structure of governments, employer organizations and unions also established general 'convergent' labour conventions and agreements, and attempted to defend and promote a set of international core labour standards (ILO, 1999).

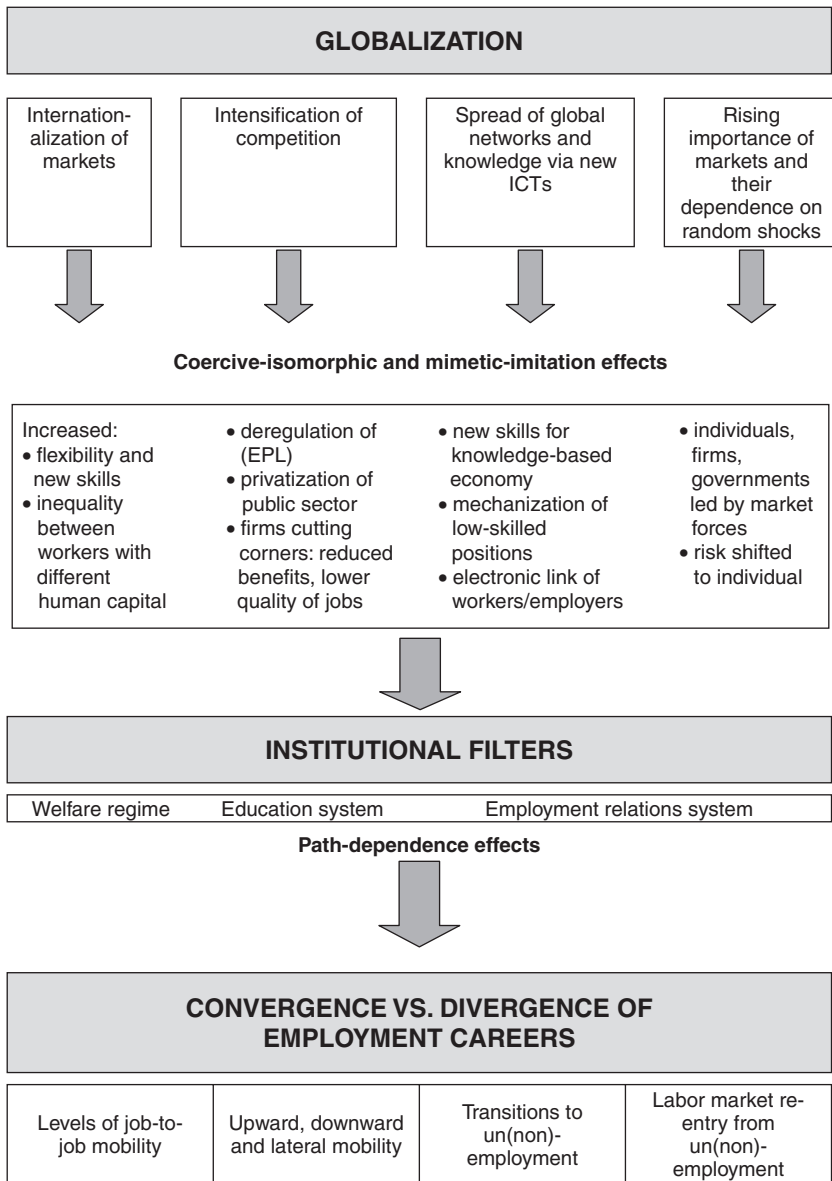


Figure 1 *The Converging Divergence Effects of Globalization and Institutions on Employment Careers in Different Countries*

Source: Modified from Mills and Blossfeld (2005); Mills et al. (2006c).

During the past decades, most countries have also recognized that economic openness is good for their productivity growth (Edwards, 1998) and that the erection of barriers to prevent the spread of new knowledge and advanced technology would have severe adverse consequences. Not being a 'global player' in the globalization process severely limits economic growth (see Raab et al., this issue, pp. 596–631). Figure 2 demonstrates these levels of increased economic openness since the early 1960s by showing the percentage of exports and imports as a percentage of the GDP. We see a general increase over all countries, with small open economies such as Ireland and the Netherlands experiencing sharp increases over time.

While trade liberalization has brought today's proportion of merchandise trade to gross domestic product (GDP) to levels quite similar to those at the start of that 20th century (Crafts, 2000), more dramatic changes have occurred in the financial sphere (Greenspan, 1997). In particular, restrictions on international capital flows have diminished substantially (Fligstein, 2002). New forms of financial trading affects the policies of countries, since in a world of increasing capital mobility there is a (real or perceived) premium on governments maintaining sound macroeconomic policies with lower taxes and fewer regulations.

Internationalization also means the integration into the world economy of previously isolated nations that were closed to global forces for reasons such as Fascist (Franco in Spain) or Communist (East Germany, Estonia, Hungary, Czech Republic) rule. For these countries, the integration into the world economy has resulted in rapid technological catch-up processes and periods of painful social and economic adjustments. For the rest of the highly industrialized countries in the world market, in particular for the countries in Western Europe, the integration for former socialist countries from the east means increasing international competition from low-income countries where labour costs and labour rights are less developed (Standing, 1997).

The internationalization of markets and decline of national borders may therefore impact workers via several processes. Countries may feel coerced to converge to lower standards to become competitive with low-income countries, thereby resulting in less protection and lower working conditions and pay for employees. We also anticipate that inequality between groups of workers will persist due to the widening gap between the wages of higher- and lower-educated workers in the industries that are more exposed to trade and international competition.

Intensification of Competition

Globalization can also be characterized by the intensification of competition, or the notion that capital and labour is increasingly mobile. The

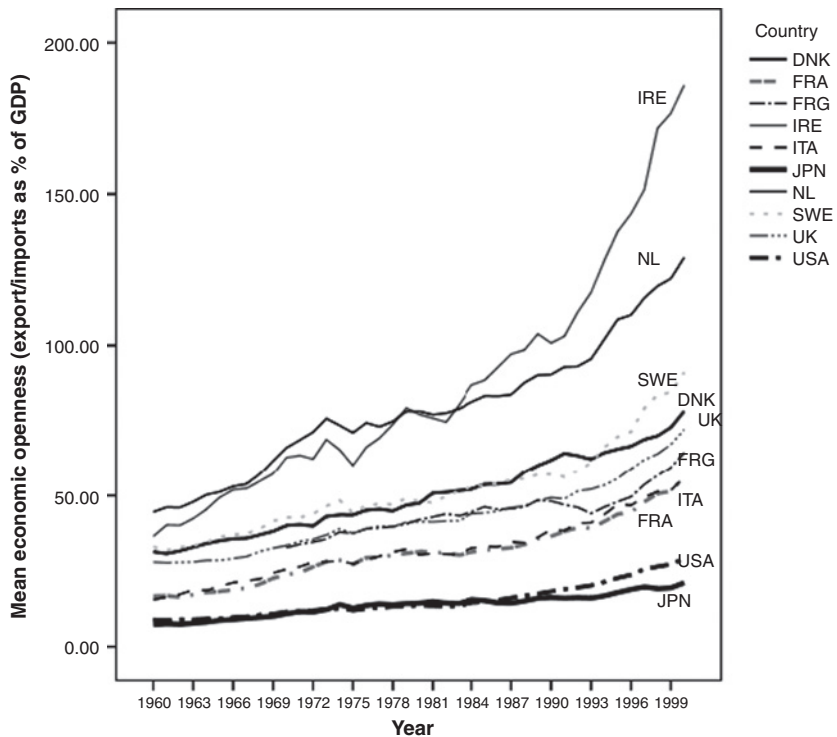


Figure 2 Level of Economic Openness (exports plus imports as percentage of real GDP in constant prices), Selected Countries, (1960–99)

Source: Created by authors from OECD (2001).

DNK = Denmark, FRA = France, FRG = West Germany, IRE = Ireland, ITA = Italy, JPN = Japan, NL = Netherlands, SWE = Sweden, UK = United Kingdom, USA = United States of America.

internationalization and interconnectedness of financial, goods and service markets translate into increased exposure to international competition for national firms and economies. To this point, nation-states have mainly been affected in terms of a modification of the tax structure rather than through retrenchment of the welfare state (Schulze and Ursprung, 1999). This aspect of globalization relates more directly to mimetic convergence. To enhance competitiveness, governments may enact what they envision as successful liberal models and policy measures to remove or relax regulation of economic activities (deregulation), shift towards reliance on the price mechanism to coordinate economic activities

(liberalization) and transfer private ownership and control of assets or enterprises that were previously under public ownership (privatization). Tax cuts, measures to keep inflation in check (even at the risk of increasing unemployment), strict control on organized labour, reduction of public expenditure and the downsizing of government are all part of these neoliberal measures. These mimetic transformations copy the notions of efficiency, productivity and profitability, and often mean a push to adjust prices, products, technologies and human resources more rapidly and extensively (Montanari, 2001; Regini, 2000).

The intensification of competition also has consequences for individuals' employment careers. First, the copying of neoliberal tactics often means deregulation of employment protection legislation (EPL). Less EPL means fewer constraints on downsizing and layoffs and ease in introducing further labour market flexibility measures (Auer and Cazes, 2000). Second, privatization often results in changes from more to less protected public sector jobs, who are further removed from the productivity and profitability of global competition (Standing, 1997).

Diffusion and Impact of New Information Communication Technologies

A third feature of globalization is the diffusion and impact of global networks on people, firms and financial markets linked by information communication technologies (ICTs) such as microcomputers, the Internet, new satellite systems, fibre-optic cables and wireless systems (Castells, 2001). ICTs not only accelerate the liberalization of financial transactions, but also breed the opportunity for mimetic convergence by creating an instant common worldwide standard of comparison. ICTs have fundamentally altered the scope (widening the reach of networks of social activity and power), intensity (regularized connections), velocity (speeding up of interactions and processes) and impact (local impacts global) of transformations (Held et al., 1999).

The diffusion of ICTs has profound consequences for the world of work and employment careers. Globalization forces rationalization processes and reorganization to produce a more streamlined labour force. Technological change has accelerated the decline in employment devoted to agriculture and manufacturing, and substantially increased the rise in the shares of both marketed and non-marketed services (Crafts, 2000). It has also shifted the demand away from the less skilled towards the more skilled by promoting a 'knowledge-based economy' (Burton-Jones, 1999; Slaughter and Swagel, 1997). New technologies can also be used to increase efficiency through the automation of low-skilled positions, thereby fostering redundancy for workers from the unskilled manual

classes. Some have also argued that changes in national labour markets and production systems are the consequences of the pressure induced by both increased international competition and the diffusion of ICTs that enable organizational restructuring (Castells, 1996; Soskice, 1998). ICTs have also strengthened the interdependencies between markets and market participants, and as a result, a disturbance in one market segment or one country is likely to be transmitted more rapidly throughout the world economy than was evident in previous eras.

Rise in the Importance of Markets

Globalization not only speeds up the process of real-time exchange and immediate communication across national borders but, owing to the intensification of global competition, also increases the relevance of markets in the coordination of decisions in all modern societies. These developments inherently strengthen the worldwide interdependence of decision-making and have the potential to produce coercive convergence. In a globalizing market, individual suppliers and consumers are increasingly exposed to a rising number of traders on each side of the market and become 'price-takers', able to buy and sell any quantity at a price that they in essence cannot influence (Useem, 1996). Thus, prices produced by globalizing markets progressively set the standards to which individuals, firms and nations then try to comply.

However, globalization does not only indicate that actors are increasingly in the hands of coercive anonymous global markets. What is equally important is that the changes within these markets are becoming more dynamic and less predictable. First, the globalization of markets endogenously intensifies competition between firms, forcing them to be innovative, to use new technological developments or to invent new products. This in turn increases the instability of markets (Streeck, 1987). Second, modern ICTs and deregulation and liberalization measures allow individuals, firms and governments to react faster to observed market changes and simultaneously accelerate market transactions (Castells, 1996). This in turn makes long-term developments of globalizing markets inherently harder to predict. Third, global prices in all kinds of markets tend to become exogenously more liable to fluctuations because worldwide supply, demand, or both are becoming increasingly susceptible to random disruptions caused somewhere on the globe, e.g. the sub-prime mortgage crisis and problems in the financial sector, which spread to other industries, major scientific discoveries, technical inventions, new consumer fashions, major political upsets such as wars and revolutions and so on. In other words, the increasing speed, dynamics and volatility of outcomes of globalizing markets makes it more difficult for individuals,

firms and governments to predict the future and to make choices between different alternatives and strategies.

Roots of Diversity? Path-Dependent Institutional Structures

The third mechanism of convergence is the process of path dependence and converging divergences. Here we argued that domestic institutions, policies and employment systems are historically grown and country-specific and determine the degree to which people are affected by the structural changes brought about by globalization (Mayer, 2004a, 2004b). In support of divergence, the forces of globalization raise different problems for each country, demanding diverse policy measures, which in turn reinforce strong path dependence over time. An encompassing framework to describe nation-specific institutions is the notion of welfare regimes, which consist of specific packages of contributions by the state, market and family (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1993). We introduce this categorization in order to test whether it is not only nation-states that may be converging, but whether similar welfare regimes constellations increasingly strengthen within groups but simultaneously diverge between regime types. As Figure 1 illustrates, domestic institutions act more or less as an intervening variable at the meso level between coercive and mimetic global forces and the responses at the micro level of the firm or the individual worker. The institutions most pertinent to mid-life employment careers are education and training systems, the type of welfare regime and industrial relations (or employment) systems. For space limitations, only the last two aspects are explored in this article.

Welfare Regime

Welfare regime constellations filter the market forces of globalization by offering varying levels of decommodification of workers via income supports (Alderson and Nielsen, 2002; Brady et al., 2005; Esping-Andersen, 1990). Differences between welfare regimes are manifested by: the level of active employment-sustaining labour market policies (e.g. subsidized employment), welfare-sustaining employment exit policies (e.g. support for unemployment), the scope and generosity of family allowances and services (e.g. maternity/paternity leave, childcare) and the share of the public sector that comprises the labour force (DiPrete et al., 1997). Using Esping-Andersen's (1990) classifications as a base, we distinguish between five welfare regime types.

Countries such as Germany and Austria represent a conservative or corporatist welfare regime that is strongly transfer oriented, with

decommodifying effects for those who are economically inactive. Social policies are not designed to promote employment opportunities or job mobility, but to ensure that (often male) workers who earn family wages and exit employment are protected against serious declines in living standards. This type of regime is committed to the traditional division of labour in the family, often referred to as the 'male-breadwinner' or 'one-and-a-half-earner' model. It supports women who give priority to family activities and work either in the home or on a part-time basis (Blossfeld and Drobnić, 2001). A variation on the conservative regimes is the 'southern' or family-oriented welfare regimes of Italy, Spain and Mexico (Castles and Ferrera, 1996). A central difference, however, is the strong ideological and practical involvement of family and kinship networks in protecting its members against economic and social risks.

Social-democratic regimes include Sweden and Denmark, and (in relation to employment) the Netherlands.² Active labour market and taxation policies in these countries are aimed at full employment for both men and women, gender equality in the workplace and home, and a 'fair' income distribution with a high degree of wage compression. Central and Eastern European countries, such as Hungary, Estonia and the Czech Republic, have experienced rapid and extreme transformations since the early 1990s. Since they share the same origin of a Communist regime, they can be classified as a post-socialist regime, but in many ways are 'evolving' and represent the most heterogeneous cluster. Hungary and the Czech Republic, for example, have more generous support for the family and promote a dual-earner family model favoured by fiscal arrangements such as in a social-democratic regime. Conversely, Estonia has taken a more liberal direction, characterized by low state intervention (Saar, 2008). The liberal regime (e.g. US, UK) is characterized by passive labour market policies, marginal support for the underprivileged and relatively low public sector employment (Gallie, 2004). The comparatively high employment performance in these regimes is often linked to high flexibility, limited union power and weaker labour legislation, making this regime the target for mimetic convergence strategies.

We anticipate that the increased flexibility and uncertainty brought about by globalization will have less impact within regimes that decommodify the risk of globalization for workers (particularly for men), which is the case for the social-democratic, conservative and familistic regimes. Conversely, individuals in the post-socialist and, to the largest extent, liberal regimes will be the most exposed to globalization, owing to their lack of decommodification.

Industrial Relations

Nations also significantly differ with respect to industrial or employment relations. Country-specific differences surface in elements such as types of

work councils, collective bargaining systems, strength of unions versus employer organizations, labour legislation or administrative regulations. This produces distinct national variations of occupational structures and industries, patterns of labour–capital negotiations, strike frequencies and collective agreements on wages, job security, labour conditions and work hours (Soskice, 1991; Streeck, 1992). How these systems diverge has been characterized as ‘coordinated’ and ‘uncoordinated’ market economies (Soskice, 1998), ‘individualist’ or ‘collective’ regimes (DiPrete et al., 1997), or ‘open’ and ‘closed’ employment relations (Sørensen, 1983).

Further key measures of industrial relations are union density, which measures the potential power of the unions, and collective bargaining, denoting the real extent to which salaried workers are covered by union-negotiated terms and conditions of employment (OECD, 2004; Visser, 2003). Employment protection legislation (EPL) is also a symbol of the level to which a nation protects its workers and an organization’s ability to be flexible in the rapidly changing globalized world.

We expect that individuals who come from more ‘open’ employment systems that are decentralized, uncoordinated and with low trade union density, collective bargaining coverage and EPL will be at a higher risk of having ‘patchwork careers’. Shielding workers is kept to a minimum; individuals’ labour market resources or human capital, such as social origin, education and labour force experience, are crucial to their success (DiPrete et al., 1997). This extreme exposure to market forces may be apparent in higher unemployment rates and overall job mobility and destabilizes the long-term employment relationship (Gallie et al., 1998).

This is in contrast to the ‘closed’ employment relations of the coordinated, centralized economies that have stronger unions, collective bargaining coverage and EPL. In these contexts, a network of institutions (e.g. unions, workers’ councils, collective bargaining) maintains long-term cooperative employment relationships and more centralized wage-setting mechanisms based on trust. This type of employment system also protects those already in the labour market and can also foster an extreme variant of an ‘insider/outside’ labour market, which is the case, for instance, in Spain and Italy. This tends to create a large segment of precarious employment and unemployment, while (generally male) employees have levels of job security and high ‘family’ wages, reminiscent of dual and segmented labour market theories (Piore, 1969). There is a high persistence of inequality due to the fact that precarious forms of employment (e.g. fixed-term contracts) are highly concentrated among specific groups seeking access to the labour market (women, younger workers, minorities, unemployed). Entry into the labour force is more problematic and unemployment usually of a longer duration with low rates of job mobility (Gallie et al., 1998).

Post-socialist regimes experienced not only a severe political and economic 'shock' from a socialist to a market-driven economy, but also incredible transformations from an agricultural to industrial society, coupled with sudden exposure to the accelerated and volatile global market at the beginning of the 1990s. This meant a rapid shift from closed to open employment systems. Older cohorts grew up in a system where employment was guaranteed, with extraordinarily high job security, even for women, youths and older workers, who were then exposed to a tumultuous period of change.

Research Design

In order to empirically examine convergence of industrial relations and employment careers, we undertake two types of analyses. First, we engage in a descriptive analysis of selected macro-level measures of welfare regimes and industrial relations over time. The convergence of welfare regimes is examined by comparing public expenditures on subsidized employment and unemployment compensation and gross public social expenditures as a percentage of the GDP over time. This demonstrates both differences in welfare regimes and provides a rough indication of their convergence over time. Industrial relations systems are examined by comparing the mean value of wage-setting coordination scores, difference in percentage of trade union density and levels of strictness of EPL over time and between countries. As with any comparative and secondary analysis, there are differences in data availability and measures (Mills et al., 2006a). Between 10 and 14 highly industrialized countries are examined, with attention to inclusion of at least one country from the five welfare regime categorizations.

In a second stage, we engage in a meta-analysis of results of existing quantitative longitudinal studies on micro-level employment data (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 2002). Results are taken from the internationally comparative studies of the effect of globalization and uncertainty on men's (Blossfeld et al., 2006a) and women's careers (Blossfeld and Hofmeister, 2006). Within these two studies, 13 OECD countries were examined, including: Germany (Buchholz and Grunow, 2006; Kurz et al., 2006), the Netherlands (Kalmijn and Luijkx, 2006; Luijkx et al., 2006), Sweden (Korpi and Stern, 2006; Korpi and Tåhlin, 2006), Denmark (Grunow and Leth-Sørensen, 2006a, 2006b), Hungary (Bukodi and Róbert, 2006a, 2006b), Estonia (Helemäe and Saar, 2006; Saar and Helemäe, 2006), the Czech Republic (Hamplová, 2006; Hamplová and Kreidl, 2006), Poland (Plomien, 2006), the UK (Golsch, 2006a, 2006b), the US (Hofmeister, 2006; Mills et al., 2006b), Mexico (Parrado, 2006a, 2006b), Italy (Bernardi, 2006; Pisati and Schizzerotto, 2006) and Spain (Simó Noguera, 2006; Simó Noguera et al.,

2006). These studies examined mid-careers, which were defined as roughly those between the ages of 25 and 54 years, or in other words, men and women already established in the labour market. Employment histories are examined via a summary of overall levels of job-to-job mobility and selected findings related to the transitions into non- and unemployment as well as on re-entry into the labour market from non- and unemployment. The study of entry into the labour market by new entrants (Blossfeld et al., 2005) and the transition from work to retirement for older workers (Blossfeld et al., 2006b) was explored in related studies.

Results

Welfare Regimes

Figure 3 provides a snapshot of the positioning of selected countries at the end of the 1990s in terms of public expenditure on subsidized employment

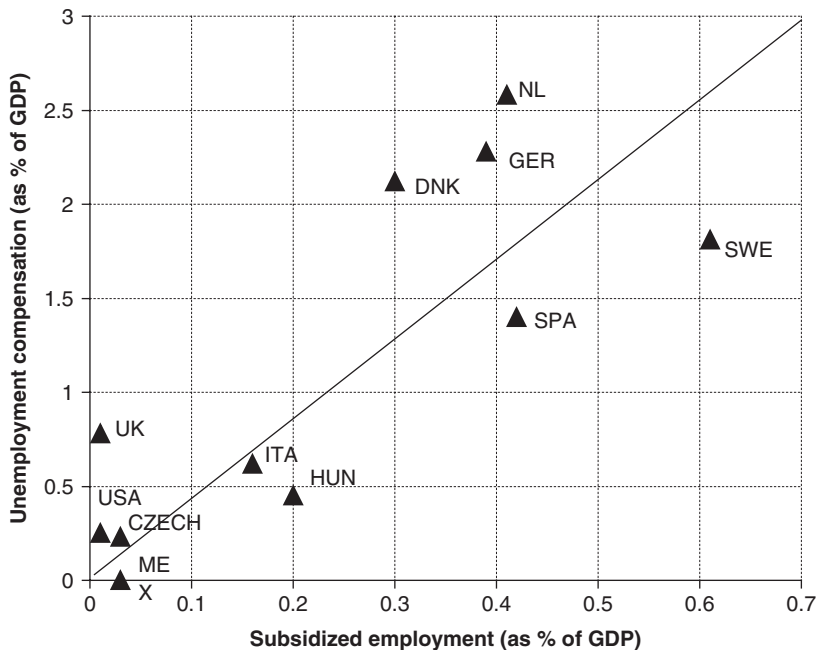


Figure 3 Public Expenditure (subsidized employment and unemployment compensation) as Percentage of GDP 1997–8

Source: Created by authors from OECD (2004: Table H, pp. 325–32). (Figures for Estonia not available.)

Note: CZECH = Czech Republic, DNK = Denmark, GER = Germany, HUN = Hungary, ITA = Italy, ME = Mexico, NL = The Netherlands, SPA = Spain, SWE = Sweden, UK = United Kingdom, USA = United States of America.

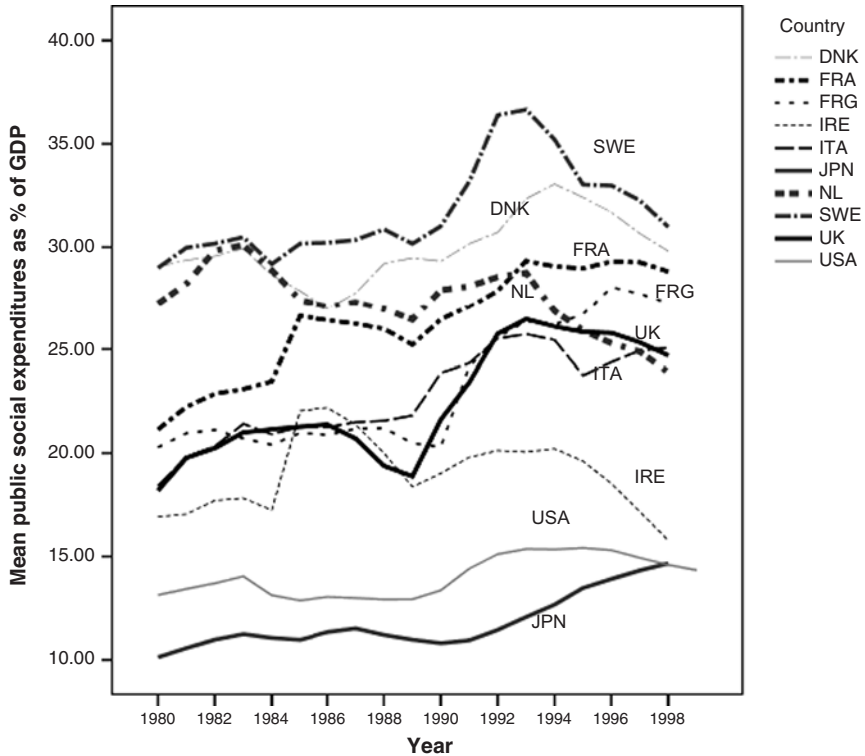


Figure 4 Gross Public Social Expenditures as Percentages of Current GDP, Selected Countries, 1980–98

Source: Created by authors from OECD (2001).

Note: DNK = Denmark, FRA = France, FRG = West Germany, IRE = Ireland, ITA = Italy, JPN = Japan, NL = Netherlands, SWE = Sweden, UK = United Kingdom, USA = United States of America.

and unemployment compensation. Nations such as Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and to some extent Spain provided more protection for workers. As anticipated, the liberal and post-socialist regimes contribute considerably less public funds. To examine potential convergence, a longitudinal examination in Figure 4 examines gross public social expenditures from the late 1980s until the late 1990s, a particularly intensive phase of globalization (see Raab et al., this issue, pp. 596–631). It provides evidence of path dependence, demonstrating clear differences in the starting points of welfare regime spending such as

characteristically low spending in liberal regimes contrasted with the social-democratic regimes. More importantly, there does not appear to be a convergent 'race to the bottom' and take-up of market-led measures to reducing public spending in all countries. In fact, many countries even experienced an increase in public spending in the early 1990s (e.g. Sweden, Denmark, UK, Italy, Japan).

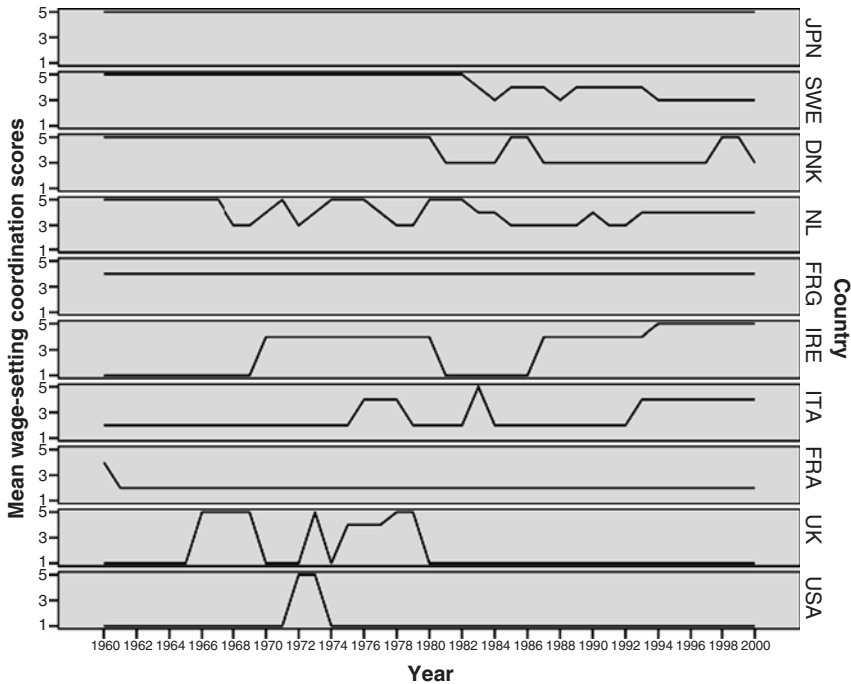


Figure 5 Mean Value of Wage-Setting Coordination Scores, Selected Countries, 1960–2000
 Source: Created by authors from data from Kenworthy (2001).

Note: DNK = Denmark, FRA = France, FRG = West Germany, IRE = Ireland, ITA = Italy, JPN = Japan, NL = Netherlands, SWE = Sweden, UK = United Kingdom, USA = United States of America. 1 = fragmented wage bargaining, confined largely to individual firms or plants; 2 = bargaining mainly at industry level with little or no pattern-setting; 3 = industry-level bargaining with reasonably strong pattern-setting but only moderate union concentration; 4 = centralized bargaining by confederation(s) or government imposition of wage schedule/freeze – with a peace obligation; 5 = centralized bargaining by confederation(s) or government imposition of wage schedule/freeze – with a peace obligation, extremely high degree of union concentration and coordination of industry bargaining by confederation and/or extensive coordination of bargaining by employer organizations with extensive pattern-setting.

Industrial Relations

Figure 5 shows a panelled summary of changes in the mean value of wage setting coordination scores in key highly industrialized countries over the last 40 years. Wage setting coordination scores range from 1 to 5 with 1 representing the most fragmented form of wage bargaining to 5 representing the most centralized form of bargaining. As we would expect, the social-democratic (Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands) regime shows a high level of coordination, but also exhibits slight erosion over time since the 1980s, which could lend some support for the convergence argument. Countries such as Japan and Germany hold high stable scores over this entire period. An extreme plunge since the mid-1970s in the US and from 1980 in the UK also supports this trend within these regimes. However, there has been an increase since the early 1990s in Ireland and Italy, challenging any uniform trend among countries.

Changes in trade union density for selected countries between 1970 and 2000 are compared in Figure 6. We see the impact of the 'Ghent system' in countries such as Denmark and Sweden, which refers to the fact that union-affiliated institutions generally administer unemployment benefits, only showing a modest decline over time. Workers in Spain, the Netherlands, Italy and Germany have higher percentages covered by collective bargaining, but lower trade union density (see Mills et al., 2006c). The family-oriented, post-socialist and liberal regimes went from already low levels of trade union density to even lower levels, which was extreme in countries

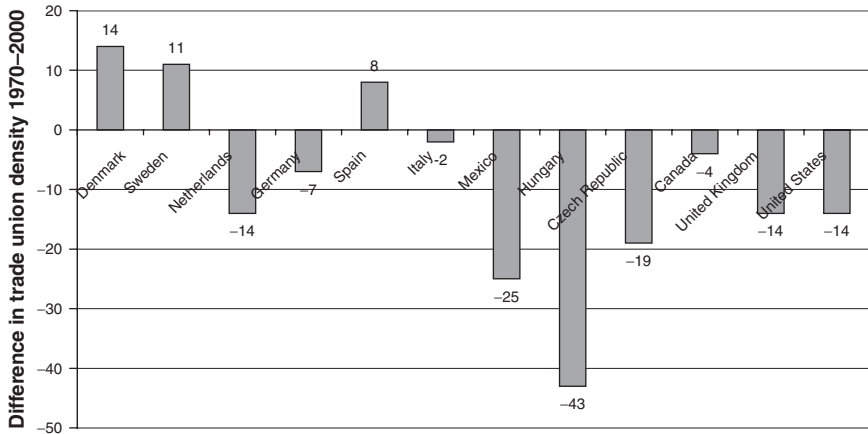


Figure 6 Difference in Percentages of Trade Union Density, Selected Countries, 1970-2000
 Source: Created by authors from OECD (2004).

such as Hungary and the Czech Republic due to the tumultuous changes. Again, we see that existing regimes seem to converge in their existing divergence.

Figure 7 illustrates changes in employment protection legislation (EPL) over three time points from the late 1980s to the mid-2000s. The index is calculated along 18 basic items, which examine employment protection of regular workers against individual dismissal, specific requirements for collective dismissals and the regulation of temporary forms of employment (see OECD, 2004: Annex 2.A1). First, some countries maintain significantly higher levels of support, such as those in the social-democratic, conservative and family-oriented regimes. Higher levels in Italy, Spain and Mexico, however, reflect protection for ‘regular’ (that is, not temporary) workers and those in the formal sector, accentuating the insider/outsider division. We do see a slight drop in EPL and persistence among other (liberal, post-socialist) regimes, but in general no uniform trend of convergence.

Employment Careers

A widely cited argument in the contemporary literature presumes that globalization breeds widespread employment flexibility that translates

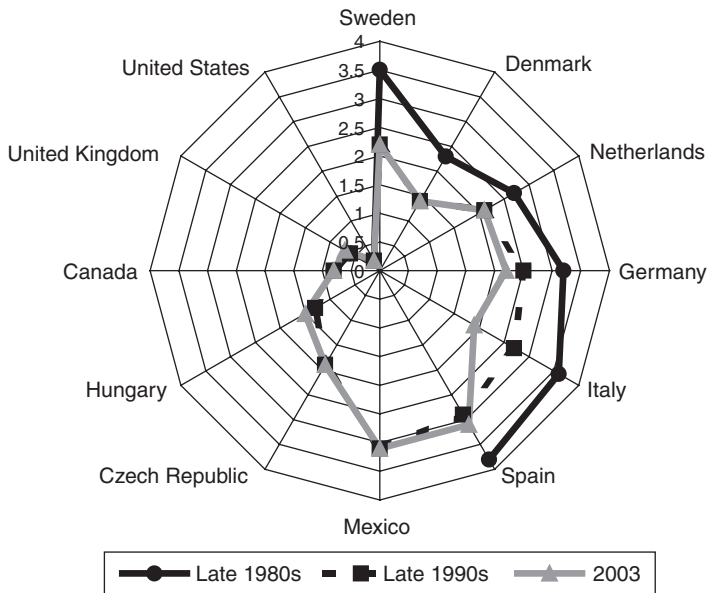


Figure 7 Level of Strictness of EPL, Selected Countries, late 1980s, late 1990s and 2003
Source: Created by authors from OECD (2004).



Figure 8 *Relative Increase in Employment Instability over Time by Country*
 Source: Adapted from Mills and Blossfeld (2006).

into unstable, fragmented and precarious ‘patchwork’ careers. Evidence of this employment flexibility is generally shown by the growth of temporary or fixed-time contracts, part-time work and shorter employment spells at career entry (Blossfeld et al., 2005). But is this the case for the largest segment of workers in most societies – mid-career workers?

Job Mobility and Average Tenure of Workers

Results of the meta-analysis of 13 societies confirm that career patterns of men and women are highly dependent on domestic institutional configurations. Figure 8 provides a placement of each country on a continuum for low- (more standard ‘job-for-life’) and high- (more ‘patchwork’) instability careers. The classification is made according to the overall level of job mobility and the average tenure of employees. In Italy, this finding holds largely for men and is attributed to the strong credentialism upon entry into the labour market and the fact that labour market regulations protect mid-career workers against unemployment and downward mobility.

Germany also showed little evidence of the emergence of highly stable patchwork careers, which was particularly clear for men. However, rising employment instabilities in the form of increased unemployed rates became evident for younger German workers and women. In Sweden, there was a continuous trend towards *more* rather than less employment stability from 1974 to 2000. Workers remained protected by the institutional frameworks that shielded ‘insiders’ (particularly men and older workers) or those in the internal labour market who already had a job and aided the unemployed to maintain their previous occupational status when they re-entered the labour market. Spain is another clear example of an insider/outsider labour market within a closed employment system. Largely male workers with a permanent contract in this highly regulated labour market have low job mobility in comparison with those on fixed-term contracts, who are mainly younger workers, the poorly educated and women.

Denmark was characterized by high job mobility and the ‘flexicurity’ system (Auer and Cazes, 2000), which is a unique hybrid employment system that combines high levels of flexibility comparable to the liberal

labour markets of the UK and the US, but at the same time provides workers with high security in the form of generous social welfare and unemployment benefits. There was strong evidence of patchwork careers and an increase in workers with low job tenure in the US from the 1970s to around 1983 and since the late 1980s. Although job tenure in the UK is comparatively very low and similar to the US, it has not significantly declined over time. There was also a growing trend in the probability of dismissal for older workers with longer tenure, which suggests that even male workers with considerable labour market experience were exposed to unemployment in these liberal regimes (Blossfeld et al., 2006b).

High levels of turbulence and patchwork careers arose particularly among the post-socialist countries. The early 1990s were extremely turbulent, as workers experienced structural changes in the economy and later a rise in unemployment that was spurred by a new wave of redundancies induced by the Russian economic crisis. In Hungary, for example, almost 90 percent of mid-career men experienced some kind of job shift in the 1990s (Bukodi and Róbert, 2006a). The recent move to deregulation, export orientation and privatization of public companies in Mexico resulted in a limited access to formal, more protected forms of employment for the most recent labour market cohorts. The large growth of the informal sector and an increase in those in the lower-skilled manual classes means that privatization and increased flexibility actually resulted in a downgrading of occupational opportunities and a rise of patchwork careers, particularly for men.

The Persistence of Welfare Regimes and Industrial Relation Systems

We also predicted a divergence in careers due to persistence in 'open' or 'closed' employment relations (Sørensen, 1983). Table 1 provides a summary of the findings of the differences between open and closed mobility regimes based on five criteria. The summary shows that, as anticipated, individuals from more open, decentralized and uncoordinated employment systems showed a higher risk of experiencing all criteria, with the exception of a lower risk for higher economic and employment security. This is attributed to factors such as lower trade union density and EPL, which provides a minimum of shielding to workers. Instead, workers in these systems needed to rely on their own human capital. Workers from closed employment systems experienced higher economic and employment security, owing to the presence of stronger unions, collective bargaining coverage and EPL. These systems consisted of a network of institutions that maintained long-term employment relationships based on trust. This resulted in a lower importance of human capital resources, ease of re-entry from unemployment and job mobility, but a higher risk of employment and economic security.

Table 1 *The Impact of Open and Closed Employment Relations on Mid-Career Employment*

	Open employment system	Closed employment system
Economic and employment security	Low	High
Precarious and flexible employment	High	Concentrated in specific groups
Importance of human capital resources	High	Low
Ease of re-entry from unemployment	High	Low
Rate of job mobility	High	Low

Intensifying Inequalities

The results provided clear support for not only the persistence, but also the intensification of existing inequality structures across time by the classic constructs of occupational class, educational level and gender (Blossfeld and Hofmeister, 2006; Blossfeld et al., 2006a). The risk of unemployment was significantly higher for lower-skilled non-manual workers in comparison to white-collar workers, exhibiting a clearly protected and more highly qualified core staff group. Here, labour market adjustment was achieved at the expense of blue-collar workers. Risks of downward mobility and unemployment remained disproportionately higher among those in lower occupational positions. Results overwhelmingly showed that across all 13 countries, class barriers have not become easier to transcend over time. In all countries, there was a group of the long-term unemployed who were unable to re-enter the labour market owing to the lack of human capital resources, or employees who swung between unemployment and low-status jobs. These were often the 'service proletariat' or the unskilled manual workers (Bernardi and Garrido, 2008; Esping-Andersen, 1993). Those with higher education across all the study countries generally experienced more upward mobility and had a smoother re-entry into the labour market after unemployment. They were also less likely to have negative labour market experiences such as downward mobility or precarious or flexible employment, and have a lower unemployment risk.

The studies also produced evidence of a 'gendered globalization' effect with clear differences in the consequences of globalization on men and women's employment. Globalization encourages the shifting of risk to the most vulnerable individuals in a society. As Hofmeister and Blossfeld

(2006) summarize, the level of temporal flexibility, quality of jobs (secure versus precarious) and degree of labour market attachment were key in understanding shifts in women's employment career. The rise in flexibility generated more insecure jobs, which were more often filled by women, hindering their further integration into the labour market. Unemployment for women appeared to be on the rise in all countries, even in the more protected countries such as Sweden (Korpi and Stern, 2006). The most stable career patterns over time were found in the social-democratic regimes of the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark, three countries that had a high degree of women's labour market participation and alternative employment tracks for women (but also a high degree of occupational segregation and part-time work). Another gendered difference was the impact of the presence of another earner. Women with breadwinners can afford to accept only better positions and turn down worse ones, whereas single mothers, divorced women and widows tended to accept and be in jobs of a lower quality. Women with a larger number of young children also tended to fare the worst in the labour market.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to examine whether there was any evidence that globalization produced increasing convergence of employment-related aspects of national-level welfare regimes, industrial relation systems and mid-career employment paths among a set of industrialized nations. We first explored several mechanisms that might lead to convergence, which has been neglected in the literature to this point. We developed three central paths for institutional convergence, which we termed: coercive convergence, mimetic convergence and path-dependent converging divergences. To examine convergence of employment careers, we explored the instability of careers, differences in closed and open employment relationships and whether inequality persisted across key social constructs.

The results did not show a clear 'race to the bottom' of a uniform convergence to neoliberal market-led measures as predicted by the broader globalization literature. It appears that countries still develop nation-specific solutions in reaction to these global transformations (Sassen, 1996). An analysis of key employment-related aspects of welfare regimes showed that there was no clear evidence of a convergence of countries to mirror the liberal regimes. Rather, we found evidence of path dependence and converging divergences – with similar welfare regimes illustrating diverse starting points that appeared to only persist and continue clustering with one another over time.

We also found that key foundations of industrial relations systems, such as wage-setting coordination scores, followed a similar path-dependent

pattern. However, there was a hint of convergence in social-democratic regimes over time, with a slight erosion since the 1980s. Existing patterns of trade union density and EPL likewise persisted among regimes, with converging divergence in this respect once again.

The enhancement of welfare regime differences was once again present when we examined the potential convergence of employment careers of mid-career men and women across time within 13 countries. Countries remained relatively stable along the 'instability' continuum of careers, with individuals in social-democratic and conservative regimes maintaining high stability (particularly men) and those in the liberal and post-socialist regimes persistently exposed, with unstable careers. The persistence of open and closed employment systems also appeared to divide workers and shape employment careers. Another central conclusion was the persistence of inequality, meaning that standard constructs such as gender, educational level and occupational class are not 'zombie' expressions as Beck (2002) once argued, but highly important stratifying factors. There was particularly clear evidence of 'gendered globalization' with mid-career men generally protected in most of the countries, while women took up the more flexible and precarious jobs created by globalization forces.

The study concludes that globalization has produced converging divergences and not resulted in a convergence of neoliberal and market employment-related policies, accompanied by the rise of patchwork careers. Rather, it has served to intensify already existent differences between industrial relations in the welfare regime clusters of countries and accentuated within-country occupational class, educational and gender inequalities.

This study is a preliminary and largely descriptive exploration with clear room for improvement and further research. First, although we attempted to develop a theoretical specification of the coercive, mimetic and path-dependent mechanisms that may lead to convergence, we concede that it is difficult to separate and empirically examine these different effects within the current analysis. This leaves room for further research to empirically specify and test these constructs more adequately.

Second, we are aware that the choice to study mid-career workers examines a group who has a relatively stable position in the labour market, particularly men. The study of the growth of uncertain, patchwork employment careers was shown to be a phenomenon for new labour market entrants (Blossfeld et al., 2005) and at the transition from work to retirement (Blossfeld et al., 2006b). Blossfeld et al. (2006b) found that globalization triggered a withdrawal of older workers from the labour force as a result of their competitive labour market disadvantages with the result of a trend towards early retirement. Again, in this phase of the labour

market career, national institutions and welfare regime constellations were key in mediating these outcomes. In conservative countries, flexibility was achieved by offering older workers generous early retirement (generally for male breadwinners), while simultaneously introducing more flexible work forms for younger labour market entrants; whereas in liberal and social-democratic regimes, early exit was less extreme with older workers forced to adapt to globalizing circumstances such as life-long learning.

Finally, our definition of globalization and the graph in Figure 1 could also be developed to include a feedback mechanism from the bottom-up or, of course, cross-national movements and hybridization (see Marginson and Sisson, 2002). In some ways, it would be interesting to think of the impact of globalization not only in hierarchical terms, with simply a higher level added on top of domestic structures that cascades down to impact decisions, but rather, to also include crucial 'bottom-up' developments, horizontal or cross-national movements and hybridization. A related innovation is the need for a more empirically-based measure of globalization, which has now been developed by Raab et al. (this issue, pp. 596–631.)

Notes

1. For a long-term historical view and useful periodizations of globalization, refer to Held et al. (1999) and Scholte (2000). For an empirical description of the development of globalization in 97 different countries from 1970 to 2002, see Raab et al. (this issue, pp. 596–631).
2. The Netherlands is an interesting case that is often classified as a conservative regime (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1990) or as a social-democratic one (Muffels and Luijckx, 2006). The 'Polder model', or consensus approach towards employment agreements (between state, unions and employers), means that the Netherlands labour market is less strictly regulated than conservative countries such as Germany. Although more recent employment policies tend to follow the social-democratic regime, family policies and the tendency to follow the male-breadwinner or one-and-a-half-earner model means that when studying the family, it is more similar to a conservative welfare regime.

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