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THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
School of Social and
Political Science

PhD in Social Policy - University of Edinburgh

**The future of work and global governance:
international organisations in the fourth industrial
revolution**

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2021

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified. Parts of Chapter 4 have been published in *Global Social Policy* with an Open Access license, as it is stated at the beginning of the chapter. Other than that, this work remains unpublished at the time of submission.

Vicente Silva

Abstract

The future of work emerged in the 2010s as a key problem for global institutions. The social consequences of the 'fourth industrial revolution' represented a major concern in international policy spheres. Global forecasts about the risks of automation, the rise of the platform economy and the spread of algorithmic management, led international policy makers to take technological change seriously and develop measures to prevent major disruptions. This research examines the process by which the future of work became a global issue, one that gathered the attention of the most influential players in global social and labour policy: the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, international business associations and global unions. From a theoretical perspective, the study looks at the articulation of multiple streams in these organisations in the context of the future of work agenda: problem definitions, policy solutions and political conflicts. Each of them showed a particular articulation of these streams, leading to different institutional outcomes. In terms of methods, the thesis refers to a large number of documents produced by these agencies – statements, reports, briefs-, as well as to elite interviews conducted with staff and high-level officials from each of them. The conclusions are that the future of work agenda in the 2010s eroded the conventional distinction between 'social' and 'economic' actors in global social governance, leading to a 'Schumpeterian consensus' that urges countries to 'invest in people' and prepare their workforce for a new technological era.

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Introduction to the study

Background

The 'future of work' emerged as a central problem in global social governance and the public discourse in the past decade. Predictions about the social implications of a new generation of intelligent technologies, associated to a broader process of digitalisation of the economy, occupied the attention of analysts and policy-makers all over the world. Observers started talking about an epochal change: the consequences of the digital transformation were expected to be so deep for the productive system that notions like the 'fourth industrial revolution' (Schwab, 2016), the 'gig economy' (Healy et al., 2017) or the 'risks of automation' (Frey and Osborne, 2017) became regular terms in academic and non-expert discussions. Since the mid-2010s, in most countries, the media would continuously report on recent innovations in artificial intelligence, robotics and big data, often with preoccupation about the wider implications they could have in society (Marenco and Seidl, 2021). Governments, responding to the urgency imposed by such accounts, began to organise committees and strategies to prepare institutions for the coming industrial revolution (Radu, 2021). Workers all over the world expressed their legitimate concerns about labour-displacing technologies (ITUC, 2017c), while companies were urged to incorporate digital innovations to keep up with this process (ILO and IOE, 2019).

Academics agreed about the extension of this process, which became the central topic of diverse compilations and edited volumes (e.g. LaGrandeur and Hughes, 2017; Larsson and Teigland, 2020; P V Moore et al., 2018; Skidelsky and Craig, 2020). The range of issues brought by digitalisation was vast. For one, the automation of work, made possible by advances in robotics and algorithmic systems, was assumed to be a destructive force for the jobs of the future (Prettner and Bloom, 2020). Digital platforms were already disrupting employment relations on a global scale, leading to new forms of work that escaped traditional regulation mechanisms, as well as the categories with which scholars and public agencies had classified occupations until that point (Graham et al., 2017; Prassl, 2018; Stewart and Stanford, 2017). The organisation of work was presenting worrying trends as well. People analytics –the use of big data methods for monitoring employees- was expanding in different industries and sectors, posing new challenges for privacy rights and the political autonomy of labour (Sharp, 2018; Upchurch and Moore, 2018). Lastly, decision-making in companies had started to rely on algorithms and automated mechanisms, which were as efficient as opaque in terms of accountability (Danaher et al., 2017; Duggan et al., 2020). Such problems seemed to be extensive to the totality of occupations, although they would be expected to affect more seriously specific groups in society –e.g. female workers (Howcroft and Rubery, 2019) or the manufacture sector (Autor, 2015).

Experts and policy-makers agreed about the need to rethink social and labour policy to address such trends. A redesign of the welfare state was seen as an imperative (Greve, 2017). On the one hand, workers had to be continuously reskilled to survive in the digital world, which urged countries to put lifelong learning at the centre of their education systems (Duggan, 2019; Penpraser, 2018). They were supposed to develop 'robot-proof' capacities (Aoun, 2017), resistant to the coming wave of automation. On the other hand, the increase in non-standard jobs in advanced economies and the persistence of informality in developing

ones was seen as an opportunity for innovation in social protection (Behrendt and Nguyen, 2018). The gig economy and the digitalisation of work just added a new layer to an already existing deficit in protection coverage; automation was seen as a real threat for displaced workers that would lose their income protection attached to their employment. For instance, it was in this context that voices supporting new instruments -a universal basic income (Lacey, 2017) or a tax on robots (Freeman, 2015; Stiglitz, 2017)- became louder in policy debates. Ideas that seemed to be peripheral in previous decades, had thus found a policy window to gain traction, being conceptualised now as preventive solutions for the changing world of work.

Global social governance –the efforts made by international actors to manage worldwide social problems (Deacon, 2007b)- presented the same trends. The future of work was at the centre of the respective agendas of international organisations in the 2010s (Grimshaw, 2020), expressed in flagship reports, commissions, policy strategies and high-level meetings. In this research, I investigate the development of this policy agenda in global governance, interpreting different approaches promoted in the international community to face the future of work. To do so, I study the engagement of key actors in global labour policy with the problems brought by technological change – multilateral agencies that define ideas and standards to that matter, as well as international labour and business associations. After the debates on the consequences of globalisation (Deacon, 2013a; Gereffi, 2014; Standing, 2008) and the global financial crisis (Güven, 2012; McBride and Merolli, 2013), the future of work became the next global agenda in social and labour policy, a process that was only partially recognised by scholars as such. At the end of the past decade, scholars assessed the new frameworks developed by international agencies for the future (e.g. Anner et al., 2019; McBride and Watson, 2019; Novitz, 2020), from a rather normative perspective instead of looking in more detail how global labour governance was changing as a whole.

Rationale of the research

In this thesis, I investigate the development of the future of work agenda in global governance, as well as its broader implications for the field of global social policy. In the 2010s, there was a generalised sense in international institutions that their approach to social and labour policy had become rapidly outdated by the new scenarios posed by digitalisation, which eventually led to substantial changes in their ideas and policies. Thus, the International Labour Organization (ILO) launched in 2015 its Future of Work Initiative, the central focus of its centenary (International Labour Office, 2015). It eventually led to the making of the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, a new guide for this influential organisation for the coming decades (ILO, 2019b). The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), on its part, remade its Jobs Strategy in parallel, publishing their new framework ‘Good jobs for all in a changing world of work’ in 2018 (OECD, 2018a). The World Bank (WB) followed a similar pattern, focusing their World Development Reports on the digital transformation of jobs (World Bank, 2016b, 2019b), and remaking their social policy prescriptions in their ‘Protecting All’ strategy oriented by the novel principle of ‘progressive universalism’ (Packard et al., 2019). Since scholars have not studied these initiatives from a comparative perspective, but rather looking at each individual organisation, my research aims to fill that gap, analysing in parallel how these actors –moved by specific interests and mandates- dealt with the new scenarios in the world of work.

My research is thus focused on the mentioned three cases: the ILO, the OECD and the WB. The extent to which global institutions changed in this process of adjustment to a new technological era is precisely the point I want to address. Global social policy has been transformed, and so have the predominant positions in the field. Initially, in 2018, this study was designed to be a comparison of policy ideas elaborated by two major institutions in world polity: the ILO, traditionally representing a social democratic imaginary, and the WB, a frequent defender of a neoliberal approach to social policy and labour market regulations (O'Brien, 2014a). The plan was, then, to examine the response from the two 'discourse factions' (Münch, 2016) that have shaped global social governance in the last forty years. Nonetheless, two moments in my research made me rethink my assumptions, on the alleged persistence of the divide between economic and social dimensions in international organisations.

The first was my trip to the ILO headquarters in Geneva in July 2019, when I had the chance to talk with a range of officials from the ILO secretariat, the social partners and a number of researchers that had been involved in the recently finalised Future of Work Initiative of this institution. The story they told me, completely invisible for an outsider who had just read in detail the ILO publications on the topic, was that the initiative had sparked a new era of political conflict between the key actors in the organisation –the secretariat, the Workers and Employers Groups, as well as governments. Even though the Global Commission organised by the ILO had established the pillars of their new 'human-centred approach' to labour policy, such framework had been suddenly transformed by business and right-wing populist governments at the ILO. The result was that the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, which was supposed to be based on the Global Commission's orientations, actually reflected a completely different approach. The effort to subordinate technological change to decent work simply vanished in the making of the Declaration, as employers and countries opposed to new regulations on platforms, algorithmic management, labour guarantees or any policy that was not related to upskilling the workforce for the digital era. The document was published just a week before my first trip to the ILO, when the institutional consequences of such developments were still to be seen.

My experience at the ILO showed me that, even though global social policy has a frequent focus on the ideas promoted by international organisations (Mahon, 2013; Stone, 2013; Vetterlein, 2014), the role of politics is just as important to make sense of how they position themselves in relation to specific policy problems. A key contribution of this research is precisely that it shows the 'making of' global policies revealing the complexity of such processes. The seminal study of the late Bob Deacon (2013a) on the ILO's Social Protection Floor Recommendation, crafted with a sharp sense of how these institutions work, was a source of inspiration in that line: he learnt how to navigate the labyrinth of international organisations by focusing on the making of key documents and the political disputes involved in them. I now want to follow that intellectual legacy but looking at several institutions at the same time. This certainly made my enterprise more challenging, but I am confident that it will be a relevant contribution to the literature given the detail with which I have tried to depict social policy-making in global institutions.

The second moment that determined this project was a conversation I had with a senior researcher from the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (DELSA) at the OECD, in December 2019, when I assisted to the launch of the OECD Employment Outlook 2019 'The future of work' in Geneva. He told me that this agency had experienced a drastic change in orientation in the last year: the new Jobs Strategy of 2018 and current reports were giving inequality and inclusiveness a much more central place than they used to have in their discourse. In his eyes, the OECD had decisively abandoned the orthodox liberal position which it had promoted in previous decades (see McBride et al., 2008; OECD, 1994, 2006). Although I was aware that the inclusive growth agenda was important in the OECD, changing the predominance of efficiency and competitiveness as policy goals (Mahon, 2019), I did not have a notion of the paradigm shift that the future of work agenda had spurred in terms of their social and labour policies. Similar transformations happened, as I said, at the ILO, in the WB and the World Economic Forum - a broad process of ideational and institutional change that I explain in detail in this study. For some reason it remained unnoticed by students of global social policy. Organisations that seemed primarily concerned about the business climate and competitiveness, had abruptly turned their attention to global inequalities and the effect that new technologies could have on them.

The previous made me include the OECD case in this study, given the importance of these institutional changes, catalysed by predictions of a future with larger inequalities, more polarisation and less power for workers in the world. At the same event in Geneva, I was amazed by a statement made by the director of the ILO Research Department saying that, to his surprise, the OECD Employment Outlook of 2019 could have perfectly been the main input of the ILO Centenary Declaration, remarking the new affinity between both institutions. Positions in global social policy were moving: the ILO was being driven by a pro-employer discourse, while the OECD was leaving behind its neoliberal trajectory and getting closer to the ILO. This was reflected in the Global Deal, the partnership both institutions were going to seal for promoting decent conditions and inclusive growth for the future of work (ILO and OECD, 2018).

The WB, on its part, had been isolated in the 'liberal' pole of global governance, but it was also experiencing a key restructuration in its understanding of social policy. The Bank's inclusive growth agenda (Deeming and Smyth, 2018; World Bank, 2008, 2012a) had led the institution to take more seriously workers' protections; to adopt a universalistic perspective on safety nets and social benefits beyond the pro-poor discourse that had characterised this institution in recent decades (World Bank, 2011, 2016a). The future of work agenda was going to be the stage for a substantive re-elaboration of their social policies, supporting measures that could be considered even more radical than those of the ILO/OECD –e.g. a universal basic income (Gentilini et al., 2020) or a 'pentapartite' model of social dialogue that included non-standard workers (Packard et al., 2019). The WB was foreseeing a 'changing nature of work' in which flexibility was going to be the norm, and therefore it supported the Danish model of flexible security to balance that situation with social protection (World Bank, 2019b). Considering the recent history of the WB, having played a key part in the so-called Washington Consensus (Babb, 2013; Williamson, 2008), these developments marked a sharp twist in terms of policy paradigms. It was a process that deserved to be observed more in detail, given its relevance for global social governance – and this is precisely what I do in this study.

The theoretical and methodological approach

The previous section indicated a process of institutional change in each of the cases of this research. Among the many approaches available in the literature to make sense of this type of phenomena (for a panoramic view, Amenta and Ramsey, 2010), I have chosen a conceptual strategy based on discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008, 2017). This perspective looks at the role of discourse in institutionalised settings – basically understood as interactions in communicative and coordinative instances-, in order to explain how organisations change. In effect, I hold that the life of international agencies relies on documents: declarations, reports, mandates, frameworks and strategies. To study their institutional transformations, I referred to a large number of publications prepared by multilateral agencies in their respective future of work agendas, analysing the issues they focused on, the policy ideas they advocated for and the conceptual grounds of their approaches. Based on the notion, explained above, that examining documents was not enough to depict the dynamics involved in their institutional contexts, I also held interviews with a variety of policy-makers and officials from these agencies, all of whom played a vital role in their initiatives on digitalisation, technological change and labour market regulations. The details about my research strategy are explained in a specific chapter devoted to that aspect.

Additionally, my conceptual approach was critically informed by multiple streams analysis (Kingdon, 2014; Zahariadis, 2007). The latter studies the development of policy agendas: when policy windows open due to external factors, institutions incorporate new themes and put in motion a set of ‘streams’ that define the final outcome of such development. These streams are three in this framework: problems, policies and politics, and the evolution of an agenda depends on the specific intersection of them. In that line, I have analysed how international organisations have defined the problems for the future of jobs, making reference to past agendas in social policy that informed their particular positions on labour issues. The way in which problems were constructed justified certain policy solutions, which varied in each organisation as I suggested before. The role of politics was crucial in my analysis, as it shed light on the agenda-setting processes that gave the future of work prominence in their institutional discourse in the 2010s. At the same time, internal politics defined which actors were most influential, determining the contribution of determinate research departments, member states or social partners in their policy-making. This study, therefore, contributes to the study of international organisations by proposing a model of analysis focused on discourse and multiple streams, and a precise methodological strategy to examine social agendas at the global level.

Outline of the chapters

I will now describe the structure and contents covered in the thesis. Chapter 1 presents the context of the study, defining the academic area it is addressing – social and labour policy in global governance. The first section refers to key approaches to international organisations in the scholarship, as well as the central concepts of the study. I introduce the notion of global labour policy; the governance mechanisms that different global actors have to influence countries in relation to labour affairs, and the specific agendas pursued by them. The future of work agenda is examined briefly here to then present the research questions that guide the study. The second part of the chapter systematises the theoretical approach, discussing

critically the usefulness of multiple streams analysis to make sense of international organisations. It is then complemented by institutional theory and discursive institutionalism, building a model of institutional dynamics and streams in organisational settings. Chapter 2 explains the methodological plan of the research, first assessing alternative approaches from the literature on global social governance. I propose a comparative design focused on a content analysis of reports from the ILO, the OECD and the WB in relation to the future of work, and the realisation of interviews with personnel from those institutions. It concludes with a note on the ethical guidelines followed by the thesis.

Chapter 3 studies the construction of the future of work as a global social problem in the 2010s. Indeed, international organisations engaged with this theme only after it had already been defined as an issue by academics, the media, international consultancies and global think tanks. The chapter analyses the debate that took place between them and their key ideas, which were going to influence the efforts made by my case studies. I propose at the beginning an alternative perspective to this trend that moves away from realism and considers the future as a construction of discourse. I present an original understanding of global social issues, inspired by social problems theory and constructivism. Such understanding looks at the claims and responses given by influential actors in terms of shaping how problems are defined. My key hypothesis in this chapter is that the future of work as such does not have an empirical existence but as a discursive construction. In that line, I study the claims that shaped the future of jobs debate internationally in the 2010s: that the world is going through a ‘fourth industrial revolution’; that ‘robots are coming for our jobs’ and that technological change will worsen already existing inequalities in different areas. The engagement of international organisations with this agenda was, I suggest, critically inspired by such claims.

Chapter 4 analyses the future of work agenda at the ILO and the creation of the ‘human-centred approach’. I start by looking at the agenda-setting process, contextualising the emergence of this theme in relation to the ILO centenary in 2019. The chapter examines the problem stream –how the ILO secretariat framed the future of work, mostly associated to technological change- to then pay attention to the politics stream. The latter in the ILO case was referred to the partners’ interests first and foremost – which had to be constructed through meetings and publications, all of which are studied in that section. I present then the position of the Employers and the Workers Groups on the future of work debates, indicating their fundamental contrasts. The policy stream in this chapter is focused on the elaboration of the mentioned human-centred agenda by the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work, which met between 2017 and 2019. Finally, my analysis turns to the political disputes that took place in the 108th session of the International Labour Conference of 2019, where the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work was made, changing dramatically the meaning of the human-centred perspective initially proposed by the Global Commission.

Chapter 5 focuses on the WB and the OECD cases, both of which represent what I called the ‘inclusive-growth’ approach to the future of work. It starts by explaining the historical similarities between both institutions –their neoliberal heritage; the predominance of economists in them and their recent trajectory towards an inclusive conception of development. I then start analysing the WB case, particularly the influence of past agendas in their current approach to the future of jobs. The problem stream is described in relation to

flagship reports –the World Development Reports in the 2010s among them. The policy stream describes the recent support in the WB of a flexicurity model of social policy and the relevance of investing in people for the changing nature of work. My examination of the OECD case follows a similar structure. It starts by referring to past Jobs Strategies in the institution, making a detailed study of the making of the new framework ‘Good jobs for all in a changing world of work’ from 2018. I explain as well the role of governments in setting the agenda, as well as the involvement of businesses and trade unions at the OECD social policy-making. I then define the problems of the future for the OECD, finally looking to the policy prescriptions given to prepare workers for technological change and address raising inequalities at work. In both cases, I apply my theoretical model of institutional dynamics to make sense of the mechanisms and powers involved in each of their agendas.

The last chapter (6) reflects on the broader implications of the future of work agenda for global social policy. The main idea I put forward is that in the 2010s international organisations, experts and interests groups agreed on a common transnational policy paradigm that came to replace previous paradigms and ideational divergences in global governance. This paradigm saw technological development as structured by a creative destruction logic, inspired by Joseph Schumpeter’s (1994) view of the economy. The role of the state in this new paradigm –the ‘Schumpeterian social investment state’, as I call it- was to transform institutions to adapt the workforce for technological innovations, and at the same time mitigate the destructive potential they entail. Social and labour policies, thus framed, are represented as a tool for technological change, having substantial implications for different policy field –e.g. restructuring education systems based on ‘robot-proof’ and creative skills. The international consensus about this reorientation of state institutions led, I conclude, to the definitive erosion of the divide between economic and social institutions in global governance, as its major players fundamentally agreed on the problems and policies for the future of jobs. The final section of the chapter mentions that, within this common policy paradigm, there are ‘varieties of social investment’: institutions interpret the meaning of ‘the social’ in various ways, being the WB focused on the ‘individual’ implications of technological change; the OECD on the ‘collective’ aspects, and the ILO on the ‘human’ dimension.

Chapter 1: Research context and theoretical framework

a. Context of the study: social and labour policy in global governance

This chapter presents the subject and conceptual basis of the study. It starts by introducing the fields addressed in it: social governance and, more specifically, labour policy at a global level. This research dialogues with a range of literatures that was necessary to assemble in order to identify its academic contribution and, more importantly, its research questions and aims. The latter are presented after providing some definitions about global labour governance and its main actors: since I am performing a comparative study of international actors, it was appropriate to define their characteristics and orientations according to existing scholarship. After doing so, the second part of the chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study, based on multiple streams analysis and constructivist and discursive institutionalism. The framework will guide my analysis of international organisations later (chapters 4 and 5), looking at the intersection of problems, policies and politics in their respective future of work agendas. The chapter 3, focused on the construction of the future of work as a global issue, as well as the chapter 6 about the implications of this agenda for global social policy, will be loosely based on my ideas on constructivist research exposed in this chapter, and will have additional analytical reflections at the beginning of each. I will now delimit my understanding of global social problems and the place of international institutions in their management.

Global social governance: international organisations and social issues

Modes of governing global problems

In the current context of increasing integration of world political, economic and cultural structures, there are policy issues that are global in character (Payne, 2016). Their study cannot be dissociated from *the governance system* that both defines their characteristics and addresses them through international initiatives. The concept of *global governance* alludes to “collective efforts to identify, understand, or address worldwide problems that go beyond the capacities of individual states to solve... [It is] the capacity within the international system at any moment to provide government-like services and public goods in the absence of a world government” (Weiss, 2013: 99). It is usual to frame global governance as a *system*; this concept refers to a goal-oriented entity which operations are sustained by a structure, i.e. patterns of relationships between positions in the system, in a constantly changing environment (Porpora, 1989). The main goal of governance is basically “organising collective action” in particular policy fields (Prakash and Hart, 1999). Considered as a system, global governance produces specific outcomes: *global public goods* that countries alone cannot provide (Kaul, 2013) and *regimes*, that is, sets of norms, principles and rules (Krasner, 1982) that make “actors’ expectations converge in a given issue-area” (Levi-Faur, 2011: 13). Actors in the governance system work with variable levels of interdependence and coordination: in cases of ‘tight coupling’, they operate with significant levels of standardisation through a centralised authority; they are ‘loosely coupled’ when agents maintain their autonomy (Babb and Chorev, 2016; Meyer, 2007).

From an agential perspective, the governance system is composed by national governments, international organisations and civil society associations, among many other actors, who act as *global governors*. These are “authorities who exercise power across borders for purposes of affecting policy. Governors thus create issues, set agendas, establish and implement rules or programs, and evaluate and/or adjudicate outcomes” (Avant et al., 2012, p. 2). As the definition highlights, they do not only correspond to decision-makers – e.g. international bodies or multilateral agencies, who alongside states define the main orientations of global regimes- but also to actors that influence decisions from a normative or intellectual role. The structural position they hold in the map of global governance is intimately linked to the *mechanisms of governance* they can access to. Abbott and colleagues (2015) have proposed four mechanisms through which global actors organise collective action: *hierarchy*, or a top-down imposition of patterns of action and norms; *delegation*, when the governor recurs to a third party to realise their goals; *collaboration*, or the direct participation in decision-making through soft power; and finally, *orchestration*, when a variety of contrasting interests are mediated by a global governor to reach some sort of compromise or consensus (Table 1). The broad conceptualisation of governors –including civil society actors and interest groups-, alongside the mentioned governance mechanisms, will provide a framework to make sense of global labour policy and its main players.

Table 1: Four modes of governance

	Direct	Indirect
Hard	Hierarchy	Delegation
Soft	Collaboration	Orchestration

Source: Abbott et al (2015: 9)

It would not be an exaggeration to affirm that virtually *all* policy fields have been managed via international regimes to a certain extent (Martin and Simmons, 2012). The area that deals with social policy –measures oriented to satisfy basic needs, increasing welfare and improving living conditions (Gough, 2013a)- has been conceptualised in the literature as *global social governance*. Bob Deacon (2007a: 143) has defined it as “a number of competing and overlapping institutions, all of which have some stake in shaping global social policy towards global social problems”. In terms of the public goods this system delivers, we can find redistributive policies, various types of rights and social regulations (Deacon and Stubbs, 2013). Governors frequently participate in debates related to social issues through the spread of *knowledge and ideas*, on the one hand, and on the other, through the realisation of *events* where stakeholders meet to discuss and make decisions about particular social issues (Kaasch & Martens 2015). Interactions and relations between actors in this field are highly politicised, involving often contrasting views on social protection, health policy, housing, employment regulation, and the many dimensions associated to welfare. Despite transnational social problems affect ordinary people from all over the world, the shaping of global social governance is usually determined by policy elites (Stone, 2008) and advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), who interact in different ways to make decisions about how to manage them.

There are several conceptual points that should be touched upon before focusing on global labour policy. The first is that in this study I develop a *political* approach to international organisations, among the several perspectives that exist in the literature to make sense of them (see Barkin, 2013; Martin and Simmons, 2012). For example, an economics-based understanding of these actors would interpret the collective action problems they face and assess their efficacy in their tasks (e.g. Drezner, 2014). Political perspectives, on the contrary, look at this object of study focusing on actors, understanding their role in relation to broader economic, political and cultural structures. The concepts of roles and powers are key to that matter. International bodies are *organisations* in the sense that they are goal-oriented actors that perform tasks that individuals or countries alone cannot achieve; they have functional and power structures that differentiate roles in their architecture, and are constantly interacting with an external environment that presents constant challenges to their agendas (Johnson, 2008: 253ff.). In relation to such goals, as international organisations, they have interests and mandates set by their foundational texts and their particular role in the world polity (Kaasch and Martens, 2015).

The most immediate function international bodies have is related to their cooperative efforts to solve global problems -the main starting point of liberal international political economy (Cohn, 2012)-, but there are two additional roles that need to be stressed to understand their actual significance. First, realist scholars remember that the governance system has been built on power relations between states and international forces. For instance, the United Nations (UN) has been often considered a 'tool of great powers': "in this view, the UN is a creature of the world's strongest states... to serve their interests" (Barnett & Finnemore, 2009, p. 43). An analogue realist approach, now focused on conflict and interests between multilateral agencies, holds that the global governance system is not only fractured by inter-states conflicts, but it is also divided by *internal ideological disputes*. These have been particularly evident in global social policy, as two 'discourse factions' (Münch, 2016) have historically coexisted at the heart of the system: a social democratic one, represented by the International Labour Organization and other humanitarian UN agencies, and a liberal pole led by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Deacon, 2014; Plagerson and Patel, 2017). These factions have also been understood as a divide between 'social' institutions, concerned about rights and equity, and 'economic' ones, focused on growth and competitiveness (Stoll, 2018). I will come back to this point extensively in the last chapter.

Secondly, there is a vast literature on the role of multilateral agencies in *policy transfer*, "the process by which actors borrow policies developed in one setting to develop programmes and policies within another" (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 346). Among the various forms of transfer that international organisations promote, there is a distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' forms of transfer (Stone, 2004, 2008), very much related to the aforementioned discussion on governance modes. The first includes *coercive* policy transfer, when the most powerful nations and multilateral agencies impose a given policy path (Dobbin et al, 2007; Gilardi, 2013; Meseguer & Gilardi, 2009; Simmons & Elkins, 2004). Coercion works through different mechanisms: by direct imposition or by the exercise of conditionality realised by international financial institutions (Babb, 2013; Babb and Carruthers, 2008; Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000). On its part, *soft* forms of transfer might include the promotion of ideas, and

the creation of policy networks. International organisations spread ideas and policy paradigms by proposing ‘lessons’ based on previous successful experiences (Meseguer, 2005; Rose, 1991, 2004); by benchmarking (Dominique et al, 2013) and elaborating performance-related indicators (Kelley and Simmons, 2015; Lehtonen, 2011), or; by constructing standards and norms for national governments (Boli and Lechner, 2015; Meyer, 2010). Another form of transfer is the creation of *networks*: global public policy networks (Stone, 2004), transnational executive networks (Stone, 2013), and knowledge networks such as epistemic communities (Haas, 1992, 2011). The importance of international organisations lies on these forms of transfer, which critically depend on their governance mechanisms, which I will explain now.

The structure of global labour policy: governance mechanisms

The ‘social’ dimensions managed by global governance are various, as I mentioned, but *work* has a privileged place in the field. Work is a central dimension in social life: a way of making a living; a path to self-realisation or alienation; a source of integration or exclusion from a broader collective (Dubet, 2009). Here I understand it as any human activity oriented to the production of economic or symbolic value, paradigmatically represented by wage labour (Budd, 2013), or towards the reproduction of society, in the form of public work or domestic labour (Huws, 2014). Depending on the angle that one takes to examine work, it is possible to find a wide range of elements that are subject to social policy at present: employment, industrial relations, wage levels, skills development, workers’ rights, informality, migration, and the list continues (Beamish and Biggart, 2006; Budd, 2011). These aspects have been normally addressed by states on a national level, for instance, through the regulation of employment relations (Streeck, 2005) or labour market policies and state programmes to support groups temporarily or permanently excluded from employment (Clegg, 2015).

Work has been central not only for state policies but also for the main actors of global social governance as it is at the core of many of their policy goals and mandates: it is crucial for social justice and human rights –key values in United Nations agencies-, as well as for international economic institutions and their pursue of growth and development.

There is a substantial difference between national and global regimes, especially in terms of their governance. Mattli and Woods, to that regard, suggest that

national regulation is primarily about hard rules, that is, laws made, implemented, and enforced by governments. By contrast, much of global regulation has traditionally been soft law, that is, voluntary standards, best practices, and their like (2009: 3)

Global labour policy (GLP), in that sense, has different instruments from those of states, who regulate markets through laws and government oversight (Carruthers, 2011). GLP refers to the collective efforts made by transnational actors to manage working conditions and employment on a worldwide scale (O’Brien, 2014b). The main reason why global governance deals with labour issues in the first place has to do with the recognition of certain problems that traditional, nation-based governance methods cannot successfully manage (Meardi and Marginson, 2014). On the one hand, there are situations that take place in virtually all regions and labour markets, although in different degrees – for instance, the realities of exploitation and forced labour; gender disparities; harassment at work; lack of social protection, etc. On

the other, if we consider that international organisations have been created to promote economic growth and expanding individual rights (Boli and Lechner, 2015; Meyer, 2010), it is understandable that they develop initiatives to ensure that work respects basic normative principles and that governments create employment in a sustainable fashion. The objective of making global labour policies depends on each international institution, but as will be clearer below, their interest in the world of work is deeply rooted in their respective mandates.

It must be noted that in this field there is not a single, consensual policy objective that unifies different voices on labour-related issues, as it happens in other areas of global governance with diverse goals and positions (Cohn, 2012; O'Brien and Williams, 2016). I will demonstrate this idea in the following section on the main agendas in the field of GLP. At the same time, governance mechanisms to influence GLP vary depending on the international actor that we consider: it is possible to find the four types mentioned above (following Abbott et al., 2015). International financial institutions have *hierarchical* tools to coercively impose labour reforms via financial conditionality (Blanton et al., 2015; Peksen and Blanton, 2017); the ILO orchestrates the interests of governments, employers and workers (Baccaro, 2015; Thomas and Turnbull, 2020) and creates international standards which implementation is *delegated* to countries (Hendrickx et al., 2016); agencies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *collaborate* with governments offering expertise and policy strategies (Mahon, 2011; McBride and Watson, 2019), while business and labour associations *cooperate* with multilateral organisations to influence their policy-making (Casey, 2004; Deacon, 2013a; Louis, 2016; Standing, 2010; Woodward, 2008). Regional institutions such as the European Union or the ASEAN community certainly have a role in their members' orientations, acting as for a where labour ministers can discuss new organisational strategies (Hendrickx et al., 2016), but given their regional reach they cannot be considered global players strictly speaking.

Processes in global labour policy: actors and their agendas

The variety of mechanisms and actors involved in GLP has led their agendas to run in parallel with one another, although thematically they tend to address the same international trends. Examining such agendas and the role of the main players in this field, which will be studied in detail in the following chapters, is crucial at this point of this study. In this section, I present the global agendas in labour governance previous to the future of work debates from the 2010s, introducing as well the cases that I am going to compare. In my perspective, it is clear that since the establishment of a global governance system to deal with social issues, GLP has *constantly responded to structural transformations* in the world economy. As a matter of fact, Braithwaite and Drahos (2000: 222–237) have noted that the globalisation of work-related norms has its roots in several historical processes: the expansion of colonial rule and the creation of modern empires before the twentieth century; the creation of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) after the first world war; the link between trade policies and labour standards since the cold war. From the 1990s, the global labour governance was primarily concerned about the consequences of economic globalisation for the world of work (McBride and Williams, 2001; Standing, 2008). At the same time, the field was characterised by a normative rift between the ILO's emphasis on providing decent work in the global economy, and the international financial institutions that privileged economic growth and trade

liberalisation as their most relevant policy goals (O'Brien, 2014a). It is time to focus on these actors and their changing role in global labour governance.

a. International Labour Organization (ILO)

The ILO is the specialised agency in the United Nations system on the world of work (ILO, 2016b); it is therefore the only multilateral organisation exclusively committed to this theme. It was created after the First World War in 1919, alongside the League of Nations and with the specific mandate of promoting class compromise to avoid communist revolutions worldwide (Deacon, 2015). Its role became to generate international labour standards and, thus, respond to the 'social question' that industrialisation and urbanisation were causing in virtually all the world (Rodgers et al., 2009). Since its birth, the ILO publishes Conventions – mandatory norms for member states- and Recommendations –soft-law guidelines, with which it exerts moral pressure over countries. Also, it plays a significant role in producing conceptual frameworks, reports and statistics on labour-related topics (Deranty and MacMillan, 2012; Thomas and Turnbull, 2018; Vosko, 2002). The ILO has a tripartite structure in which representatives from governments, employers and workers have a voice in the Governing Body and the International Labour Conference, where yearly these partners meet to deliberate on new norms or orientations for the organisation (Baccaro, 2015; Cox, 1977; La Hovary, 2018b; Maupain, 2020).

The relationship of these partners have historically varied, and lately it has been marked by several political disputes between the Employers and Workers Groups² (La Hovary, 2015). The ILO secretariat, even without a voting role in policy-making instances, plays a key role in pushing agendas and providing technical support to the social partners (Deacon, 2013a, 2015). The ILO's staff -part of the International Labour Office- does not follow the principle of tripartism (La Hovary, 2015). It is composed by officials appointed by the organisation's Director-General, who are supposed to be autonomous in their decisions vis-à-vis the influence "from any governments or from any other authority external to the Organization", according to its constitution (ILO, 2012). In terms of the ILO role in global governance, it must be said that it is the only agency that can legitimately produce labour standards. Its governance mechanisms have transitioned since the 1990s from a hard-law approach –which norms many times failed to make an impact in national regulations (Peksen and Blanton, 2017) towards soft mechanisms of policy transfer. The prime examples are the publication of Declarations almost every decade -soft power texts that operate as normative frameworks on a certain topic (Maupain, 2009)-, or the promotion of voluntary codes of conduct for multinational companies (Hassel, 2008).

In recent decades, ILO agendas have evolved, as suggested above, in line with some structural changes in the economy. After decades of promoting the de-commodification of labour and

² When it comes to the representation of workers and employers, the ILO has a long-standing partnership with two global civil associations: the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE). In the ILO's mentioned institutions, the ITUC and the IOE "provide secretarial support to, respectively, the Workers and Employers' groups, and have a key role in formulating the groups' responses at the Governing Body and the ILC" (La Hovary, 2018b: 40). Although thousands of confederations participate in them, these associations are not necessarily representative of the world's workers and employers in all their diversity, as Standing (2008) has suggested.

full employment, inspired by Polanyi and Keynes (Deutschmann, 2011), the ILO in the late 1990s had to reformulate its normative foundations since the end of the cold war had made their main objective redundant -proposing a rights-based alternative to revolutionary communism (Maupain, 2009). In 1998 the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work was published, promoting four types of rights that became the ILO's *core labour standards*: "freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced and compulsory labor, the abolition of child labor, and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation" (Anner and Caraway, 2010: 153–4). From 1999 such principles became the basis of the *decent work agenda*, which established formal employment as the main normative standard to be pursued by labour policy (Deranty and MacMillan, 2012). In this agenda the ILO's purpose was to offer a 'social' alternative to neo-liberal globalisation (F Hauf, 2015); in 2008 the organisation made the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization that established employment and social rights as conditions for an equal society (Maupain, 2009). Finally, as an extension of the decent work initiatives, in 2011 the *social protection floor agenda* was launched, after a process of continuous internal debates (Deacon, 2013a). It extended the notion of decent conditions to other policy fields beyond the labour sphere: member states were encouraged to provide essential services to their population, as well as social transfers and benefits that allow people to reach a minimum living standard.

b. World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF)

The WB and the IMF – also called 'Bretton Woods institutions' (Woods, 2009)- are two of the most influential economic actors in global governance. I suggested above that these organisations possess two different strategies to govern countries: "the Fund and the Bank have been able to use both financial incentives/penalties and policy expertise in development and economics to push particular policy options" (O'Brien, 2014a: 155). Particularly in situations of sovereign debt or balance-of-payments crises, when countries need of a lender of last resort to overcome default, these institutions have pushed forward a liberalisation agenda both in developed and emerging economies. In general terms, the discourse of their policy prescriptions has traditionally been focused on boosting countries' competitiveness through labour market deregulation and poverty reduction strategies (International Labour Organization, 2005). Flexibility a source of adaptability for companies in times of crisis, and cutting down social expenditure for fiscal consolidation, have been part of the 'structural adjustments' demanded by their loans since the 1980s (Haworth et al., 2005). Financial conditionality is not the only source of power for the WB and the IMF, as they also influence national work and employment regulations through policy advice and knowledge production.

The WB provides financial services and policy prescriptions to middle-income and developing countries, as well as financial support in cases of crisis. Its headquarters are located in Washington D.C., though its offices are spread all over the world. Due to its governance model that gives veto power to its majoritarian shareholder – the United States, it is an organisation that tends to be considered as an extension of American dominance in international politics (Vestergaard and Wade, 2013; Woods, 2006). In any case, it is a complex agency, running development programmes in dozens of countries, possessing a secretariat that collects international data on social and labour policy issues, operating with relative autonomy with

respect to the Bank's stakeholders³ (Marshall, 2008). In the last three decades, the WB has explicitly aimed to be considered a 'knowledge bank'; yearly publications such as the World Development Report or the Doing Business Report are a key input in global policy debates (Cammack, 2003). The former are often focused on macro-trends in the world of work of developing economies, (see World Bank, 1995, 2013, 2019), whereas the latter rank member countries, including advanced economies, assessing the ease of doing business and the presence of 'burdensome' regulations in them – including labour standards (Stein, 2014).

Initially, after its birth in 1944, the WB offered funding for infrastructure building or agriculture promotion in Third World countries, aiming to limit Soviet influence in them (Woods, 2009: 249). In the 1960s, the institution engaged with formal education expansion, framing it as a key pathway to development, under the idea of the 'knowledge society' (Mundy et al., 2016). In terms of labour policy, since the 1980s, and in the context of successive financial crises in the developing world, the Bank included labour reforms to its 'structural adjustment' programmes, which had as a primary objective to increase employer's power to hire, fire and regulate work (Caraway et al., 2016). This perspective was still predominant in the WB in 2003, when it started publishing the Doing Business Reports that included labour market 'rigidities' as a negative factor for competitiveness. However, in the 2010s, the WB adopted the ILO decent work and the social protection floor agendas. This was partly due to the de-legitimisation of the Washington Consensus after the great recession (Güven, 2012), a process that had begun in the previous decade with the civil anti-globalisation movement (Martell, 2017). The World Development Report 2013 'Jobs' set out the approach to labour policy displayed in subsequent publications that decade, arguing for a 'regulation plateau' that moved between innovation-curtailing protections for workers and the provision of basic services and reskilling, necessary to build resilience against emerging risks (World Bank, 2013, 2014, 2016b).

The IMF, on the other hand, is an agency that was created after the Second World War with the mandate of overseeing international financial stability, related to exchange rates and sovereign debt. Its secretariat is concentrated in Washington D.C., not spread in different regions as in the WB case. On a national level, it provided loans and technical advice for countries with different levels of economic development (IMF, 2016). As the WB, the Fund is a relevant source of economic knowledge and statistics, expressed in flagship reports and growth forecasts – for example, the periodic World Economic Outlook. Unlike the Bank, the IMF does not possess a department especially dedicated to work and employment matters (O'Brien, 2014a), which partly explains that it has not been as influential in terms of advancing new concepts or frameworks as the WB. This is not to say that the IMF does not have a strong interest in this area, however. Caraway and colleagues pointed out in 2016 that "on average, about a quarter of the IMF programs after 1987 have labor conditions. Labor conditionally reached a sample peak in 1999 when nearly 44 percent of all IMF programs included at least one labor condition" (Caraway et al., 2016: 30). More recent data indicates that, though the

³ Still, there are tensions in the WB between its editorial controls and the politics of the organisation. For example, the resignation of Joseph Stiglitz in 2000, then a resonant anti-neoliberal voice, that led to the designation of Laurence Summers, former director of the Treasury Department (Toye, 2009). Another case was the resignation of chief economist Paul Romer in a scandal involving manipulating in the Doing Business Report to harm business confidence in socialist-led Chile in the late 2010s (The Economist, 2018).

proportion of loans with social policies attached –including labour market regulations- did not grow dramatically in the next following two decades (Güven, 2018).

The involvement of IMF programmes in developed countries found a paradigmatic example in the management of the Euro crisis at the beginning of the 2010s. In words of Blanchard and other IMF researchers, the institution recommended to follow the Nordic flexicurity model during the post-Great Recession period, arguing for an extension of unemployment schemes to maintain aggregate demand with “flexibility in wage-setting” and “public sector wage cuts” (Blanchard et al., 2014: 16). The conditions demanded by the IMF in the Greek crisis indicate that, more than following the Nordic model, the Fund was still inspired by its conventional orthodox formula (Kentikelenis et al., 2016). In terms of the effect that IMF conditions have had for labour policies, the evidence suggests that, same as WB loans, they have had the effect decreasing labour rights in recipient countries, especially individual rights over those of collective nature (Reinsberg et al., 2019). Despite the substantive weight of labour reforms in the IMF’s strategies, this theme has not concentrated its attention in terms of knowledge production. Precisely for that reason this research does not include the IMF as a case study as its involvement in GLP agendas has been far more limited than that of the WB⁴:

The IMF does not have a specific unit which deals with labor issues. Attempts to articulate a single overarching Fund view have not been successful. As a result, country-level IMF representatives are free to develop or not develop contacts with labor groups (O’Brien, 2014a: 159)

The previous means that the IMF involvement in the field has been primarily dependent on domestic politics and each national case (Caraway et al., 2016). Furthermore, it partly explains that the IMF does generate *global* agendas in labour policy, sustained by a set of concepts, evidence and interactions with other international actors – as in the case of the ILO, the OECD or the WB. That explains their limited engagement with the future of work agenda in the 2010s, representing the main reason why the IMF has not been considered as a separate case study for this research.

c. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

The OECD is a multilateral agency that, contrary to the ILO or the international financial institutions, is not precisely global, or at least it has not been so until recently. Usually considered the ‘club of the rich countries’, the OECD groups those developed nations

committed to democracy and the market economy from around the world to support sustainable economic growth, boost employment, raise living standards, maintain financial stability assist other countries’ economic development, contribute to growth in world trade (Martens and Jakobi, 2010: 1)

Even though the organisation was initially conceived as a group of transatlantic liberal democracies, it has expanded in recent decades its membership to leading economies from

⁴ The IMF sporadically published reports on the impact of technology on jobs (Brussevich, 2018; IMF, 2018), but this theme was just not as central as it was in the WB, where it was at the core of the institution’s research agenda in the 2010s.

other regions – e.g. Poland joined in 1995, South Korea in 1996 and Chile in 2010 (Clifton and Díaz-Fuentes, 2011). Other non-democratic economic powers –for example, China- are not members, marking a difference with other groups such as the G8 or the G20 that do not have this political filter in terms of membership. The OECD, unlike those organisations, has an autonomous secretariat located in Paris, which is led by the OECD Council that makes strategic decisions in terms of agendas and resources’; various Departments coordinate events and publications, while several Committees evaluate implementation in member countries (Martens and Jakobi, 2010). Even though the secretariat is relatively autonomous, government ministers can set agendas and propose new problems in diverse thematic meetings coordinated by the OECD a few times a decade (e.g. OECD, 2016, 2018).

The contribution of this organisation to global governance relies on the OECD’s capacity to set agendas and to offer a forum for international debates (Ougaard, 2010). Developing normative and technical frameworks for countries is also part of their tasks, though its governance methods rely on delegation of implementation and ‘naming and shaming’ countries that do not comply their strategies in the policy fields they oversee (Marcussen, 2004). With respect to global labour governance, countries’ performance is constantly assessed in two annual reports, the OECD Economic Outlook and the OECD Employment Outlook. They are produced by two different agencies: the Economics Department and the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (DELSA). In work-related questions, the two bodies have supported different approaches to labour and employment regulation, though in recent decades the OECD has published successive Jobs Strategies (OECD, 1996, 2006, 2018a) that have presented a unified and official position on labour policy.

The Jobs Strategies have responded to specific problems identified by the OECD in the labour markets of its member countries. Under the predominance of the Economics Department, the 1996 strategy was concentrated on high unemployment in advanced economies, which was expected to be reduced by eliminating ‘rigidities’ and adopting a supply-side approach by governments (Armingeon, 2004, 2007; Dostal, 2004; OECD, 1994, 1996). The 2006 strategy addressed deficits in inclusiveness from marginalised groups, women and the long-term unemployed, proposing that either the strict neoliberal approach or the Nordic flexicurity model would activate them (Mahon, 2011, 2013, 2014; Mahon and McBride, 2008; OECD, 2006). The past decade was marked by the responses to the great recession in OECD publications (McBride and Merolli, 2013) and, as I examine in one of the chapters, the organisation placed the future of work at the core of the new strategy published in 2018 (McBride and Watson, 2019; OECD, 2018a). The OECD Jobs Strategies have not necessarily determined the course of labour regulations in its member states (Armingeon, 2004), partly due to the role of collaboration and consultation the OECD possesses; nonetheless, it is a key voice the GLP field, also developing active partnerships with the WB, the ILO and the civil society actors that I am going to introduce below.

d. Civil society: international business and labour associations

Intergovernmental organisations are not the only players in GLP that have a global reach. Associations of workers and employers, respectively, are active participants in the policy-making processes of the agencies mentioned above – the ILO, the OECD and the WB. To be sure, economic actors may look for influence individually, not taking part of any collective

entity, as it has been the case with multinational firms – they often partner with multilateral organisations and adapt their supply chains to social responsibility codes (Amoore, 2002; Royle, 2010). Even so, capital and labour have been most influential in GLP through confederations that represent a vast number of national and regional associations, as well as a variety of industries and economic sectors. When it comes to employers and workers, their associations are linked to the three institutional spheres in employment-related arrangements: national, sectoral and transnational (Lansbury, 2018), which explains their truly global character. The previous does not mean, of course, that they represent *all* forms of employment or *all* companies: both international trade unions and business confederations speak for actors operating in the formal economy, and naturally only considering those who participate in an association. For instance, the exclusion of Global South economic actors is certainly a limitation that international trade unions face at present (Koch and Kryst, 2015), and questions have been raised about their appropriateness to represent workers in a globalised and diverse world (Standing, 2008).

It must be noted from the previous that business and labour associations are not policy-makers themselves, but *collaborators* with agencies that have the resources and legitimacy to influence national regulations. Their role in GLP is inevitably mediated by the participation mechanisms of each international organisation with whom they interact, be it on a regularly or rather sporadically through specific initiatives and partnerships. In terms of business, I have suggested that companies may find a place in international policy debates individually, especially in fora such as the Davos meetings from the World Economic Forum (Stone, 2010). Still, business associations take part in intergovernmental organisations in a more regular basis, representing the interests of a large range of companies on a global scale. The International Organisation of Employers (IOE), for one, represents the voice of business at the ILO and has been part of its tripartite structure since its birth, participating in the Governing Body, collaborating with publications and standard-making procedures (La Hovary, 2015). They represent hundreds of business federations in all world regions and sectors (IOE, 2020). It has normally been considered a ‘brake’ to initiatives or policies promoted by workers in the institution (Rodgers et al., 2009), and in the last decade they have questioned the right to strike (La Hovary, 2013) and have opposed to the regulation of work in of global supply chains (Thomas and Turnbull, 2018). On the other hand, Business at OECD (BIAC) represents employers’ associations from OECD countries. Unlike the IOE, which has voice and vote in the ILO governance model, BIAC is just invited to international meetings and to comment on publications (BIAC, 2020), but the OECD is not a tripartite institution.

International trade unions, at least those interlinked with multilateral institutions, have existed since the end of First World War and the creation of the ILO. A historical schism between unions in the capitalist and the communist spheres limited the possibility of creating a global organisation (Harrod and O’Brien, 2002). By the end of the 1980s, partly due to the unification and globalisation of the market economy, labour internationalism advanced towards an all-encompassing form or organisation. Thus, Global Unions was formed in 2002 grouping a number of international sectoral federations with the aim of opposing the expansion of transnational capitals and multinational enterprises through different campaigns and publications (O’Brien, 2018). From a conceptual view, these bodies defend the rights of the ‘everyworker’: they represent the worker as an abstract entity regardless of their social categories, employment status or occupations (Burgmann, 2016). The role of Global

Unions in labour governance is mediated by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the organisation that represents labour at the ILO. The ITUC collaborates actively with the institution in tripartite instances and is part of the Governing Body, same as the IOE, but has been recently more influential recently given that Director General Guy Ryder (2012-) led the ITUC before assuming that role (Deacon, 2013a). In the OECD, the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) is the voice of labour in the institution, with a collaborative more than deliberative role. To finish with this point, it is worth highlighting that the relationship between business and labour organisations, operating at the heart of the mentioned multilateral agencies, shapes what Farnsworth (2005) calls 'international class conflict', a key element to consider in the study of GLP.

The future of work and technological change: a new agenda in GLP in the 2010s

The future of work emerged as a key matter of debate and concern in the academia and the media in the past decade. New demonstrations of the potential of artificial intelligence, robotics, the internet of things and 3D printing brought to the fore the need to study its implications for the world of work in the coming years. Analysts had long made predictions about the *disruptive potential of technology* (Kurz, 2010) and industrial production, digitalisation and, more recently, the robotisation of labour were commonly interpreted as an external force that 'impacts' the productive system as a whole. Studies pointed to the *risks of jobs automation* and particularly to the scenario of mass unemployment that labour-saving devices could trigger (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014; Ford, 2015; Arntz et al, 2016, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2016; Frey and Osborne, 2017; McKinsey Global Institute, 2017). Technological development thus re-emerged as a key issue alongside climate change in policy debates and imaginings of future risks (Frase, 2016). If global warming stood out due to its potential environmental consequences, the rise of intelligent technologies seemed as perilous given the *social problems* they could trigger.

Whether the world was at the verge of the 'second machine age' (Brynjolfsson & McAfee 2014), a 'fourth industrial revolution' (Schwab 2016), or a 'coming great transformation' (Stiglitz, 2017), the combination of several technological innovations suggested the world of work could change dramatically in the years to come. On the one side, it was expected to *boost productivity* and increase economic growth (Acemoglu and Restrepo, 2018; Autor and Salomons, 2018); on the other, it could liberate people from wage labour and make conceivable a *post-work world* (Danaher, 2017; Mason, 2015; Snape, et al, 2017; Srnicek & Williams, 2015). Beyond these interpretations, there were also authors that distrusted the mentioned predictions as they tended to overshadow the issues that workers were facing at the present time, such as precariousness or wage inequalities (Wajcman, 2017; Watson, 2012). Overall, there was a certain agreement in the international debate about the need for institutional transformations that prevented major disruptions and exploited the benefits that such technologies could bring to society. There was *no consensus*, however, about what social policies should be implemented by national states, or what standards should be established by international organisations at a global level.

International organisations engaged with the discussions that were taking place in the academia and the public opinion in many countries at the same time (Grimshaw, 2020). I will examine the future of work debate in these spheres in the first empirical chapter of this

research. The main question in that sense is how this theme became a global issue - what actors and mechanisms were involved – in the first place, one so relevant that multilateral agencies that deal with the most salient problems of our time decided to put at the centre of their strategies during the past decade. Table 2 shows the initiatives, publications and outcomes derived from this agenda in the three case studies I am covering, with some reference to civil society actors and additional international actors that contributed to the global policy debates on this theme.

Table 2: Actors in global labour policy: the future of work agenda in the 2010s

Actors	Governance structure	Role in global labour policy	Initiatives on the FoW	Key publication on FoW	Main outcome FoW agenda
International Labour Organization (ILO)	Tripartite organisation with ILO secretariat	International labour standards and global agendas	ILO ‘Future of Work Initiative’ (2015-2019)	ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work report	ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (2019)
Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)	Multilateral agency of richer nations with OECD secretariat	Jobs strategies for member states	OECD Jobs Strategy 2018: ‘Good jobs for all’	OECD Employment Outlook 2019: The future of work	New Jobs Strategy: Good jobs for all in a changing world of work (2018)
World Bank (WB)	Multilateral development bank with semi-autonomous research depts.	Labour plans through financial conditionality; knowledge production	Human Capital Project (2019-)	World Development Report 2019: The changing nature of work	Human Capital Project (2019); ‘Protecting all’ White Paper
Civil society actors	International confederations of national and regional business and labour associations	Representing class interests in intergovernmental organisations	Meetings and events; statement reports	IOE ‘Understanding the future of work’, 2017; ITUC ‘The future of work’, 2017	New source of international class conflict
Other international organisations, less relevant in GLP	Various multilateral agencies from the United Nation system	Producing problem-oriented ideas and policy proposals	Flagship reports focused on new technologies and jobs	UNESCO ‘Artificial intelligence’, 2018; UNIDO ‘Industrial development report’, 2020; WTO ‘World Trade Report 2017’	No evident institutional change

Source: Author. FoW = Future of Work

While organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) or the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) published positioning reports on technological change and its implications for work and production, the cases I have considered here –ILO, OECD and WB- did not only release studies on it. It could be said that they substantially re-oriented their approach to social and labour policy in the context of this agenda, under the shared

notion that the world of work was going through a substantive change. Such process of institutional change is precisely the object to dissect in this study: the initiatives, ideas and outcomes derived from it. The making of the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work in 2019; the generation of the OECD new Jobs Strategy in 2018 ‘Good jobs for all in a changing world of work’; the reorientation of the WB discourse on social policy toward flexicurity in its white paper ‘Protecting all: risk sharing for a diverse and diversifying world of work’ in 2019; all these are the policy processes that I am going to interpret, initially focussing on each individual organisation to then compare their positions and institutional dynamics. It is an exercise that the literature has not addressed. Studies on multilateral agencies and the future of work have either analysed their policy ideas detached from the institutional factors behind them (e.g. Grimshaw, 2020) or just focused on a single organisation instead of asking about changes in global labour policy more broadly (e.g. Janssen, 2019; Mahon, 2019; Novitz, 2020)

Research questions

Based on the previous, the main of this research is:

- How did global labour governance and its main international organisations (ILO, WB, and OECD) engaged with the future of work agenda in the 2010s?

My secondary questions are:

- How did the future of work become a global social problem in the 2010s?
- How was the future of work set in the agenda of these organisations in the past decade?
- What were the main ideas that characterised the problem-definition and policy frameworks developed by these actors to face the future of jobs?
- What was the role of politics in each organisation’s future of work agenda?
- What were the similarities and divergences in their policy approaches?
- How did the future of work agenda transform discourse positions in global labour governance in relation to previous agendas⁵?

b. The theoretical approach: multiple streams analysis and discursive institutionalism

The contextualisation presented above indicated the object of this study: the future of work agenda in global governance and the involvement of relevant international organisations in it. Now it seems appropriate to reflect on the theoretical lenses that I am going to use to look at this phenomenon. The nature of the research problem implies that there are two dimensions that must be explored conceptually before analysing them from an empirical standpoint: the first is the notion of ‘agenda’ in policy studies; the second, policy-making in

⁵ For example, the division between ‘social’ and ‘economic’ actors in the globalisation debate.

organisations in general, and in international agencies in particular. To establish my conception of the first concept, I will recur to the literature on multiple streams analysis, a framework explicitly focused on agendas and the intersection between problems, policies and politics in their development. With regards to the second set of notions, the study adopts institutional theory and more specifically discursive institutionalism to understand the organisational dynamics in motion in my case studies – the ILO, OECD and WB. Prior to describing this particular agenda, it is necessary to define in a rather abstract fashion what agendas are and how policy studies have made sense of them.

What are policy agendas and how to approach them? Introducing multiple streams analysis

The framework I am about to introduce is one of the most utilised and referenced in policy analysis. Multiple streams analysis (MSA) has been adopted and developed by scholars around the world, partly due to its flexibility to be used in conjunction with other theories of public policy (Cairney and Jones, 2016), while at the same time has been considered by scholars as a rather weak framework theoretically speaking for the same reason (Rawat and Morris, 2016). Its simplicity is, perhaps, its greatest asset and its most noticeable flaw; I aim to rescue the positives and overcome its weak spots by resorting to a complementary theory of policy change later. Originally proposed by John Kingdon (2014) in his *Agendas, alternatives and public policies* from 1984, MSA re-elaborated the ‘garbage can model’ (Cohen et al., 1972) that understood organisational decision-making as an intersection of several *streams*: participants, choices, problems and solutions. Kingdon applied this concept of streams of energy or flows to policy-making, presenting them as necessary conditions to make a certain theme occupy the political agenda of a given subsystem. Unlike the policy cycle models that assume a series of stages (Bridgman and Davis, 2003; John, 2012), MSA conceives a number of streams as logical conditions for an agenda to take place, thus kick-starting policy change (Cairney and Jones, 2016; but cf. Howlett et al., 2017). Kingdon defines an *agenda* as

the list of subjects or problems to which government officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time (2014: 3)

Such definition is noticeably limited to a national level of analysis, but MSA can be used to make sense of international or global agendas as well (Lovell, 2016). In any case, agendas have to be *set*, focusing the attention of decision-makers and their surrounding actors – the media, experts, political parties, and the like (Kingdon, 2014: 45ff). Politicians, hence, choose certain themes from a wide range of *alternatives*, and the way in which they approach them depends on the conjunction of three streams that run autonomously, but are interdependent once they have been connected by policy entrepreneurs. Zahariadis summarises well the definition of these streams:

the stream of *problems* includes concerns that individuals inside and outside the policy system have. *Policies* (solutions) are people’s products, usually generated in narrow policy communities; they are answers that may be produced not only when needed. *Politics* is a stream that refers to the broader political discourse within which policy is made. It includes legislators and parties, the national mood or climate of opinion, etc. (2007: 69; emphasis in original)

When the streams cross, it means that a theme receives ‘public’ concern, leading politicians and experts to propose solutions about them, mobilising political will and forces to actually implement those measures (Béland and Howlett, 2016). Kingdon calls this moment a *policy window*: it opens once the three factors have joined together and it can occur not only in relation to ‘real’ problems, but also out of sheer political or strategic interests from decision-makers (2014: 165ff.). In policy making there can be, in that sense, issues without proposed solutions; lack of political will to address them, or a diversion of public attention towards problems created by interest groups inside or outside a given subsystem (in concordance with Cohen et al., 1972).

The critical junctures that determine the creation of a policy window and henceforth a change in the agenda, are triggered by two types of phenomena, as Birkland remarks: “changes in *indicators* of underlying problems... and *focusing events*, or sudden shocks to policy systems that lead to attention and potential policy change” (2013: 175; emphasis added). These categories will be highly relevant in the analysis of the future of work agenda and the indicators and events that marked its policy window at the global level. To finish our characterisation of MSA, I can emphasise that, although it might seem a structure-oriented framework with its focus on variables that surround policy making, it actually highlights “the key role of political agency” (Hawkins and McCambridge, 2020: 317). In particular, the behaviour of *policy entrepreneurs* is crucial, who push to join the different streams and mobilise their specific resources to influence decision-makers and their strategies in line with their own interests (Jones et al., 2016). When applied to a national case, it is possible to highlight the role of members of the parliament, of political parties or civil servants in the opening of a new policy window (Herweg et al., 2015; Zohlnhöfer et al., 2016). Scholars have also introduced in the framework a series of factors that, from the periphery of a given subsystem, influence their political agendas, for example the importance of public opinion (Brunner, 2008) or political networks (Reardon, 2018) to define the problem stream.

Applying MSA to international organisations and limits of the framework

Given that MSA was originally made to study nation-based politics, as I have suggested, studies at the international or global level need to perform a sort of de-contextualisation to make the framework suitable (Ackrill and Kay, 2011). At the risk of being repetitive, the description I have made so far of MSA emphasises the following analytical categories: the three streams, policy windows and their triggers, and policy entrepreneurs. The case of global governance that is at the centre of this study, I argue, can be examined using such notions, especially to organise the specific elements that are relevant in the making of this agenda. MSA has been successfully utilised to make sense of international organisations and their policy making processes. Joachim (2007) has studied agenda-setting on gender issues in the UN system; policy design at the European Union has been scrutinised with a MSA perspective (Ackrill and Kay, 2011); policy entrepreneurs in multilateral negotiations (Blavoukos and Bourantonis, 2011) and the active role of the WB and the IMF as entrepreneurs in national settings (Kusi-Ampofo et al., 2015) are examples of application of MSA on an international scale. To my knowledge, this model has not been used as such in particular studies on GLP or the cases of this research: the ILO, the OECD and the WB.

The deficit in academic literature in that sense presents both an opportunity to innovate and a challenge to operationalise MSA to reframe it in an international-politics scenario. To be sure, the global level implies a larger degree of complexity (Luhmann, 1997), and it is a reality that the analysis just cannot avoid. In agenda-setting in GLP, and in global governance in general, the main difficulty to apply the MSA model is that policy-making on worldwide issues involves several levels –processes in national states and regional bodies, civil society associations and multilateral agencies- and therefore the observer can easily get lost in the multiplicity of variables that can be considered. For that reason, in order to limit the flows that can be included in every stream, this research considers the global problems, policies and politics on the future of work focusing on each case study individually. This means that I will examine the ‘agendas’ –in plural- developed by the ILO, the OECD and the WB, alongside business and labour organisation, and how this theme was set in each of them through their specific governance mechanisms, political processes and institutional possibilities.

Moving from description to explanation: integrating agency and structure in causality

The theory described above is certainly a useful starting point to organise policy-making processes and their occasional messiness, as other models in the literature do (see Béland and Powell, 2016; John, 2012; Petridou, 2014 for extensive reviews). As Acrrill and Kay (2011: 72) rightly affirm, MSA is “only descriptive heuristics to help organize a historical policy narrative”. The story that is told in every chapter about how the future of jobs agenda came to being in each case study will be precisely *organised* narratively distinguishing between an agenda-setting moment, the definition of the problem on this theme, the development of policy alternatives and the political interactions that drove the agenda in one direction or another. It must be noted that this is a predominantly descriptive approach, but the analysis should go a step further and ask for *explanations*: the answer MSA gives to the question ‘why does a policy window open?’ is just: ‘because policy entrepreneurs made it happen’, which is to tautologically suggest that policies change because actors wanted it. At this point we are in need of another theory, of recurring to a ‘multiple lenses’ strategy, as Cairney (2007, 2013) put it that helps to complement MSA, filling its explanatory deficit.

MSA, in all truth, is more a model than a framework. Models present a simple map of a complex, real phenomenon that helps to differentiate between dimensions of analysis and their relationship (Morgan, 2012); the problem for this study is that “whatever the models do, they do not explain in the causal-mechanistic sense” (Reiss, 2013: 115). Frameworks, for their part, are a more fluid representation of a phenomenon, emphasising a ‘causal schema’ with explicit influencing factors (Hess and Ostrom, 2007). If we come back to MSA, we see that the question about precise causes remains open. In this study I aim to explain why international organisations have responded to the future of work agenda in a specific fashion, therefore *causality* should play a part in this theoretical reflections. The literature recognises four pathways to establish it: measuring effects through *probabilities*; *manipulating* elements and assessing their effect; identifying *mechanisms*, related to an underlying structure at play, and; recognising *powers* –individual, physical or institutional- that operate in a given scenario (Cartwright, 2015). Since the two first pathways do not fit with the purpose of the study –I am not measuring effects or manipulating any variable-, the two remaining ones offer a plausible ground to locate the causes of policy change, similarity and divergence between the cases I am covering in the research.

First, although mechanisms can have a natural-science, positivist tone, they will be understood here as patterns of relation that determine the characteristics of a situation, be it in latent or manifest fashion. They refer to a certain structure and the elements that compose it:

simply put, a description of a mechanism helps to explain because what we seek from a scientific explanation to a large extent just is an explication of “*how it works*”... If we seek to gain understanding of a macro-social phenomenon through examining the underlying mechanism this means that we already have some *understanding of the behavior of the parts* (Reiss, 2013: 112–3 emphasis added)

In the case of this study, we find that international organisations have particular governance mechanisms that, on the one hand, set their place in the global policy spheres, and on the other, determine the relationships between the ‘parts’ that integrate them: governing bodies, research departments; social partners; various shareholders or stakeholders, and the like. But this focus on the organisational structure of our cases should not let us ignore the role of agency, the dynamic causal dimension to consider in my approach. Here I can introduce the notion of ‘powers’, i.e. factors that have the ‘capacity’ (Cartwright, 2017) to make a difference in the world. When possessed by social actors, *powers* can be held as a disposition, in a passive state (Mumford, 2009), or as an actual orientation and tendency to determine their behaviour (Bhaskar, 2008: 222). In relation to international organisations, my subject of study here, it is clear that they themselves possess the power to influence global social governance through their respective capacities. In their internal political dynamics they are inhabited by several actors that also have different powers, which they display when they are to influence relevant organisational decisions. These elements are excluded from MSA, due to its already mentioned explanatory shortfall, but they can be developed and operationalised if we introduce institutional theory to make sense of the mechanisms and powers that mobilise the ILO, OECD and WB respectively.

Making sense of organisations: institutional theory and discursive institutionalism

The subject of this study are organisations, and from a MSA perspective I have proposed to look at agenda-setting and policy-making by studying the window represented by the future of work in global governance, as well as the events that have characterised such policy process. The *lack of conceptual development on causality* in MSA is added to other weaknesses that it is necessary to address before I move on to propose an alternative framework for the empirical stage of this study. Added to the problem of causality. I find two other substantive flaws in MSA that can be enhanced by using a complementary theory of policy analysis: First, it has an *ontological ambiguity* in terms of ‘where’ windows and streams can be found. Metaphorical thinking here does not help, and MSA is unfortunately made of analogies than impede a more precise operationalisation. It is an ontological problem because *what* streams are is eluded through analogy: *what* type of entity are problems, policies or politics more precisely? Why are they at the same level analytically speaking? A second limitation of MSA –actually a third if we consider causality as the first that I mentioned- has to do with the outcome of open policy windows. Under the assumptions of the model as outlined above, the joining of the three streams would lead to a change in *policy* – ways of governing a problem area (Colebatch, 2009); however, the implications of an agenda shift can

go well beyond the generation of new programmes or initiatives. It can transform the actual situation of the problem addressed by the agenda; it may transform the correlation of forces between political stakeholders; it can even push an organisation or actor to redefine its mandate in a certain field. These various effects are better captured by the notion of *institutional dynamics*, which I will explain in a second.

The reorientation of MSA towards a firmer theoretical basis that I propose here is inspired by institutional theory and more precisely by discursive institutionalism. Institutional theory is certainly a ‘broad church’ that integrates a wide range of traditions in the social sciences. From the 1970s onwards, the development of ‘new institutional economics’ (Hodgson, 1993, 2000), of sociological institutionalism in organisational theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), and the rise of historical institutionalism in political science (Hall and Taylor, 1996) gave strength to this, now well established, framework. What unites these heterogenous set of theories is the fact that they explain social phenomena, as it is natural, paying attention to institutions that structure how individuals and systems behave. They understand institutions as a “emergent, ‘high-order’ factors above the individual level, constraining or constituting the interests and political participation of actors” (Amenta and Ramsey, 2010: 17).

According to Richard Scott’s definition, *institutions* “consist of cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behaviour” (1995, p. 33). All these elements of institutions are not fixed, although they can appear to be a natural aspect of social life to most actors (Berger and Luckmann, 2002); however, they are subject to processes of *institutionalisation* that create patterns of conduct and negotiate the existing ones (Jepperson, 1991). The mentioned three ‘institutionalisms’ have different approaches to study such pillars and the processes of institutionalisation that shape them: in economics, rational-choice analysis of incentive structures is dominant; in historical institutionalism, path-dependency and critical junctures are the main object, while in sociological institutionalism the focus is on the development of scripts of action based on normative arrangements and common values (Schmidt, 2010). The fourth variant corresponds to ‘discursive institutionalism’ (DI), the perspective I am going to adopt for the empirical stage.

a. The ontology of DI: constructivism and ideas

DI offers a fruitful perspective to study agendas in international organisations (see Clift, 2018 on the IMF; Thomas and Turnbull, 2018 on the ILO), and it is noticeable compatible with MSA. DI is a theoretical approach that stresses the role of communication in policy analysis (Schmidt, 2008): agenda-setting and policy-making are the *result of communicative processes* in which interested actors promote ideas in institutional contexts. There is an articulation in this theory of the three ‘Is’ that contemporary political economy has proposed to make sense of policy developments: interests, ideas and institutions (Béland, 2016; Hall, 1997; Hay, 2004a; Shearer et al., 2016). In line with the previous discussion on the limits of MSA, DI has a stronger stance on ontology, causality and the outcome of policy change. I will start with the first. The ontological basis of DI is *constructivism*, i.e. the epistemological assumption that social and political dynamics are open-ended, contingent and dependent on actors’ perceptions of their reality (Hay, 2004b, 2009). Constructivism also implies a *relativist*

position: since there is no objective reality ‘out there’, but it only exists through meaning and perception, different groups and positions have multiple interpretations that, from a scientific standpoint, are equally valid and open to analysis (Corbetta, 2003: 24).

Perceptions are organised in various ways, and the literature recognises among them paradigms (Hall, 1993) beliefs, frames and discourses (Hajer and Laws, 2006). In DI the main entry point is related to *ideas*⁶. Beyond the extensive literature on this concept in political analysis⁷, DI distinguishes between *cognitive ideas* -that provide explanations and guidelines to deal with a given phenomenon- and *normative ideas* -which are linked to values and are used to legitimise certain courses of action (Schmidt 2008, pp. 306–307). In other words, ideas both describe and prescribe. Those that are related to public policy can be dissected using Mehta’s typology (2011), which distinguishes between *problem definitions* -based on a given intellectual or normative position-, *policy solutions* -desirable measures to tackle such problem- and *conceptual foundations* -widely shared and unproblematic assumptions about reality. This typology is crucial to reassess MSA from a DI perspective: streams of problems and policies are, in this understanding, constituted by diverse, sometimes contrasting ideas – such is their ontological status in this framework. While for Kingdon (2014) agendas often involve many *alternative* approaches, with DI we can understand this, first, because there is a radical relativism that explains the existence of policy debates in the first place. And those alternatives refer to multiple interpretations in the dimensions of problem-definition, policy proposals and conceptual approaches, as DI suggests.

b. Causality in DI: discursive mechanisms and ideational power

From the different forms of causality in social research (Cartwright, 2015), two of them seem relevant for DI: mechanisms and powers. Adding my own interpretation of this framework, I propose that an agenda is set and it develops towards policy making thanks to two mechanisms. The first is *uncertainty*, which should not only be understood as a state of affairs, but as a causal factor that pushes agents to act, to identify certain policy issues and their potential solutions. Uncertainty refers to “situations where the individual has no information on which to base a calculation of probabilities” (Beckert 1996: 807). They are uncertain for such situations have unique characteristics⁸ that cannot be completely interpreted following previous trends, and, on other hand, because actors possess bounded rationality (Jones, 2013; Simon, 1955) regarding future events, which impedes them from making decisions with complete information⁹. The uncertainty concept opposes to that of *risk*, which is commonly related to events that are somewhat measurable and foreseeable. In such unpredictable situations, ideas play a key role by delivering a guide for agents to “order and intervene in the world” by organising their “beliefs, desires and goals. Only then can agents diagnose the crisis

⁶ Mark Blyth, alluding to the epistemology of DI, has accurately held that “ideas do not simply ‘matter’... they are simultaneously the *media* through which agents understand the world and the *material* that constitutes it” (2011: 84, emphasis added)

⁷ See Béland and Cox, 2010, 2016; Bell, 2012; Berman, 2013; Blyth et al., 2016; Campbell, 2002; Campbell and Pedersen, 2015; Gofas and Hay, 2009; Goldstein and Keohane, 1993; Yee, 1996.

⁸ Another similar definition was formulated by economist Hyman Minsky (1996: 160) two decades ago: “uncertainty (or unsureness) is a deep property of decentralized systems in which a myriad of independent agents make decisions whose impacts are aggregated into outcomes that emerge over a range of tomorrows”.

⁹ Orenstein has remarked, in that sense, that “ideational approaches to politics tend to start from the assumption that rational actors face considerable uncertainty about their interests or how to pursue them” (2009: 59)

they are facing” and act accordingly (Blyth, 2002: 32). In my perspective, and coming back to MSA, uncertainty can be created – it is not a fact of nature-, for example through focusing events or unusual indicators that reveal an unexpected situation. The shaping of the problem stream is intimately connected to this generation of uncertainty, pointing to the emergence of a new ‘urgency’ (Jessop, 2015) that must be faced through governance instruments.

A second mechanisms recognised in the DI literature, perhaps the most sui generis, is *discourse*. In DI, discourse is simply understood as the interactions where actors discuss about their ideas (Schmidt, 2008). In this view, discourse

is stripped of postmodernist baggage to serve as a more generic term that encompasses not only the substantive content of ideas but also the interactive processes by which ideas are conveyed. Discourse is not just ideas or “text” (what is said) but also context (where, when, how, and why it was said) (Schmidt, 2008: 305)

Interactions in context can be considered as real mechanisms that are a necessary condition for any type of policy process. It is a common-sense notion: after all, as Goodin (2008: 5) reminds, “politics and policy making is mostly a matter of persuasion”. In her seminal work on DI, Vivien Schmidt distinguishes between two forms of discourse. The *communicative discourse* “consists of the individuals and groups involved in the presentation, deliberation, and legitimation of political ideas to the general public” (Schmidt, 2008, p. 310). It can take place in the media, in policy forums, the academia, or any other instance that is aimed to present different views about a given theme. It can also be embodied in texts: articles, reports, papers, for example. On its part, the *coordinative discourse* “encompasses the wide range of policy actors engaged in the construction of policy ideas” (Schmidt, 2010: 3) – including experts, politicians, advocates, activists, etc. Coordinative interactions occur “in transnational settings on the basis of shared cognitive and normative ideas about a common policy enterprise” (Schmidt, 2008: 310), involving an agreement on a given course of action apart from the expectable disputes that characterise the policy construction process. In summary, communicative interactions have the purpose of achieving consensus or managing disagreements, while coordinative relations are expected to organise strategies for action (see, for a thorough theoretical discussion, Habermas, 1984)

Power is another source of explanation in DI, a really central one to make sense of interactions and their effects. The theoretical literature often focus on authority and legitimacy, or the structural power that actors have due to their positions and resources (Hearn, 2012; Stewart and Haugaard, 2009). DI is definitely what Scott (2012: 70) calls a ‘decision-making’ approach to power¹⁰: it looks at “what really happens when decisions are made” and the unequal influence of different actors in that process. Not all actors have the same capacity to choose or discard ideas, to see their interests institutionalised. The concept that DI offers to explain such disparities is that of *ideational power*: “the capacity of actors (whether individual or collective) to influence other actors’ normative and cognitive beliefs through the use of ideational elements” (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016: 321). For DI, and influenced by Lukes’ classical work on this concept (2005), power is exerted on decision-making, agenda-setting and determining preferences. Ideational power is held by actors –who can be more or less persuasive, or have an institutional position that grants their influence- and also by ideas

¹⁰ The definition of power as decision-making comes, to be sure, from Dahl (1957).

themselves. As long as ideas create identification in the interlocutors of communication, they can cause changes in political opinions and behaviour (Mukand and Rodrik, 2018). Ideational power, thus, is a key category for studying communicative and coordinative spaces and how some alternative framings get more support than others.

c. Outcomes in DI: agency and institutional dynamics

A dimension that I have left purposely undefined has to do with the results of an open policy window. The MSA literature has frequently associated agenda shifts and the joining of the streams to *policy change* (especially Howlett et al., 2015, 2017). Nevertheless, it is not possible at present to ignore the various developments in institutional theory that, in the past three decades, have identified different types of *institutional dynamics*, as I will call them in this study. In particular, historical institutionalism (Amenta and Ramsey, 2010; Hall and Taylor, 1996; Thelen, 1999) has stressed the relevance of situating policy making in broader historical patterns and rules that influence in one way or another the results of such process. The importance of this heritage, acting as a background, is most famously associated to the notions of path dependence and increasing returns (Pierson, 2000), now part of the ordinary vocabulary of political science (Parsons, 2007). Historical institutionalists have replaced the question about policy change, and specially the linear logic of policy cycles, for the more generic concept of institutional change, which does not follow a unidirectional path. For authors in this line of thought, institutional change is normally caused by critical junctures (Capoccia, 2015) that may displace previous rules; create layers of new rules that coexist with previous ones; drift due to external pressures, or converse existing rules by reinterpreting past ones (Hacker et al., 2021; Mahoney and Thelen, 2009, 2016; Streeck and Thelen, 2005). These forms diverge in terms of their relationship with the ‘stickiness’ of previous institutions, and often the degree of political conflict involved in a given critical juncture determines the type of change, from unnoticeable to abrupt (Peters et al., 2005).

The categories mentioned above are still applicable to DI (Blyth et al., 2016). This current is not as concerned about the *degree* of institutional change as historical institutionalism. It is actually an under-theorised area in DI. The latter has a much stronger focus on agency and ideas. In terms of the first, the agents of ideational and institutional change are considered in constructivism as motivated by two sources: their *perceived interests*, which are not just derived from their position in wider structures, but are a result of discursive processes that make them adopt certain ideas as their own (Blyth, 2002; Hay, 2011), and; their *identities*, that is, their changing mandates and positioning over their organisational history¹¹ (Broome, 2013; de Goede, 2006; Wendt, 1999). On that basis, actors engage in communicative and coordinative discourse, making their ideas circulate and influence decisions in institutionalised spaces – the parliament, the media, conferences, local councils, etc. The important point here, in relation to the previous paragraphs, is to highlight that actors must *position themselves* to participate in discourse (Burr, 1995). This is central when we are to analyse the emergence of a policy agenda, because the uncertainty a new problem can create

¹¹ The underlying notion here is that political actors do not have any ‘natural’ preference or behaviour. International relations theorist Alexander Wendt has proposed that a basic tenet of constructivism, which is at the basis of DI as I have affirmed earlier, is that “the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature” (1999: 1).

pushes actors to take position and redefine their strategies in an unprecedented context, which they normally do through meetings, statements and publications.

Historical institutionalism reduces institutions to their regulative pillar – the so-called rules of the game (North, 1991) and how they evolve. When DI asks about change it does so by looking at the ideas at the basis of cognitive and normative institutions and how they are maintained and/or transformed in a given policy window, what we can denominate here as ‘ideational change’. As Hay (2009) suggests, this type of change is rooted in previous policy developments, and in that sense I can add that there is effectively ‘ideational path dependence’, but also the opportunity to create ‘path changing’ problems, policies and concepts. Transformations in that sense do not only occur with respect to policy solutions, which are just one type of idea (Mehta, 2011), but also to problem definitions and general concepts that organisations and actors promote.

For instance, the increasing relevance of the climate change agenda in global governance has implied, of course, a continuous evolution of mitigation and adaptation policies through multilateral agreements, but the framings that have shaped the social problems behind environmental crisis have also been modified, giving way to new notions - the ‘green economy’, ‘sustainability’, ‘de-growth’ and the like (Gough, 2017). Such agenda has been set internationally in part due to communicative processes –new scientific data and projections- and coordinative spaces –multilateral conferences and agreements- that have institutionalised novel courses of action to tackle climate change (see Gough, 2013). When the three types of ideas –problems, policy solutions and concepts- are replaced by others more legitimate in an organisation, we can talk about ‘policy paradigm change’¹². It occurs as any other form of institutional change (Hardy, 2005): as a result of a loss in legitimacy of previously taken-for-granted ideas, or due to the strategic benefits related to such change for specific actors or an organisation as a whole.

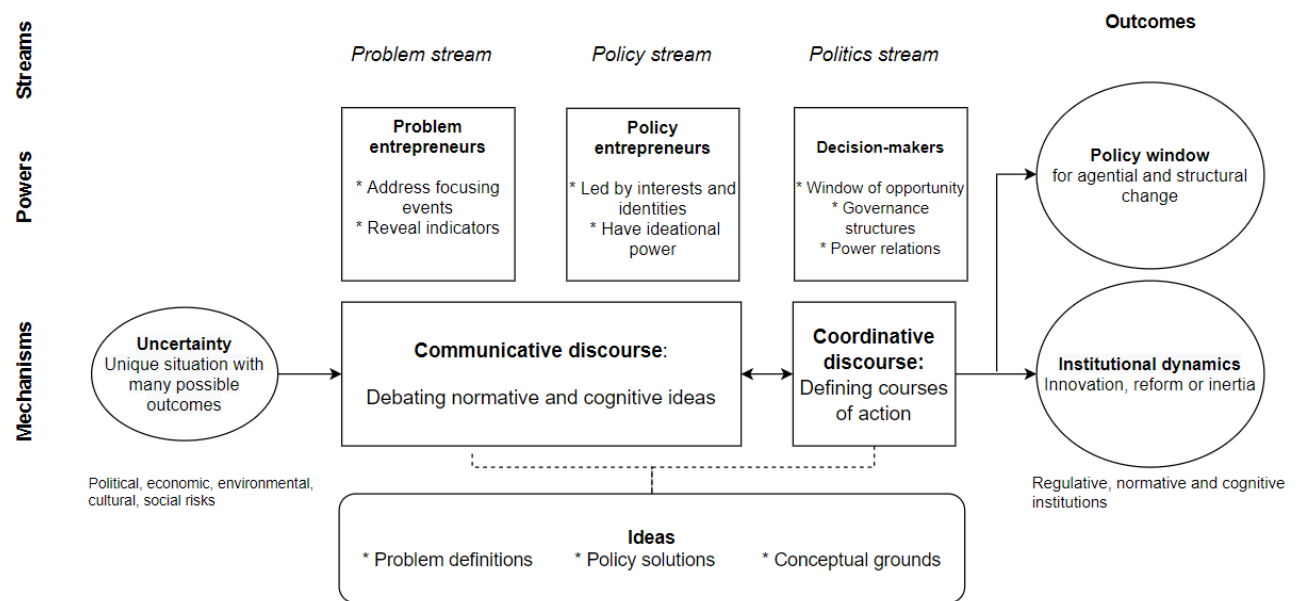
A framework to study multiple streams in global labour policy through discursive institutionalism

The previous reflections on the appropriateness of MSA to study empirically new policy agendas were complemented by a re-interpretation of such approach in terms of a DI perspective of institutional dynamics. Now I will propose a framework to study multiple streams in international organisations, most precisely in the case studies selected to approach the future of work agenda in global labour governance. Here I am going to translate concepts from the original MSA model –in concrete, multiple streams and policy windows- from a discursive and communicative understanding of agenda development. As suggested above, this is a *framework* insofar it identifies causal relations between explanatory factors, aiming to indicate how policy agendas ‘work’, and not only a descriptive *model* of this kind of processes (see figure 1 below). The framework separates between logical moments in the development of agendas, which should not be understood as stages in an evolutionary sense,

¹² I understand ‘policy paradigm’ following Hall’s (1993) classic work on the demise of Keynesianism and the rise of monetarism in British economic policy. Drawing upon the same work, Sarah Babb has defined this concept as “a powerful and enduring framework of related ideas and standards about policy – a model that specifies both the instruments that should be used in a policy area and the goals that the policy should be addressing” (2013: 270).

but as conditions that must be fulfilled for the opening of a policy window and the generation of various institutional dynamics. The first of these conditions is the existence of *uncertainty* in a given problem area, meaning a situation where there is no consensus in the public, policy and politics spheres about its possible consequences, let alone on how to govern it. Uncertain scenarios, in order to become problems, must be reframed in terms of risks that are manageable, measurable and controllable through policy decisions.

Figure 1: Agendas and institutional dynamics: streams, powers and mechanisms



Source: Author

The three streams can be conceived in this framework as flows of communication and coordination in policy-making and decision-making instances. The *problem stream* is defined by interactions between influential actors, whose discussions are led by entrepreneurs that construct a problem by interpreting focusing events and identifying indicators about the risks it entails. The agency of entrepreneurs is expressed through communication: practices that expose positions and pursue agreements on the existence of a problem that requires to be addressed; the definition of this issue is, of course, a matter of dispute, between political interests of contrasting conceptual perspectives. The *policy stream* involves discourse about the potential solutions to the mentioned problem, in which participants engage following different mandates and identities. These motivations should not be considered a natural or given factor as actors must respond to an uncertain context through internal discussions (in the case of organisations) and positioning their views in broader debates. Participants in policy-related discourse have, of course, different levels of ideational power, derived from their roles in institutional settings and the persuasiveness of their ideas, determining the identification they can generate in their audience (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016; Schmidt, 2017). Communication in the problem and policy streams is organised by particular conceptual grounds and discourse positions, which allows the analyst to find ideational structures in the interactions between participant actors.

The politics stream, on its part, refers to spaces of coordination where decisions are made about the policy issue at stake. Actors in position to make those decisions are mobilised by a window of opportunity, a chance to promote their own agendas and strategies. They encounter opportunities and limitations given by governance mechanisms in the organisation where they operate – e.g. voting capacity or veto powers in a given subsystem. Coordination means that a plan of action must be defined in an organisational setting, for example in ministerial meetings, technical committees or intergovernmental negotiations. In such instances, ideas operate as weapons for actors and their coalitions to influence discussions and generate adhesion (Béland and Cox, 2016; Béland and Orenstein, 2013). Pre-existing power structures are key in the analysis as they may explain the path taken by coordinative discourse as well as the attributions of the decision-making bodies involved. Finally, the result of the intersection, the conjunction of the three streams –communicative and coordinative interactions on problems, policies and politics- derives in the opening of a policy window, a possibility for change in the situation of the implied agents or the actual situation denounced as problematic. On the other hand, a possible outcome has to do with institutional dynamics: regulative, normative or cognitive institutions can be subject to change or reproduction depending on the decisions made at the political level. Needless to say, an open window does not mean policy or institutional transformation – on the contrary, there is an ideational and organisational stickiness that must be overcome. Since the relationship between the elements of Figure 1 are not sequential, their interaction is contingent.

How can we apply this scheme of analysis to global labour policy and its agendas? My view is that it is a field led by entrepreneurs that work in very different ways: the streams combine in a particular fashion in the ILO, the OECD or the WB, partly given their governance structures and policy-making procedures. The future of work agenda, empirically speaking, should be studied in plural as ‘agendas’, especially making a difference between the ILO –a tripartite organisation- and the other two cases, which are intergovernmental but predominantly run by experts in an ideational sense. This explains the division of chapters of this study: one focused on this agenda at the ILO, and another separate on the OECD and the WB. Table 3 below indicates how the streams differ in each organisation. The flow of problems is expressed in the making of publications or statements that make clear the position of each in common debates. It is crucial to pinpoint that, though actors have particular channels through which they communicate their ideas, the situations they address, that create uncertainty in the world of work, tend to be the same – for instance, a financial crisis or the effects of the coronavirus pandemic- but they address them through their individual organisational spaces, both communicative and coordinative. For instance, the three cases considered generate a large amount of labour statistics that, sometimes referring to the same phenomena, they use to interpret trends related to work (see, for example, data on the automation of jobs in ILO, 2016; OECD, 2019; World Bank, 2016). While, as organisations, they have some degree of closure, the truth is that international organisations are constantly responding to issues raised by ‘exogenous’ entrepreneurs –other international agencies, academics, non-governmental bodies- as the future of work case will clearly indicate.

Table 3: International organisations and multiple streams in global labour policy

Actor	Problems	Policies	Politics	Internal problem entrepreneurs	External problem entrepreneurs	Policy entrepreneurs
ILO	ILO Declarations and international indicators	International labour standards, policy advice and frameworks	Governing Body meetings; International Labour Conference	ILO Governing Body; IOE and ITUC	Other IOs; scholars in labour law, industrial relations, sociology of work, labour economics; civil society partners	Tripartite partners and ILO research departments
OECD	Ministerial statements; OECD Employment Outlooks	OECD Jobs Strategies	Ministerial thematic meetings; participation of social partners	OECD Council; governments; BIAC and TUAC	Other IOs; labour economists; civil society partners	Economics Department; DELSA
WB	World Development Reports	WB Social Protection and Jobs Strategies	WB Board of Governors; shareholder countries	WB President; Chief Economist	Other IOs; development and labour economists; civil society partners	WB Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice

Source: Author

The policy stream, on the other hand, is related in these agencies to the existence of publications and texts that condense their policy proposals on a certain theme. The main texts in the ILO are, to be sure, its Conventions and Recommendation, but we can also consider studies and frameworks that researchers from the ILO Office are constantly generating to inform international debates. In the last three decades, the OECD (1994, 2006, 2018a) has been publishing Jobs Strategies that present a diagnosis of the key labour issues in OECD countries, to then suggest a set of policies to address them. The WB publishes practically every year the World Development Report that occasionally has dealt with the work-related themes (World Bank, 1995, 2013, 2014, 2019b), however, its key recommendations in terms of social and labour policy are elaborated in the WB Social Protection and Jobs Strategies (World Bank, 2001, 2011). Policies are a stream in these cases to the extent that they involve ideas that have been generated by research teams, who define approaches by choosing evidence and concepts, while excluding others. The analyst can trace how these policies were developed, just like she can identify the construction of problems through the mentioned communicative channels.

In relation to politics, decision-makers in each agency are of course particular to their own governance structure. In the ILO, the Governing Body, with tripartite representation, builds agendas and define courses of action. It is in the International Labour Conference where labour standards are defined, with an active participation of endogenous problem and policy entrepreneurs – the ILO secretariat, the IOE, the ITUC, government representatives, among others (Hughes and Haworth, 2011). In terms of the OECD, the is the organisation’s council and president who make decisions agenda wise, while research departments have a relative

autonomy to pick up topics and approaches; the social partners –BIAC and TUAC- have a consultative role, so they are included in communicative but not in coordinative instances (Woodward, 2008). Also, it is often considered that the Economic Department and DELSA at the OECD have contrasting ideological and conceptual approaches (Mahon, 2011, 2013), which can be considered as part of the political dimensions of social policy at the OECD. Lastly, the politics stream in the WB has to do, as mentioned before, with the interests of the Bank's shareholder countries and the ideational choices made by policy makers at the organisation – in this case, the Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice. Both can be politically aligned, but there is some editorial control that can contrast with researchers' orientations (Toye, 2009). These aspects and the complexity of each organisation are precisely the dimensions of analysis I am going to unpack in the following chapters, providing a detailed account of the future of work agenda and its development in each case study.

Chapter 2: Data collection and methodological strategies

Introduction

Having described the field of social and labour policy at the global level, and after delimiting the subject of the research, I can explain the methods and pathways I have chosen to develop the argument. It is not an easy task to talk about the problems of the future, first, given their inevitable speculative character; second, investigating policy-making globally poses additional challenges for the researcher, considering that the global is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. With respect to the first point –the inexistence of the future-, I must suggest that, from a constructivist perspective, the reality of what actors represent as the future of work is secondary: the only empirical reference that can be studied is the statements actors make and the strategies they develop to address potential scenarios. The distinction made by discursive institutionalism between communicative and coordinative discourse (Schmidt, 2008, 2010, 2015, 2017) is useful to that regard: ideas about policies take place in publications and public statements, and strategies are discussed in meetings and events joined by decision-makers. In that line, my approach to international organisations will be structured by that distinction, looking at the documents and the events organised by them on the future of work in the 2010s. The second problem I have mentioned –the ethereal ontology of ‘the global’- demands a serious reflection on how scholars have studied this analytic level in the field of social and labour policy. The chapter starts with the latter point –referring to approaches developed by experts in the field-, to then describe my own methodological strategy focused on different types of discourse.

a. Methodological approaches to global social governance: assessing alternatives

Two predominant perspectives: global diffusion of policy ideas and the role of international actors

The field of global social governance has been investigated in the literature with different research designs and in a large variety of social policy areas. A common characteristic of studies on this theme has been a focus on two key dimensions: the transnational creation and diffusion of policy ideas, and the role of international actors in addressing specific social problems (Yeates, 2014). The emphasis of both points of view is naturally different: one is concerned about what has been conceptualised as policy transfer through various institutional levels (Evans and Davies, 1999; Marsh and Sharman, 2009), while the other has an explicit focus on actors and their involvement in international policy agendas (Deacon, 2007b; Kaasch and Martens, 2015). A similar idea has been proposed by a programmatic book on social policymaking in international organisations by Niemann and colleagues (2021: 10): scholars usually seek “to answer questions regarding how these processes take place and how they are communicated to other levels of social policymaking”, along “with questions of who formulates and frames what kinds of ideas, goals, and rights on social protection”. In a nutshell, how ideas travel and how they are developed by specific actors in global governance are the two structuring axes in this field of enquiry.

Depending on the research problem addressed, scholars have put forward different research strategies, which are worth mentioning to define my methods in dialogue with the literature.

The approach interested about *the diffusion of policy ideas* has frequently asked about institutional isomorphism –the emulation of norms and policies between different subsystems (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983)- and policy convergence (Drezner, 2005; Knill, 2005). From a global perspective, the question here is basically how certain institutional forms that originate in specific organisational levels –e.g. in a local government or in a regional body-become a worldwide trend. Classic studies in this line have studied the expansion of university systems and formal education institutions from a quantitative viewpoint: looking, for example, at the increasing number of people that accessed to them in the past century (Frank and Meyer, 2007; Ramirez et al., 2016). The strategy in this kind of enquiries has been to assess descriptive statistics in international social indicators.

Another angle from which academics have made sense of the global spread of policy ideas has to do with the effectiveness of *international actors in influencing policy-making* in national states, also from a quantitative viewpoint. This literature has started from the fact that there is a large gap between the prescriptions of global institutions and the actual practices of governments – both levels can be tightly or loosely coupled (Babb and Chorev, 2016; Meyer, 2007). Cases of successful expansion from the global to the national in the literature have been, for instance, the diffusion of conditional cash transfers (von Gliszczynski, 2015) or the privatisation of pensions (Orenstein, 2013) in past decades. Failures in that sense can be found in studies about the lack of compliance with human rights in countries that have nonetheless ratified them (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui, 2005) or, closer to my topic, in works about the inefficacy of ILO standards to improve workers' rights in member states (Peksen and Blanton, 2017).

Apart from the analysis of diffusion, students of global social policy have payed attention to the role of diverse international actors in dealing with transnational problems –e.g. migration, poverty or financial crises (Béland and Orenstein, 2013; Strange, 2012). Arguably, the most influential author in this line was Bob Deacon, one the intellectual founders of the field. The methodological plan this author followed still represents a crucial reference for future studies. On the one hand, Deacon's work had an actor-centred perspective, focusing on the major players in global social governance from a comparative perspective (Deacon, 1997, 2007a). The analytical possibilities of this entry point had to do with finding patterns of convergence and divergence between international actors, aiming to explain the construction of synergies in global governance (Deacon, 2013b). The aspects that could be compared in that sense were, for example, institutional initiatives or discourses displayed by international agencies (Deacon and Stubbs, 2013). In terms of data collection and sampling, Deacon's book *Global social policy in the making: the foundations of the social protection floor* (2013a), his last seminal work, represents a methodological tour de force. It examined the creation of the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation (no. 202, from 2012) by combining two strategies: studying the creation of key documents (statements, proceedings of conferences) related to the Recommendation, and at the same time interviewing in situ ILO policy-makers involved in its making.

The focus: the construction of the future of work in international organisations and other actors

The idea of analysing global social policy looking at documents and their ‘social life’ seemed highly effective in Deacon’s work, and it is an approach that I have incorporated in this research for the following reason: international actors tend to hide their internal and external political disputes¹³, and therefore the analysis could be misguided if it only considers their official communicative discourse. It is crucial, for that reason, to complement document analysis with in-depth interviews, giving all the necessary conditions for individuals to open up about the politics of their organisations. Deacon’s approach, by focusing exclusively on multilateral agencies and their partners, disregards the importance of other actors in global social governance in shaping ideas and policies. Studies on policy diffusion and convergence have the same focus. My analysis of the future of work agenda in the 2010s aims to bring a more diverse range of actors into the mix (Table 4).

Table 4: Actors influencing global social governance

Actor	Definition
Nation-states	"Organised political communities with governments and geographical boundaries recognised by international law"
International organisations	"Organised political communities formed by groups of states that meet and employ staff to explore common agendas"
Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)	"Organisations formed by citizens and NGOs that meet and employ staff to explore common agendas"
Mass publics	"Large audiences of citizens who, although they might not meet or employ staff, can express together a common concern about a regulatory question"
Epistemic communities	"Large audiences of state, business and NGO actors who meet sporadically and share a common regulatory discourse based on shared knowledge"
Media	Organisations and platforms that spread information and opinions in world society
Civil society actors	Associations that represent economic, political or cultural interests, employing staff to define their particular agendas

Source: Author, inspired by Braithwaite & Drahos (2000: 24) with civil society and media added

In my perspective, to address the complex ‘making’ of global social policy, it is appropriate to consider as many actors as the analysis requires, as well as the *double emphasis* on the diffusion of policy ideas *and* policy-making in international organisations. In that line, I have divided the following chapters in relation to these two dimensions, while looking at different at the engagement of various actors in the mentioned agenda (Table 5 below). Chapter 3 investigates the diffusion of the future of work as a policy problem, paying attention to the academics and research institutions that first represented as a global issue in the 2010s. On the same dimension, chapter 6 indicates the expansion of a transnational policy paradigm in the context of the future of work agenda, based on the empirical findings of the research. In

¹³ This notion, that I had initially as a general conception of how international organisations work, was ratified by my fieldwork. In some interviews, especially at the ILO and the OECD where politics is an everyday concern, it was difficult to touch some topics because of the reluctance to expose inner conflicts to an outsider. I decided, to avoid this discursive resistance, to not record the interviews, giving more freedom to speak about controversial matters without a fear for retaliation.

relation to the role of international organisations, I have devoted one exclusive chapter (4) for the ILO case, which demanded so due to the variety of actors and processes involved in its Future of Work Initiative. In chapter 5, lastly, I turn my attention to the OECD and the WB, using the same methodological approach as in the ILO case: a combination of document analyses with interviews with key informants from such agencies, inspired by Deacon’s work (2013a). The categories of analysis of chapter 3 and 6 will be further explained at the beginning of each; it is necessary to define, however, the empirical plan to approach the case studies, as I will do now.

Table 5: Structure of the study

Empirical chapters	Approach to global social governance	Methodological strategy	Actors studied
3. The construction of the FoW as a global issue	Diffusion of a global policy problem	Qualitative analysis of statements and responses on the FoW	- Epistemic communities (e.g. social scientists; futurists) - Global think tanks - Media
4. The ILO and the FoW	Engagement of international actors with global social problems	Qualitative analysis of documents Interviews with policy-makers and officials	- International organisations - National governments - Civil society associations
5. The WB/OECD and the FoW			
6. The Schumpeterian consensus in global labour policy	Diffusion of a transnational policy paradigm	Comparison of cases examined in chapter 4 and 5	- Academics - International organisations

Source: Author. FoW: Future of Work

Defining the comparative design

The methodological approach of this study combines, in line with the previous, different qualitative strategies. First of all, its rationale follows a *comparative research design*. In that sense, as most comparative studies do, it takes its units of analysis as if they were ‘wholes’ (Ragin 2014), which in this study refers to three organisations – the ILO, the OECD and the WB. By doing so, the analysis assumes that it is possible to say something about them based on a representation principle: their reports and their staff’s views are supposed to represent the organisation – unless they explicitly indicate the contrary. Among the various kinds of comparative strategies, it corresponds to a small-N design as it is focused on just three cases. Since this kind of studies are susceptible to selection bias (Hopkin, 2010: 305), it is important to recognise from the outset that these intergovernmental agencies have been chosen *because* they represent different, many times opposite views on global labour policy, the ILO incarnating a social-democratic tradition, and the OECD and the WB historically promoting a liberal imaginary in richer nations in the first case and in developing economies in the second (O’Brien, 2014a, 2014b). Hence, it is expectable to find stark disparities in their approach to

the future of jobs, perhaps in relation to their particular mandates and governance mechanisms.

Considering that comparative enquiry traditionally gives *history* a relevant place to interpret current events (Lim, 2016: 15), my analysis incorporates this variable in three ways. Firstly, it aims to reconstruct the discourse of the future of work in the context of a broader historical processes, often called the ‘fourth industrial revolution’ (Schwab, 2016; Skilton and Hovsepian, 2018). This will be a central aspect to be explored in chapter 3. It means that, prior to the analysis of each case study, I offer a detailed description of the context in which this agenda took place, mostly in terms of the ideas that circulated about this process of structural change and the way they shaped the responses of policy actors to its challenges. On the other hand, the empirical explorations of the cases integrate past agendas in their organisational history, taken as a background to assess the degree of institutional change they have experienced in the context of the future of work agenda. Third, the interpretation of the trajectory of the organisations considered here –ILO, OECD and WB- has the form of a historical narration, telling a story of what happened in each agency in relation to this issue taking, of course, the categories proposed in the theoretical framework as a basis for the narration. This form of exposition is common in small-N studies (Abbott, 2004: 22) and will be useful to make the results easier to understand for the reader.

As an empirical investigation, the study’s ideas and conclusions are based on data and my own interpretation of it. The body of evidence considered in the research includes secondary data –documents published by the organisations from the sample-, and primary data derived from interviews conducted by myself with key informants from the three agencies and other international organisations. The two sources with their respective analytic strategies are described in the following sections.

b. Content analysis of reports from the ILO, OECD and WB on the future of work in the 2010s

The main body of data considered in the analysis is a *long series of reports* published by these agencies. The purpose of this is to interpret the main ideas put forward by them officially as an organisation, as well as those sustained by endogenous problem and policy entrepreneurs, in relation to the broader discourse on the future of work. These documents include details about the coordinative initiatives developed by them to engage in conversation with external actors -from national governments, the civil society, etc. I also consider press releases where they have discussed about their respective approaches to this topic – e.g. the ILO (2018a) published a statement with a critical ‘response’ to the WB World Development Report 2019 about technology and jobs. A list with the complete sample of documents retrieved in my analysis can be found in the annex 1 to this study. The documents consist of rather short documents -such as policy briefs- and other larger ones that cover more topics and dimensions as well. Considering all these reports, each organisation has devoted a vast number of pages to cover this topic, as the annex indicates.

From those dozens of documents, Table 6 shows a small sample with the most important from an organisational and ideational point of view, especially in relation to technological change. The criterion for selecting these publications for the sample follows the classification

made by the ILO, the OECD and the WB in their respective websites, where they list their reports and statements thematically¹⁴. More specifically, two types of documents are included:

a) First, I consider in the sample *all publications under the category of 'future of work'* with an international perspective, i.e. not only focused on national cases, released between 2013 and 2020. The reason for this timeframe is that 2013 marks the beginning of the international debate on this issue (Greve, 2017) and in 2020 the focus turned to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on employment and working conditions, leaving the future of jobs in a secondary position in the agenda. Given that these organisations publish reports about individual countries, including all of them in the sample would have overstretched it unnecessarily. Reports are really varied in character and are not limited to research outputs, though most were empirical works and policy briefs, some of them books and others shorter pieces. On the ILO case, many studies were made by the secretariat about this theme (e.g. Balliester and Elsheikhi, 2018; Behrendt and Nguyen, 2018; Berg et al., 2018; De Stefano, 2018; Ernst et al., 2018; ILO-ACTRAV, 2019; ILO, 2016, 2017; International Labour Office, 2013; Montt et al., 2018; Moore, 2018; Salazar-Xirinachs, 2017; Weber, 2018). Other relevant documents are the report of the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work from 2019 (ILO, 2019b) and the ILO Centenary Declaration (ILO, 2019a). The OECD documents primarily included a variety of empirical studies on automation, skills and new technologies (e.g. Arntz et al., 2016; Berger and Frey, 2016; De Backer et al., 2016; Nedelkoska and Quintini, 2018; OECD, 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). The WB publications consisted primarily in their World Development Reports (World Bank, 2013, 2016b, 2019b, 2020) and other policy documents that specified initiatives (World Bank, 2018d, 2019a), frameworks (Merotto, 2020; Packard et al., 2019; World Bank, 2018b) and empirical findings on the impact of new technologies on work (Artuc et al., 2019; Eden and Gaggl, 2015).

b) Second, the sample considers *reports on conferences, summits and meetings* convened by these organisations specifically about the future of work. The development of this policy agenda followed a particular pathway in each organisation, meaning that the communicative and coordinative spaces they arranged are difficult to consider in a single category. Due to its tripartite structure, in the ILO these events consisted primarily in interactions between the secretariat, government delegates and the social partners. For example, the agency prepared the 'National dialogues on the future of work' in 2017, summarising a series of tripartite discussions organised in dozens of member countries (ILO, 2017b). The key instances in terms of decision-making were the meetings of the Governing Body where the Future of Work Initiative and its outcomes were defined (International Labour Office, 2019b) and the International Labour Conferences (ILO, 2019b; International Labour Office, 2015). The proceedings of these and other events are analysed to make sense of the political stream in ILO case. When it comes to the OECD, statements from ministers of labour or social protection in member countries are considered, assessing their role in setting the future of jobs in the organisation's agenda (OECD, 2016, 2018b). At the same time, speeches and texts from the OECD Council, and especially the Secretary-General (e.g. Gurría, 2017) are taken into account.

¹⁴ The sites where the totality of publications can be found are:

- ILO: [The future of work \(The future of work\) \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/publications)

- OECD: [OECD Future of Work - OECD](https://www.oecd.org/future-of-work/)

- WB: [Jobs and Development List of Publications \(worldbank.org\)](https://www.worldbank.org/publications) ; [World Development Report \(worldbank.org\)](https://www.worldbank.org/publications)

I basically did the same with regards to the WB, by examining remarks from the Bank’s President (Kim, 2018) on the future of work agenda, and proceedings from relevant institutional events - e.g. the Spring Meetings organised alongside the IMF, which during this time period often had tables discussing on technology and jobs¹⁵.

Table 6: Key reports on the future of work (2015-2019)

Organisation	Title	Year of publication
International Labor Organization (ILO)	The future of work centenary initiative	2015
	National dialogues on the future of work	2017
	New automation technologies and job creation and destruction dynamics	
	ITUC: The future of work, a global deal	
	IOE: Understanding the future of work	2018
	Digital labour platforms and the future of work	
	Work for a brighter future: report of the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work	
ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work	2019	
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	The risk of automation for jobs in the OECD countries	2016
	Ministerial statement. Building more resilient and inclusive labour markets	
	OECD Jobs Strategy 2018. Good jobs for all in a changing world of work	2018
	Automation, skills use and training	
	OECD Employment Outlook 2019. The future of work	2019
	Negotiating our way up. Collective bargaining in a changing world of work	
	An introduction to online platforms and their role in the digital transformation	
World Bank (WB)	World Development Report 2016. Digital dividends	2016
	The future of work requires more, not less technology in developing countries	2017
	The Human Capital Project	2018
	The future of work: race with – not against – the machine	
	Protecting all. Risk sharing for a diverse and diversifying world of work	2019
	World Development Report 2019: the changing nature of work	
	Does automation in rich countries hurt developing ones?	

Source: Author

In terms of the strategy I have chosen to read and analyse the mentioned documents, I think it is absolutely necessary to adopt a *method that codifies them* and makes them manageable¹⁶ for retrieving their data (Gibbs, 2011, 2014; Lewins & Silver, 2007). I have utilised NVivo for that purpose; furthermore, as Gibbs affirms, using software “can make qualitative analysis

¹⁵ The mentioned Spring Meetings gather civil society actors, politicians, international civil servants and global experts to discuss about a variety of policy issues, one of which has been the future of work and digitalisation between 2017 and 2020. More details can be found on: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/meetings/splash/spring>

¹⁶ However, as Gibbs has affirmed, using software “can make qualitative analysis easier, more accurate, more reliable and more transparent, but the program will never do the reading and thinking for you” (2011: 106).

easier, more accurate, more reliable and more transparent, but the program will never do the reading and thinking for you” (2011: 106). In that line, to give more depth to my own reading of the texts, I have adopted a *content analysis* strategy, making use of a devise that characterises this form of reading texts: a coding ‘frame’ (Schreier, 2014) or ‘scheme’ (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). This refers to an agenda for codifying texts that distinguishes between main categories and sub-categories, specifying the rules that analysts should follow in the process of assigning a concept to every part of the text (Mayring, 2000). Given the large amount of material derived from the documents, it is more appropriate to use a ‘deductive’ strategy that starts from a delimited set of categories, but the analysis could create new ones if the material shows unexpected and analytically relevant themes not covered in the original coding frame. The one that is going to be used for this stage of the study can be found in Table 7 below. The final analytic procedure consists in comparing what the three case studies said in respect to every category and sub-category in order to find significant similarities and divergences (Gibbs, 2011).

Table 7: Coding frame for analysing the reports

Categories	Sub-categories	Rules of codification	Examples
I. Problem definition	a. Problem representation	Currently or potentially harmful aspects of intelligent technologies	Technological unemployment; deskilling; surveillance
	b. Assumptions	Key concepts, binaries, or categorisations that underlie the support the representation of the problem	Man versus machine; productivity; race between technology and skills
	c. Origins	Historical and epistemological sources of the problem definition	Econometric modelling; simulations; critical epistemology
	d. Unproblematic aspects	Elements of the problem that are left aside but, in comparison, highlighted by other representations	Human and environmental costs of economic growth; beneficial or negative consequences of technological evolution
	e. Effects	Material impacts of such representation. Institutional changes; who benefits and who harms	Increasing economic productivity; promoting social protection for workers
	f. Dissemination	Diffusion strategies and reception in the media and other audiences	Publication of reports; advertisement in social networks; organisation of conferences
II. Policy solutions	a. Programmes	Measures and plans aimed to be developed by any governance system (global, national, local) that is supposed to be a solution for the problem	Continuous training; universal basic income; robot tax; reforming higher education;
	b. Expected outcomes	Expected results from the programmes as their potential beneficiaries	National economies; workers; employers; governments
	c. Limiting factors	Factors that could alter the expected outcomes	State of the global economy; adoption of new technologies; international relations; class conflict
	d. Responsible agencies	Governance actors supposed to develop the programmes	Intergovernmental organisations; national governments; companies; individuals

Categories	Sub-categories	Rules of codification	Examples
	e. Evidence	Conceptual and empirical grounds that justify the implementation of the policies	Empirical data; successful or failed cases; best practices
III. Conceptual grounds	a. Theoretical foundations	General statements about the functioning of the economy, the labour market and employment conditions	Inclusive growth; free market; creative destruction
	b. Conceptual innovations	New concepts proposed by the speaker to frame the identified problems and policy solutions	Human-centred approach; plateau of labour regulation; robot-proof jobs
IV. Positioning	a. Identity	Categories and attributes adopted by speakers to define themselves	Organisational culture and history; policy-making styles; usual practices
	b. Rights and duties	Actions that speakers feel free to perform, and those about which they are responsible	Normative mandates; policy agendas; interest groups' representation

Source: Author

The categories that underlie the document analysis are derived from the discursive-institutionalist approach described in previous sections, under the assumption that the material that constitutes them –as communicative and coordinative instruments- are *ideas*. Loosely inspired by Mehta (2011), I make a difference between three types of ideas, which constitute the basis for the coding frame, adding sub-categories to make them operational. The first is *problem definition*: statements about a currently or potentially harmful situation, identified through conceptual and normative assumptions about a desired state of affairs that could be disrupted. As Bacchi (2009) suggests, problematisations are also rooted in historical representations of trends, which can have an actual impact on the phenomena they are trying to portrait. The second type of ideas are *policy solutions*, which are proposals of measures and strategies to tackle the problem initially presented. They can be examined in terms of specific programmes, their potential limits, the evidence that backs them up and the responsibility assigned to agents to develop them (Cairney, 2012; Colebatch, 2009; Jenkins, 2007). Thirdly, the ideas that are at the foundations of the two previous are their *conceptual grounds*. Theories, understood as general utterances about a given area of reality (Alexander, 1987), and conceptual innovations proposed by the subjects of study are key sub-categories in this dimension.

I have added a fourth notion in the frame that has a sharper normative character: the category of *positioning*, which has been mainly develop in social psychology to make sense of the place that individuals assume when they communicate with others (Burr, 2003; Davies and Harré, 1990). For operationalising the concept -resorting to Slocum-Bradley's (2010) approach- I distinguish between the categories and attributes that the speakers mention as part of their *identity*, and the *rights and duties* they assume in terms of the policy problem. Applied to the future of work agenda, this frame of analysis recognises in documents the dimensions that are highlighted as the most urgent for policy-makers –e.g. technological unemployment due to automation; deregulation of platform work-, as well as the key policy ideas pursued by the ILO, OECD and WB and their respective partners. These actors approached these issues with a certain conceptual basis, having created at the same time new categories to communicate

their ideas, and explicitly took position in this international agenda depending on their role in GLP.

c. Interviews with key informants from international organisations on this agenda

Aside from examining the mentioned reports, the study considers a series of interviews with individuals employed by the ILO, OECD and WB, their social partners (ITUC and IOE at the ILO; TUAC and BIAC at the OECD), as well as some officials from other agencies that focused on the future of jobs during the same period – the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) most precisely. The sample covered individuals who participated in the policy formation process on the future of work in their respective organisations, be it from a policy-making or decision-making perspective. The purpose of interviewing in qualitative research, in broad terms, is to understand a situation from the subject's point of view, taking their own words as the key reference (Taylor, et al., 2016). In the context of this study, such technique allowed me to delve into a relevant dimension that was not covered in the reports: the agenda-setting process, the internal agreements and disputes in terms of framing the issue, and also the relations with other agencies. My interviewees could certainly be understood as *experts* -who possess technical and process knowledge about this issue (Bogner and Menz, 2009) or as *elites* – since the interviews “target people directly involved in the political process” (Beamer, 2002: 87). Contacting experts and elites is a usual practice to do *process-tracing* (Hay, 2016; Tansey, 2007; Trampusch and Palier, 2016): following the evolution of policy-making from the perspective of insiders and revealing the institutional and political dynamics involved in it, which can in principle be opaque for the external observer.

In practice, the composition of the sample has been defined through two frequently used strategies in non-probabilistic, small-N studies (Lune and Berg, 2017). The first is called *purposive sample*, i.e. targeting specific persons that had key positions in the future of work agendas of each institution. The second is commonly referred to as *snowballing* and consists in asking interviewees for contacts that, according to the interest of the researcher, can be useful to talk with. The people that I have contacted as a purposive sample corresponded researchers that had a relevant role in flagship reports from the mentioned agencies –e.g. the Bank's World Development Report on the future of work, or the OECD Employment Outlook on the same topic. The directors of these publications were easily identifiable, as they normally mention who integrated the team that produced them. With respect to contacts gathered through snowballing, they were mostly international civil servants that occupied decision-making positions in coordinative instances such as the International Labour Conference or the ILO Governing Body. It is not easy for outsiders from these institutions to learn about individual roles in such instances, even when proceedings of meetings are made public. Much of the political work they do is ‘behind the scenes’, which is why I have reached them through a third person. In all cases, I presented myself as a graduate student doing a comparative research about the future of work agenda in global governance, also specifying what I wanted to learn from each specific individual. Despite it can represent a problem in some studies (Kvale, 2006), the position of asymmetry between these experts and elites and myself, a graduate student, benefits the logic of the interview since they are exhorted to describe processes in detail, as if I had no previous knowledge about the themes we talked about.

Table 8: Characteristics of the interviews

No.	Org.	Position	Location	Date	Topic
1	ILO	Coordinator, Future of Work Initiative ILO	Virtual	09-Jun-19	Details about FoW initiative at the ILO
2	ILO	Senior Advisor, ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT-EMP)	Geneva, ILO HQ	09-Jul-19	Employers side - Global Commission and ILC 2019
3	ILO	Senior Researcher - ILO Research Department	Geneva, ILO HQ	15-Jul-19	History of the FoW at the ILO
4	ILO	ILO Special Adviser to the Deputy Director-General for Policy (DDG/P) on Economic and Social Issues	Geneva, ILO HQ	16-Jul-19	Relationship ILO-G20 on FoW
5	ILO	Senior Economist - ILO Employment Policy Department	Geneva, ILO HQ	16-Jul-19	Empirical research at the ILO
6	ILO	Senior Technical Advisor on the Future of Work - ILO Office of the Deputy Director-General for Policy	Geneva, ILO HQ	17-Jul-19	Organisation of the Global Commission on FoW
7	ILO	Senior Economist - ILO Research Department	Geneva, ILO HQ	17-Jul-19	Setup of the ILO Office's Technical Secretariat for the FoW
8	ILO	Technical Officer on Future of Work - ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV)	Virtual	25-Jul-19	Workers side - Global Commission and ILC 2019
9	ILO	Senior Economist - ILO Inclusive Labour Markets, Labour Relations and Working Conditions (INWORK) branch	Virtual	25-Jul-19	Setup of the ILO Office's Technical Secretariat for the FoW
10	ILO	Technical Officer - ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV)	Geneva, ILO HQ	12-Dec-19	Workers side - Global Commission and ILC 2019
11	IOE	Senior Adviser - International Organisation of Employers (IOE)	Geneva, IOE HQ	10-Jul-19	Employers side - Global Commission and ILC 2019
12	IOE	Technical Adviser International Organisation of Employers (IOE)	Geneva, IOE HQ	10-Jul-19	Employers side - Global Commission and ILC 2019
13	ITUC	Assistant Director - International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), Geneva office	Virtual	09-Jan-20	Workers side - Global Commission and ILC 2019
14	WEF	Data Lead, WEF's System Initiative on Shaping the Future of Education, Gender and Work	Virtual	25-Jul-19	WEF role in the FoW
15	WEF	Head, WEF's Inclusive Economies Practice, Centre for the New Economy and Society	Virtual	25-Jul-19	WEF role in the FoW
16	OECD	Director OECD Employment Outlook 'The future of work'	Geneva, ILO HQ	04-Dec-19	OECD Employers Outlook 2019 on FoW
17	OECD	Lead Economist OECD Jobs Strategy 2018	Virtual	03-Jul-20	Making of the 2018 OECD Jobs Strategy
18	TUAC	Senior Policy Advisor on future of work - TUAC at OECD	Virtual	27-Aug-20	Participation of OECD social partners in 2018 Jobs Strategy
19	WB	Director World Development Report 2019 'The changing nature of work'	Virtual	15-Jun-20	WDR 2019 on FoW
20	WB	Global Lead for Labor & Skills - WB Social Protection & Jobs Global Practice	Virtual	06-Aug-20	WDR 2016 and 2019; Protecting All white paper
21	WTO	Research Economist, Economic Research and Statistics Division, WTO	Geneva, WTO HQ	12-Jul-19	WTR 17 study

Source: Author

The final sample has 21 interviews. In terms of the interviews design, first of all, it can be noted in Table 8 above that all of them had a certain topic to be discussed, representing also the reason why those specific people were chosen. In the ILO, I contacted a series of high-level researchers and officials with the help of a gatekeeper that I met in the conference 'Debating the future of work', organised by the University of Sheffield in May 2019 – the Director of the ILO Research Department back then. In the cases of the OECD and the WB, the main authors of their key reports on this issue were contacted by email and interviewed online. The sample was smaller than that if the ILO mainly because the quality of these interviews was better –being online helped to make them more extensive- and also due to the complexity of the making of the ILO Centenary Declaration that I had to unpack through a series of interviews. I also got in touch with representatives from social partners –business and labour organisations- that indicated the participation of civil society actors at the ILO and the OECD respectively, with reference to the future of work agenda. Additionally, I interviewed two researchers from the WEF, given the active role their organisation had in this agenda (Schwab, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2017a, 2017b, 2018); finally, there was an interview with an economist from the WTO that led the World Trade Report 2017 on technology and jobs (WTO, 2017). Since the WTO, after the debates on a social clause on trade agreements from the 1990s (Stoll, 2018), does not get involved in any labour-related issue, I wanted to find out why and how they had chosen to make a report on the future of work this time.

The design of the interviews was semi-structured (Brinkmann, 2013). With this approach there is an agenda that covers all the relevant topics for the study, but with enough openness to let respondents give their own impressions about them (Stephens, 2007). In some interviews, for example I was not aware of reports or events that had taken place in one of the organisations, so leaving some space allowed the conversation to talk about unexpected themes. The semi-structured design was guided by a questionnaire, inspired by an article from by Di Ruggiero and colleagues (2014) that studies the expansion of the decent work agenda by the ILO and then adopted by other UN agencies. They interviewed employees from multilateral bodies to reveal the politics of agenda-setting at that global level, a similar approach to mine. I have adapted the questionnaire they used for their study (Table 9), which could be used as a guide:

Table 9: Sample questionnaire for experts and elites interviews from the ILO and the WB

Dimension	Illustrative question
Perspectives on the future of work	Why is the future of work relevant for global governance?
	What does the future of work mean to your organisation?
	How was it decided that the future of work was going to be incorporated in your organisations' agenda?
	What key publications show the position of your institution, and how was it developed?
	How was the process behind the making of those reports/statements?
Future of work agenda	Who owns the future of work agenda?
	What other influential actors have dealt with the future of work in the past decade?
	What is the position of your organisation about those other actors?
	What external actors have supported your organisation's approach to the future of work? Who had opposed it?
	What partners have participated in the production of a given document?
	Have there been conflicts or controversies in this policy construction within your organisation?
	What have been the key events in your organisation's future of jobs agenda?
	What is going to be the role of your organisation in the future of work?

Source: Author, inspired by Ruggiero et al (2014)

The interpretation of the interviews consisted in a content analysis of notes taken by myself –the interviewer in every occasion- since they were not recorded. I used the questionnaire, its dimensions and questions as a ‘coding matrix’ that I then filled with phrases and ideas from my notes, trying to not change original wordings or expressions given by the individuals. The decision to not record was that the themes covered in the conversation were often politically sensitive, and given the image of neutrality that international organisations try to display (Thomas, 2007), not recording them was considered the best strategy to avoid inhibiting the interviewees’ speech. Instead, with the agreement of all participants, I have taken notes in each interview, summarising key ideas and sometimes transcribing literal phrases when they condensed a point to be highlighted (see annex 3 at the end of this document for an example from the notebook I used for the interviews).

d. Research ethics

This study follows the ethical guidelines provided by the Graduate School from the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh, as well as those proposed by the Social Policy Association from the United Kingdom. According to the latter, there are four issues that should be addressed to guarantee the study’s ethical responsibility:

a. *Obligation to society*: this project aims to be a contribution to the understanding of work-related issues that may be faced by societies in the near future. Therefore, its purpose is to

reflect on the policy instruments that can be implemented to prevent diverse social issues, and the adequacy of international institutions to face them. In doing so, it complies with the law and does not have any conflict of interest since the researcher does not have any responsibility with the agencies that are going to be studied or the actors that are subject to regulation by them (e.g. associations of workers or employers).

b. *Obligations to research participants*: the data collection stage deals with individuals, particularly in terms of the interviewees. Since during the conversations they may go beyond the official discourse delivered by their organisations in reports and statements, it is possible that their status and position in them could be harmed by their interviews. The data collected, in that sense, needs to be confidential and strictly used for this research in an anonymous way. As mentioned above, to safeguard their professional integrity the interviews are not recorded. An informed consent (see a template version in annex 2) is provided to all interviewees, so they are aware of their rights and the conditions of the study. The collected data is going to be erased two years after submitting the dissertation.

c. *Obligations to research sponsors*: my doctoral studies are being funded by the 'Becas Chile' programme developed by the Chilean government, which covers my tuition fees and living expenses for up to 4 years. However, I do not possess any responsibility regarding my sponsor as it does not include any requirement in terms of content or research process. For that reason, I am free to publish this study's findings without any external constraint related to such sponsor.

d. *Obligations to the subject and to colleagues*: the first condition to respond to the discipline's standards is to follow an adequate training process. In that sense, I have formed myself in qualitative data analysis, which I now teach at postgraduate level. Second, the sources that the study uses are publicly available – academic articles; reports by all the organisations mentioned, including proceedings from meetings and conferences. In that line, if ideas presented in the analysis belong to these organisations or other authors, this is going to be appropriately referenced.

Chapter 3: The construction of the future of work as a global social problem

Introduction

The importance of certain global labour issues is constantly changing: some trends in jobs markets or working conditions become more prominent in public and expert discussions, while others lose salience accordingly. Until the beginning of the past decade, problems in this field were mainly linked to the dynamics of globalisation: the structural transformation of the world economy had benefited multinational companies and global elites, but had left many without their livelihoods, or exposed to the dire conditions of international competition and migration (for an extensive discussion, see Sobel, 2009). At the same time, major players in global labour policy had responded to the challenges of globalisation by refining their approaches to social protection and labour market regulation, highlighting the need to integrate those people excluded from the benefits of this process (O'Brien, 2014b). The main issues that circulated in international policy discussions were precisely related to exclusion. Informality, precariousness, poverty, dualisation, all these concepts seemed to reflect such a dynamic, and were at the core of the discourse of international organisations on the world of work (Scott, 2013). These trends were, by the end of the 2010s, as important as always; however, they did not seem to be at the centre of public debates or the agenda of major players in global labour policy as they used to, particularly in multilateral agencies.

The focus had changed. Predictions about forthcoming shifts in labour markets, especially associated to technological innovation, occupied the place that globalisation had had in previous decades. Diagnoses about a 'changing world of work' became ubiquitous (Lansbury, 2018), sometimes disregarding the urgencies of the present to redirect attention to the coming transformations in the field. This chapter investigates precisely this process: the emergence of the future of work as a global social issue. As I mentioned, *the future was not in the spotlight of actors in global labour governance as such, and neither was technology*. This problem *had to be created*, as it simply did not exist some years before – i.e. it was not recognised as a key troublesome area to cover by analysts and policy makers. For this reason, I concentrate this chapter on the *construction* of this problem, under the working hypothesis that it was the result of a series of activities and debates developed by relevant actors in the field, not necessarily referring to an 'objective' social issue. On the opposite, it was a complex process that posed dilemmas of interpretation, being able to be addressed through many different theories and normative approaches.

Instead of presenting a literature review, with a summary of the main arguments on a certain theme, I propose a theoretical approach that considers the literature as a phenomenon in itself, that deserves to be analysed and not only scrutinised due to its effects in terms of establishing the coordinates of the problem at stake. An exclusive focus on academic works would leave aside fundamental ideas that structured the debate from other spheres –for instance, from management consultancies or global think tanks. Consequently the analysis needed to include other types of actors as well. In the chapter, I proceed first by developing a conceptual framework grounded on constructivism, social problems theory and discourse analysis, all with the aim of addressing the emergence of this issue in the global policy arena. The subsequent sections examine the main ideas proposed in the future of work debate in the 2010s, and the responses that they generated in different circles, relevant for global

labour governance. I look at the diagnoses about an epoch shift –embodied in the concept of the ‘fourth industrial revolution’-; the appearance of automation as a key matter of concern, and; the implications of such processes for inequalities at work. The conclusion summarises the argument and presents some questions about the role of international organisations in this problem, which will centre my attention in the following chapters.

a. Conceptual reflections on social problems and global governance

A preliminary definition of the social problems concept will provide us a basis for the theoretical discussion in the next sections. Even though analytical traditions in this literature manage different understanding of this notion, I may first recognise some general elements that are extensive to all of them. First, social problems refer to *conditions*: state of affairs “that we believe are troublesome, prevalent, can be changed, and should be changed” (Loseke, 2003: 7). As a source of trouble for someone, they in principle must be “remediable or solvable” by human actions (Jamrozik and Nocella, 1998), in the sense that they are not irremediable facts of nature. Secondly, problems involve an ‘evaluative judgment’ on a given condition (Schneider 2018), under the assumption that they could disturb a situation considered as normal or desirable. Lastly, their ‘social’ aspect is explained by the fact that they are experienced by a collective entity. In terms of reach, social problems are an elastic condition that may affect specific groups, nations, regions, or the entire world. Without fully engaging with the intellectual dilemmas that this concept entails, and more based on common sense, I could propose a basic definition as follows: *social problems are troublesome conditions attributed to a certain collective entity, which present a threat to a normal or desired state of affairs for such collective, although they must be solvable in principle*. This minimum definition will become more complex once I dialogue critically with the literature in the next sections.

To illustrate the previous, we can think of income inequality: it is a troublesome phenomenon that generates scarcity and poverty in the worse-off, while allowing rapacious and extractive behaviours in benefit of minority groups in society. It is, in principle, solvable given the redistributive instruments developed in social and fiscal policy to counter it; historical examples indicate that it can be managed through various institutional arrangements. Disparities are an issue from an equalitarian normative position, or when comparing their situation in different settings. It is frequent to talk about class, ethnic, or gender inequalities, or to refer to them in geographical terms by focusing on nations or on global inequities. Now, how can we understand the future of work considering the definition I have suggested? Why is it a problem and what kind of evaluations are involved in its judgments? Who are affected by the upcoming trends in the world of work? These are the questions that I expect to answer in this chapter. It follows a route that goes from a theoretical reflection on the concept of global social problems and the place of international organisations in them, to an investigation on the construction of this issue in the global policy arena. In that line, as indicated in the introduction, I present an analysis of the related academic and non-academic literature, considering ideas not only as bibliographical references, but also as the empirical material for my reflections throughout the chapter.

The constructivist approach in social problems theory and the role of discourse

The constructivist approach in social problems theory has existed for at least half a century. As most of this literature, it emerged in American sociology in response to two traditions of thought. The realist perspective, the one that is closer to the intuitive understanding of social issues, assumes that problems have an 'objective' nature, harming either individuals or society's 'normal' functioning (May, 2002). For this view, still the most widespread approach to make sense of social problems, these have a *self-evident reality* that can be demonstrated empirically and addressed in a rational manner. Its corollary is the functionalist notion that some 'pathological' phenomena –e.g. crime, political instability- affect cohesion in society's different sub-systems, justifying their management for the sake of normality (Honneth and Sarkela, 2014; Merton and Nisbet, 1971). Subjectivism, the other mentioned tradition, argues that conditions are not intrinsically problematic, but they have to be *defined* as such by social actors. The emphasis of this view has been put on value-judgments: certain elements are defined as troublesome because they offend fundamental values or standards (Jamrozik and Nocella, 1998; Parrillo, 2005). Since there is often disagreement on values between social groups, consequently there is no consensus in terms of policies (Fuller and Myers, 1941). In a word, whereas realism looks at the structural dimensions of social problems, subjectivism pays attention to the agential aspects.

Aiming to overcome this gap between objectivism and subjectivism, constructivists in the 1970s argued for a pragmatic understanding of social issues, framing them not as a given fact, but rather as a collective definition¹⁷. The basic principle of the constructive position, in that sense, is that "the notion that social problems are a kind of *condition* must be abandoned in favour of a conception of them as a kind of *activity*" (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977: 73). This activity is called 'claims-making', representing the analytical unit of the study of social problems. Part of the literature studies the cycle or the stages through which a certain condition become an issue for social actors (Best, 2013), similar to the policy cycle concept (John, 2012). Still, the most interesting side of this approach is the focus on *interactions*: the "dilemmas of interpretation" and the debates arising from the fact that "social problems are ambiguous situations" (Best and Harris, 2013: 3). The centrality of interactions in the problem-construction process leads, naturally, to an emphasis on communication – for example, the importance of the rhetorical dimension in making certain conceptions more or less compelling (see Ibarra and Kitsuse, 1993). Constructivists do not ignore, however, the weight of structural or material conditions on social issues, but defend that in any these elements only become 'evident' through ad hoc measurements and conceptual instruments (Kitsuse and Spector, 1973), thus being 'putative', not objective conditions (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 1993).

The analytical strategy in this perspective is, in a word, to 'understand understandings' of social problems (Ibarra and Adorjan, 2018), exposing the "selective process" through which actors choose "from among a multiplicity of possible realities" (Gusfield, 1981: 3). The question about the truth or falsity is secondary in analysis, representing a fundamental difference vis-à-vis realist approaches. There are also key divergences with respect to conflict

¹⁷ As eloquently put by sociologist Herbert Blumer: "it is a gross mistake to assume that any kind of malignant or harmful social condition or arrangement in a society becomes automatically a social problem for that society. The pages of history are replete with instances of dire social conditions unnoticed and unattended in the societies in which they occurred" (1971: 302).

theories in this field. The latter have scepticism about the self-evidence of ‘social’ problems since references to ‘society’ as a whole tend to hide divisions and the political implications of claims-making (e.g. Wright Mills, 1943). Furthermore, for this conflict perspective “definitions of social problems are dictated more often by the interests of the powerful in our society”, as Manning suggest (1985: 8). Although not focused primarily on these aspects, contemporary constructivists have embraced these critical views by stressing the importance of *interests* in the making of a social problem. Be they powerful elites, intellectuals, civil society actors, religious authorities, etc., claims-makers must have an interest in the issues they engage with (Archer, 2015; Braun and Dreiling, 2018). Against a materialist conception of interests –just restricted to economic or political gains-, constructivism incorporate other factors that can be central for claims-making, such as moral principles or the pursuit of scientific rigour.

Another fundamental element of the critical side of this approach has to do with the role of power in claims-making. Braun and colleagues have proposed that both elements cannot be dissociated:

a group’s ability to act on their interests and influence public views and social change around a global problem depends on their social power. Social power is necessary to create and diffuse a social problem claim. Without it, claims about a problem will go unheard. It is only with some form of social power that the voices and concerns of people get heard in the larger public (Braun and Dreiling, 2018: 88)

Power acts as an enabler for influencing public debates and as a limit for actors that do not have a voice in it. In the terms already introduced in my theoretical framework (following Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016), it can be understood as power ‘in ideas’ –the resonance of certain conceptions of social problems- and ‘over ideas’ – the differential access that actors have to their definition and management. In that sense, instead of only paying attention to communication in the form of claims, analyses must take power into account to delineate the map of a given debate.

Constructivism in social problems theory, as in other fields of application, has been intimately linked to the concept of discourse. I must make some clarifications in order to introduce my own position on this literature. In line with Burr (2015: 224), I can delineate two routes that scholars have followed: the first, a *macro approach*, understands discourse as “ways of talking about” certain people or objects, embedded in power relations. It corresponds to the Foucauldian approach to discourse (see Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983; Howarth, 2005; Keller, 2013). The work of Carol Bacchi has applied Foucault’s framework to social issues, elaborating the ‘what is the problem represented to be’ approach in policy analysis (Bacchi, 2009; Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016). Bacchi’s argument starts from the assumption that policies do not respond to pre-existing issues: instead, they are the result of discursive practices that ‘shape’ the problem and its subjects. The strategy to make sense of such representation would involve tracking its ‘genealogy’, unpacking its unproblematic elements through an ‘archaeological’ lenses, and other methods inspired by Foucault’s work (1971, 1977). This focus on ‘problematizations’ is a fruitful conceptual and empirical pathway to study social issues from a constructivist lens, which adds to previous works inspired by this conception of discourse – e.g. Walters’ study on the discourse of unemployment (1994).

On the other hand, in constructivism there is a *micro approach to discourse*, which I will adopt to develop my argument in this chapter. Predominantly influential in psychology, ‘discursive constructionism’ conceptualises discourse as a verb, not as a noun: it is simply “defined as texts and talks as parts of social practices” (Potter and Hepburn, 2008: 276). The notion of discourse as an activity leads this perspective to focus on *interactions* embodied in texts: debates, arguments, conversations where the reality of certain statements is established or challenged. In terms of discursive analysis, Jonathan Potter (1996) suggests to distinguish between the ‘epistemological’ and the ‘action’ orientation of texts: the first refers to their construction of facts through descriptions, whereas the second are the actions that are performed or promoted through texts. This perspective is conceptually precise and hence eludes the complexity of Bacchi’s problematisation framework. It is also consistent with the assumptions of key works in the constructivist theorisation on social problems, focused on claims (texts) and the public conversations (discourse) triggered by them. Following discursive constructivism, the analysis is hence centred on the debates that shape the description of a problem: on “claiming and responding”, since “a claim without response dies at its end” (Schneider, 2018: 13). These descriptions may have generative effects: they would not only designate problems, but also influence their management, their trajectory.

Constructing global social problems: the global agora, actors and structures

I am now in position to propose a theoretically informed definition of social problems, inspired by the different strands in constructivist research mentioned in the previous section. They can be understood as *conditions that are represented as harmful or troublesome for a given collective entity, through a process of claims-making in which more or less powerful actors interact to define the nature of the problem and its expected solutions*. The passage from this problematisation stage to the institutionalisation of certain definitions and frames is, in principle, a phenomenon that lies beyond my focus on the construction of social issues¹⁸, although it is an aspect that will be at the core of my next chapters, looking at the politics of the future of work. Now I would like to concentrate on *global social problems*, and evaluate how we can make sense of them from such a definition. The first observation that must be made is that the term *global* reflects a particular *scale* of social issues that coexists with other, equally relevant, levels of analysis - e.g. international, national or local (Sassen, 2008). The fact that most of the problems that are part of our common sense at present –poverty; environmental risks; unemployment; deficits in education or health, to name a few-, possess a global dimension is not a coincidence, but it responds to the larger process of globalisation by which nations have incorporated organisational and ideational structures that make them similar in many respects.

Global social issues, in my view, are not fundamentally different from those restricted to other, less encompassing scales. They are a troublesome, urgent state of affairs that according to certain actors need to be solved, who follow determinate interests and normative mandates. Now, global social issues *do* exhibit some distinctive features. For one thing, they “are transnational—that is, they cross political boundaries (country borders). These issues

¹⁸ This passage from the ‘construction’ to the ‘construal’ via the institutionalisation of defined ‘imaginaries’ is the essential focus of cultural political economy (Jessop, 2010; Jessop and Sum, 2010; Staricco, 2017; Sum and Jessop, 2013), an approach that will not centre my attention since it does not interact with the social problems literature, though it could have been an alternative framing to the same object I am analysing.

affect individuals in more than one country (Snarr, 2008, p. 2)". In that sense, global social problems are actually or potentially harmful for a "large number of people" (Bhargava, 2006, p. 1) – for instance, a pandemic, or the implications of a large-scale war. These two characteristics of global social problems -their wide territorial and social range- are complemented by a third: they can hardly be solved at the local and national levels. For this reason, "supranational bodies" have been created "in order to assist nation-states in dealing with the social problem concerned" (George and Page, 2004: 2). In the same vein, Vinay Bhargava has argued that worldwide issues "require a *global regulatory approach*; no one government has the power or the authority to impose a solution, and market forces alone will not solve the problem" (2006, p. 1, emphasis added).

A reference to the vast literature on globalisation is necessary to frame the context in which social problems are constructed. Claims on global issues take place in what Diane Stone (2013: 17) calls the 'global agora', an imaginary space of exchange where multiple publics can connect and communicate, recognising that "some actors are more visible, persuasive or powerful than others". It is associated to the idea of a 'transnational public sphere' (Fraser, 2007), the domain where global elites build public opinion through communication, represented at present by the cyberspace and the digital media – from Twitter to TED talks (Drezner, 2017). The factors that explain the predominance of certain views and of specific actors in the agora are, to be sure, multiple, and may well refer to a variety of sources of power, from expertise to fame. It seems more relevant at this point to recognise the types of actors that interact at this global level, and at the same time to identify the structures that condition the behaviour of such actors in the agora. Despite being an exercise in abstraction, my analysis of the future of work debate will be grounded on this preliminary analysis, especially to locate the type of actors that supposedly represent 'the global' in such discussion. I can mention the 'major players' that lead processes at this level (Thomas, 2007), and that can present claims on social problems with some degree of worldwide resonance.

First, *international organisations* coordinate countries in dealing with them, taking advantage of their apparent position of neutrality, in the name of universal values (Boli and Thomas, 2015). Secondly, I can consider *epistemic communities* – "networks of knowledge-based communities with an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within their domain of expertise" (Haas, 2011: 788). Typically divided in disciplines and areas of study, epistemic communities represent different conceptual approaches to social issues. Individuals in these communities are often organised in policy networks that might have a global range (Stone, 2008), are employed by academic institutions and interact in specialised circuits of knowledge – journals, conferences, media, etc. Third, also in the realm of expertise, *think tanks* appear as relevant actors. These are organisations that operate either nationally or globally, producing knowledge and instances that resemble the logic of the academia (Stone, 2013: 64). Be they ideologically motivated, or observing from a rather scientific stance, think tanks "generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues that enable policy-makers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues" (McGann, 2016: 7). Lastly, the role of *transnational advocacy networks* is also key, understood as actors "working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services" (Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 3). These can include pressure groups, which aim to "persuade policy makers to pursue a preferred course of action" (Schlozman, 2015: 368) in relation to certain issues,

or transnational activists that coordinate campaigns and protests on a global scale (Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005).

Actors only have the capacity to operate and have a voice on global social problems if they are placed in wider structures. If we take the global agora as the stage where they put forward claims and strategies, structures are the backstage, the elements that make their agency possible and that are, at the same, the subject of their ideas. Following Payne (2016), I refer to three types of structures: cultural, economic and political, that have been subject to an expanding process of globalisation in the last half century. In the cultural dimension, in most countries there are at present organisational forms –for example, think tanks or higher education institutions- that have been replied globally in a process of institutional isomorphism, following values that are now considered universal, such as economic growth, social justice or individual rights (Meyer, 2007, 2010). On the other hand, there are global media that spread information and images globally thanks to the creation of multinational media corporations (Appadurai, 1990; Thompson, 2005). Most of their contents are presented in today's *lingua franca*, the English language, contributing to the Anglicisation of global culture¹⁹ (Kuppens, 2013; Tomlinson, 1991). Claims about social problems, in this context, are produced at the heart of certain institutions –e.g. universities, private or public research centres- and circulate through international media and digital platforms in a common normative vocabulary and language.

Economic and political structures are also fundamental factors to take into account in the analysis of global social issues. In relation to the first, it is well known that the world economy is characterised today by the “the functional integration of internationally dispersed activities” (Gereffi, 2005, p. 161). Changes in the geography of production and the liberalisation of capital movements have shaped societies in the last decades (Dicken, 2015; Gereffi, 2014; Thun, 2017), thus interconnecting the problems they face. On the political side, a global governance system has been developed since the creation of the United Nations (Weiss, 2015), one that elevates international organisations and great powers to the role of ‘global governors’ that define problems and policy agendas (Avant et al., 2012). Cooperation between states (Craig, 2008) and competition over hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2001; Waltz, 1999) characterise the logic of global governance, though multilateral agencies have relative autonomy in the functioning of their secretariats (Barkin, 2013). When it comes to constructing social issues, there is a global governance system that creates knowledge about them, from data to policy ideas (Deacon, 2007a; Kaasch and Martens, 2015), and is led by international organisations that pursue different interests and mandates (O’Brien, 2014a; Stoll, 2018). The construction of global social problems cannot be dissociated from this governance system, given the prominence that these actors have in terms of legitimacy, resources and reach. I will focus on them in the following chapters.

¹⁹ This point will be critical to examine why the future of work debate was, in the 2010, led by works and ideas published in English. It is not just a secondary observation, since the language constitutes the first barrier for actors that, despite making claims about this issue, will remain unheard by the ‘global’ public. This linguistic monopoly, channelled through specific institutionalised media, determines that, as Tomlinson remarks, “what get excluded are probably writings in difficult or obscure foreign languages, ephemeral writings like newspaper articles, slogans on walls and leaflets distributed at demonstrations, and almost everything people say but do not write down” (1991: 11).

At this point of my analysis, I am able to delineate a strategy to study the emergence of the future of work as a global subject of concern. Grounded on the constructivist approach delineated above, *I will concentrate on the main claims that structured different debates on the future of work and its possible challenges*. The focus will be put on the discourse of globally influential actors, understood as those whose claims gather attention from the global agora, encouraging responses from other interlocutors. Drawing upon discursive constructionism, *I will study the epistemological construction of the future of work* –i.e. the elaboration of facts and trends that lead to actions-, and the alternative responses presented in the academic and public discussion about them. The discussion about what to do about them, related to public policy, will be covered in the following chapters, explaining the ideas developed by international organisations on the future of jobs. The relevance of the rhetorical dimension and use of persuasion in facts-construction will be highlighted. Also, in line with post-structural analysis, I will stress the importance of power relations to understand claims-making, contextualising actors in global structures and in history.

b. The future of work: the construction of a global social issue

Futurism takes over social and labour policy

The future represents a fertile ground to be studied from a constructivist point of view. The fact that it possesses no material or independent reality makes it a privileged object of reflection. Realist perspectives lose validity when the topic of research are issues that have not occurred. And, at the same time, some of the most pressing issues for world society in the last decade have been oriented to the future (Fraser, 2016). Climate change is an expected state of affairs given demonstrable trends in the planet's temperature, while technological innovations threaten to weaken social integration, opening a new spectrum of risks. These trends, since they allude to imagined futures, become problems only insofar as actors claimed them as such; the future becomes a gravitational force in societies when they offer a point of reference for actors' present actions (Beckert, 2016). In this case, my working hypothesis is that, in the mid-2010s, the future of work *became a global social problem* due to the active role of influential claims-makers in building the frameworks, notions and facts that would make possible its very conception as a problem. That is not to say, of course, that the processes that are at the basis of tomorrow's issues in the world of work were *created* by such actors; the structural and ideational dimensions run in parallel, and basically there is no scientific way of discerning whether their future will be shaped by what actors think of them or not.

In that sense, my question about the *construction* of the future leaves aside whether the trends identified by analysts will effectively take place. Instead of engaging with the immediate practical and normative issues posed by them, the constructivist perspective favours second-order analysis, that is, observing observers (Luhmann, 2012). The truth of their ideas is less relevant than their overall impact on the global debate about this issue. With that spirit in mind, in this section I will present *three claims about the future of work* that elevated it as a novel social problem for the world. The first held that the world is going through a 'fourth industrial revolution'; the second, that most jobs can be automated by intelligent machines; and finally, the third affirms that new technologies disproportionately benefit capital and the most skilled groups in society. The first opened a field of *uncertainty*

over the future; the other two pointed to the *risks* that are concurrent with the mentioned ‘revolution’. These observations, I will demonstrate, delineated the contours of the discussion in the 2010s, establishing the axes that were going to be considered central in social and labour policy during those years, at least in the international discourse. The influence reached by the actors that put them forward was certainly explained by their privileged position in global structures, as well as by their rhetorical value, giving their ideas force of law. After examining such claims and their context, the analysis will focus on the contrasting responses they received, thus mapping the global debate on the future of jobs and its problems.

First claim: “the world is going through a fourth industrial revolution”

The first statement corresponds to the idea that currently the global economy is on the verge of a new era, one that presents continuities and progress in relation to previous times. The term that succeeded in naming this expected process was the ‘Fourth Industrial Revolution’ (FIR). The discussion on the future of work took place in the 2010s with this epochal change in the background, delimiting the aspects to be problematised from the large variety of dimensions that could have been highlighted in the debate. The fact that *the future was imagined in most accounts in relation to technology* dismissed the importance of other ‘megatrends’ that could be equally prominent for the world of work, namely environmental change (Montt et al., 2018), demographic shifts and migration (International Labour Office, 2016c) or the demise of labour’s collective organisation (ILO-ACTRAV, 2019). These processes, and many others for sure, represented possible entry points to imagine how work will look in the coming decades, and they were also linked to an age-based rationale: however, there were hardly formulations such as ‘the future of work in the era of’ the Anthropocene, the Sixth Mass Extinction Period, the Financialisation Era or the new Gilded Age, concepts that certainly portrayed relevant processes and their problematic consequences in the 2010s.

The future of work, despite the previous, was imagined most predominantly in relation to technology. This and the following sections will provide evidence of such affirmation. How can this be explained? The answer can be found, in my view, in the principles with which futures studies in the West were institutionalised in their early days in the mid-twentieth century, which ever since have made projections and build potential scenarios based on scientific argumentation. According to Hyeonju Son’s (2015: 123) historical account of futurism, between the 1940s and 1960s, there was the institutionalisation of “the prevalence of technological forecasting as a key approach”. In the following two decades, futures studies showed an increasing awareness about the possible limits to economic growth, and from the 1990s, the discourse turned to the adaptability of organisations in relation to emerging global risks, looking to satisfy economic imperatives²⁰. There was already a cultural predisposition in Western observers (who, as will become clear later, were the ones that invested themselves with the authority to speak about ‘the global’) to focus their attention on technological innovations as far as projecting the future was concerned. At the same time, the rhetoric of ‘global risks’, extended since a couple of decades (e.g. Bostrom and Ćirković, 2009; Centeno

²⁰ Son, in this line, affirms that for some decades now “the predominant foresight scenario has changed the framework of questions regarding the futures approach into how to improve organizations and their strategic planning. The primary criteria of whether viable alternative futures are also assessed by the possibilities of economic gains and management goals” (2015: 124).

et al., 2015), made conceivable the existence of worldwide threats, in this case related to technology.

The expansion of the fourth industrial revolution narrative

It is in this intellectual context that the FIR concept was developed. It was coined in 2015 by Klaus Schwab (Foreign Affairs, 2016; Schwab, 2016), director of the World Economic Forum in Davos. It presented a simple narrative of the future, linking it to previous periods in economic history, predominantly focused on technical evolution. In this narrative, the first industrial revolution (1760-1840) was led by the use of steam and new forms of transport; the second (1840-1960) was characterised by electricity and the organisation of assembly lines; the third one (1960-2000s) was based on computing and digital technologies (Schwab, 2016). On its part, the fourth wave is characterised by the fusion of physical and digital infrastructures: it “began at the turn of this century and builds on the digital revolution. It is characterized by a much more ubiquitous and mobile internet... by artificial intelligence and machine learning” (Schwab, 2016: 12). Skilton and Hovsepian (2018: 6), in a book dedicated to analyse in detail the FIR, suggested that unlike previous industrial revolutions, the FIR had the potential to be truly universal, given the expansion of information technologies and innovations in the context of the globalisation of the economy.

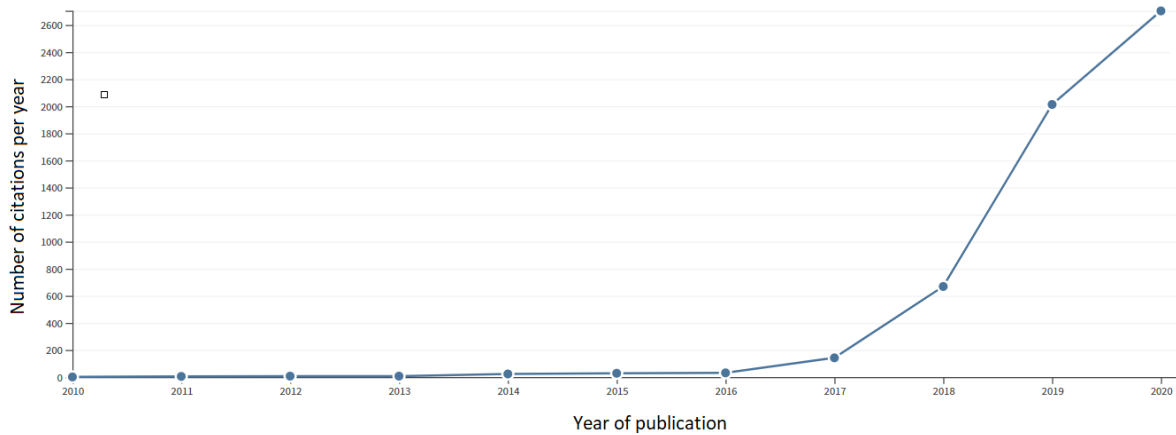
Such a prognosis rested on the idea that the processing capacity of machines and computers will continue to grow exponentially in the future, following a trend already predicted by experts (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014; McKinsey Global Institute, 2017a). A key characteristic of this process, it was argued, was that it was not reduced to industrial work or any type of occupation in particular, but it could impact virtually all jobs and labour markets (Bughin, et al., 2017; Susskind & Susskind, 2015). Most advances referred to *general purpose technologies*, i.e. those that “have a wide array of applications”, are “initially crude but evolving in complexity” and tend to develop as clusters of technologies (Bekar, et al., 2017), which explains that they can be, at least in paper, linked to any work-related activity. Futurist James Clark affirmed in that line that “there is now nowhere in the globalized job market to escape the pace of technological change, nowhere to hide from it”. Clark further argued that

this is a civilizational phase change... The power of these new complex technologies... and the speed at which they are arriving, in almost every country, in almost every industry, with so many more people living longer and able to work longer, all this taken together means we’ve got an unarguably large and unique perfect storm brewing (2017: 45)

This concept was echoed by multiple authors and organisations to make sense of the challenges ahead in global labour policy (e.g. Colin and Palier, 2016; Kemp, 2016; Kiggins, 2018; Moore et al., 2018; OECD, 2019; Penpraser, 2018; Skilton and Hovsepian, 2018; World Bank, 2018, 2019). Figure 2 indicates its explosive appearance in the academic discourse. Since its conception in 2015 until 2020, it was cited in 529 scientific articles, primarily in journals related to engineering, computer science and business economics, as well as in several others in the social sciences. Interestingly, its use was not only restricted to English-speaking regions, but on the contrary, academics from South Korea, China, Brazil or India were extensively citing it as much as in Western countries²¹.

²¹ Further characteristics of the literature citing this concept can be found in www.webofknowledge.com .

Figure 2: The ‘fourth industrial revolution’ as a key concept in the academic discourse (number of citations, 2010-2020)



Source: Web of Science (Science and Social Science Citation Indexes). Number of citations of the phrase ‘fourth industrial revolution’ (title, abstract and/or keywords) in English

The previous indicates that the FIR incrementally became a global concept to make sense of the future, and thus to frame prospects on the world of work. From my constructivist approach, I must interrogate this trend looking at: first, the problems associated to this diagnosis, and secondly to the interests that claims-makers, in this case the World Economic Forum, had in proposing the mentioned idea. In relation to the first, *the particularity of the notion of an industrial revolution is that it is immediately attached to a series of problems*, under the principle that they tend to disrupt previous social forms. The case of the first and second revolutions is well-known in that sense, being linked to issues of poverty, rural migration, exploitation and class conflict in economically leading countries (Allen, 2011; Maddison, 2001; Williamson, 1995), and underdevelopment and dependency in subordinated regions (Frank, 1969; Wallerstein, 2006). In that sense, the conception of a new industrial stage cannot be dissociated, unless seen from a manifestly naïve perspective, from the dislocations it would produce. In the Forum’s narrative, the main problems identified –that will be expanded later in this chapter- were associated to automation trends, privacy concerns and the management of algorithms (Schwab, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2017a, 2017b, 2018).

Before I look at the responses given in the global discussion to the idea of the FIR, I can add a short comment on the reasons that explain its popularisation and the interests behind its creation. On the first point, the *simplicity of the historical narrative* gives this concept an enormous rhetoric value: it can be described in just a few lines, relying on categories that are widely known, almost part of our common understanding. At least in Western societies, to be sure, in the sense that it possesses an implicit focus on the Global North and its historical experiences of industrialisation – for instance, it does not contemplate the ‘first’ revolution started in the post-war context in Latin America, or in China after Deng Xiaoping’s opening to foreign capital in the 1970s (Rist, 2008). Apart from focusing on the North, the FIR concept borrows from the logic of modernisation (Escobar, 1991; Peet and Hartwick, 2015), posing the need for countries to catch up with the current ceaseless pace of innovation. It is both a

description of a historical transformation and a normative conception of a trajectory to follow.

Furthermore, historical periodisation is never a neutral exercise: it reflects an interested evolutionary understanding from a particular point of view (Le Goff, 2015). My Interviews with researchers from the World Economic Forum revealed that the organisation's discourse on the FIR played a key role in its own political agenda, which until 2020 had digitalisation and the future of jobs as its main axis²². The concept positioned the Forum as authoritative voice on global social affairs, and in subsequent years director Klaus Schwab was going to take advantage of that new place by pushing for a move towards 'stakeholder capitalism' (e.g. Financial Times, 2020), the long-standing political project of the Forum (Pigman, 2007). As it is known, they organise annual meetings bringing together political, economic and cultural global elites, where the Forum exercises its 'discreet power': setting policy agendas from a supposedly disinterested position (Garsten and Sorbom, 2018). In the 2010s, the FIR and the future of work became a central topic of discussion in these meetings, from where they expanded their own framework at that high level²³. In framing the notion of the FIR, the Forum bet to be considered a *prophet* that foresees the future, a *saviour* that offers solutions for potential disruptions, and as a *saint* that represents a disinterested human-centred approach to deal with this new era²⁴ (see, to illustrate this point, World Economic Forum, 2017a).

Positive response: the rhetoric of 'preparedness' and the business of the future of work

The forecasts about an epochal shift related to intelligent technologies triggered two types of responses in the international discourse, one exhorting actors to adapt and the other questioning how radical these transformations will be. The first responds to the question: how should economic actors organise to face this new era? I call this argument the *rhetoric of preparedness*: societies –more precisely, companies- must rearrange their organisation not to be left behind by the train of technological development. The problem for society is, therefore, to provide conditions for it to happen. From a conceptual perspective, this approach presents three implicit characteristics. It represents technology as an external factor that 'impacts' the functioning of the economy, as if it was not already part of it (about this conception, see Badham, 2006); on the other hand, it promotes a 'soft-deterministic' (Williams and Edge, 1996) understanding of technological evolution, in the sense that it is presented as inevitable, but with room of manoeuvre for individual actors to implement them; and finally, in line with neoliberal futures studies (Son, 2015), it frames the future in terms of challenges for private organisations that must be sorted. The World Economic Forum was a key proponent of this logic:

The question for all industries and companies, without exception, is no longer "Am I going to be disrupted?" but "When is disruption coming, what form will it take and how will it affect me and my organization? ... The fourth industrial revolution may be driving disruption, but the

²² Interviews with researchers in Geneva, where the Forum's headquarters are located.

²³ Details about the Forum's annual meetings in Davos, Switzerland, can be found on: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/archive/davos2020>

²⁴ I have borrowed the idea of international organisations as 'prophets, saviours and saints' from Sotiria Grek (2020).

challenges it presents are of our own making. It is thus in our power to address them and enact the changes and policies needed to adapt (and flourish) in our emerging new environment (Schwab, 2016: 17, 99)

The narrative of preparedness was, at the same time, particularly resonant in the international business community, due to a large extent to *the role of management consultancies*. The global consultancy industry provides accounting services to companies, recommending strategies to lead with their changing environment (Skærbæk and Tryggestad, 2010). The industry is largely concentrated: four companies control 66 per cent of global market shares (International Accounting Intelligence, 2017). The so-called ‘Big Four’ - Deloitte, Ernst & Young, KMPG and Price Waterhouse Cooper, the largest players in the field (Gow and Kells, 2018) - in the last decades have gone through a ‘think-tankisation’ process, meaning that they increasingly invested in knowledge creation, taking part in global debates by defining problems and agendas for business (Saint-Martin, 2013). Saint-Martin affirms that their views and proposals matter since they act as agents of isomorphism for firms, spreading business models all over the world. At the same time, they are largely embedded at present in global policy networks, participating in high-level events, co-authoring publications or leading initiatives in different regions of the world (Morgan et al., 2019).

In the case of the future of work, consultancy companies had been an active actor in advertising the preparedness discourse, thus constructing a new problem for the private sector. As Sturdy and Morgan (2018) suggest, these firms organised since 2016 a series of publications, initiatives and events, “creating incipient demand or anxiety and uncertainty, all this before any particular set of consulting tools or models is offered”. The authors affirm that *these actors did not precisely respond to a given, already existing state of uncertainty due to technological change, but they themselves created such state of uncertainty in an interested fashion*. As profit-oriented organisations, these companies aimed to lead the private sector to a *new business model* that prepares their organisation and workforce to the future ‘labour landscape’ (KMPG, 2016). While they describe this process, they also pointed to the way to follow:

the time to embark on the ‘AI journey’ has indeed arrived. To automate or not to automate is no longer a question anymore. Enterprises will have to integrate AI for their own benefit and survival, with the numbers of such entities growing steadily (Ernst & Young, 2017, p. 9)

The obvious interest behind this kind of claims is *making a business out of the future of jobs*²⁵. Apart from the tone of urgency delivered by these consultancies in several reports (see figure 3 below), the organisational model they constructed to respond to the problems of the future is one in which businesses automate as many positions as they can, while offering re-skilling programmes to reintegrate their displaced workforce. The idea, that organisations as the World Bank would later adopt (2019b), was that “organisations cannot protect jobs which are made redundant by technology – but they do have a responsibility to their people”; therefore, companies should “protect people not jobs” (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2017: 5). Such a

²⁵ This business dimension is, to be sure, not restricted only to the management field, but also to finance. Expectations about the role of FIR technologies had an impact in the value of high-tech companies, as expressed by a KMPG report: “projections for the i4.0 [industry 4.0] market run into the trillions. Forecasts for potential value creation are eye-watering. Revenue expectations — at manufacturers and at service providers — are flying high” (2017b: 1).

scenario would make firms reap the benefits of the new industrial innovations, and at the same time workers “would benefit from skillsets tailored to local demand, better access to opportunities and more appropriate job-fit” (Accenture, 2018: 16). Such a depoliticised conception of labour, ignoring the ‘indeterminacy’ of workers (Dundon et al., 2020) and the latent conflicts that the model could provoke in employment relations, would be contested by other approaches to the future of jobs, as we will see later in this chapter.

Figure 3: Reports of ‘Big Four’ management firms, urging businesses to adapt to the future of work (2017-2018)



Source: Accenture, 2018; Deloitte, 2017; KPMG, 2017a; Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2017

Sceptical response: downplaying the technological hype

The opposite reaction to forecasts announcing a new social and economic era was the one that doubted on the reality of such expectations. For this sceptic perspective, in the future, work will not be substantially transformed by new technologies as many analysts have predicted. I have found two varieties of this argument: the first, based on historical examples, affirms that there is a recurrent tendency in Western societies to make dystopian representations of the future of work, and this time it would not be any different. The second variant is the idea that, beyond the transformative potential of the FIR innovations –artificial intelligence, machine learning, robotics, data analytics, and so on-, societies have constantly dealt with technological change in a way that has kept employment growth, and therefore it is expectable that they create jobs in the same manner. Of course, this refers to the threat of displacement caused by the introduction of machines at work. The scepticism derived from both positions, in terms of the construction of the issue, fundamentally meant that the future was not necessary a problem. Whereas the preparedness narrative was a call for action for the private sector, the technological hype one *dismissed the need to respond* in practice to the mentioned forecasts, being essentially a conservative position in the debate.

Incredulity related to a historical and perhaps critical stance in part came from sociologists of work and scholars in social studies of technology, who had certainly witnessed different waves of innovation in the past. In the 2000s, sociologists expressed disbelief about the real impact of computers and the Internet for work, for example forecasts of the ‘end of work’ (Smith, 2006; Strangleman, 2007). In the past decade the situation was not different, having sociologists denouncing the ‘new catastrophism’ (Urry, 2016) associated with the future of

technology. Part of the aversion against the described predictions was due to the persistence of deterministic views that did not take uncertainty into account (Boyd and Holton, 2018); on the other hand, critical authors suggested that the terms of the discussion were diverting public attention from the more real problem of economic concentration by technology companies, as Wajcman held:

the popular commentators and journalists, not to mention the business consultants, seem to devour this bleak picture with a Frankensteinian relish... The homogeneity of the Silicone Valley creators is a more dangerous threat to the future than any perceived robotic apocalypse. Too often these purveyors of the future have their backs to society, enchanted by technological promise and blind to the problems around them (2017: 2, 7)

Other relevant arguments like this circulated in the academic debate about the risks of automation, which will be analysed in depth in the next section. The second sceptic position mentioned above was more related to labour economics. In this field, it is agreed that technological innovations have a productivity effect in the short run, at the same time recognising that, when they start to cause disruption, the economy is capable of absorbing it by generating new jobs, in a process of *creative destruction* (Cahuc and Zylberberg, 2004). The belief behind this view, sustained by the adaptability of labour markets in previous periods in history, is that markets are capable of reaching equilibrium despite exogenous shocks. In 2015, when the literature was still incipient, economist Werner Eichhorst published a paper that followed the same rationale, now applied to the future of work debate from the past decade²⁶:

the future world of work will certainly be different from what we know today. However, this is not a reason to be afraid; as history has shown, human creativity and inventiveness are strong and will always find ways to cope with new situations, including creating new job profiles in the future. We have been living with technological progress, globalization and structural change for decades and will continue to do so in the future (2015: 27)

As in the previous case, this idea was particularly relevant in the debates about automation and possible job losses caused by new technologies, which I will examine now. The consequence of this argument in terms of the construction of the future of work as a social issue, is that new trends were represented once again as unproblematic, given the historical adaptability of capitalist economies in relation to exogenous change. That was precisely the implicit message of scepticism in this case, while at the same time other observers were pointing to the disruptive character of the FIR, and claiming for 'preparing' for the future of jobs.

²⁶ Eichhorst, probably as other observers on this topic, took his words back, recognising in an article from 2020 that "although past conjectures of jobless growth have thus far proved dumfounded, this time it could be different. Inescapably, digitalization, artificial intelligence and the rise of the platform economy will have profound consequences of quality and diversity of future employment relations, if not on the quantity of such jobs" (Eichhorst et al., 2020: 2).

Second claim: “the robots are coming, or a large proportion of jobs are at risk of being automated”

The second claim that shaped the construction of the future of work as a global problem was related, once again, to technology. In the 2010s, with an increasing awareness about recent developments in robotics and AI in the public and academic discussion, the idea that ‘the robots are coming’ for everyone’s jobs became noticeably ubiquitous. Although unexpected, forecasts about a coming ‘robocalypse’ (Autor and Salomons, 2017) occupied the attention of analysts and the media on a worldwide scale. This section will show how these claims provoked a series of debates, all of which pointed to different aspects of work, disputing the extent of the problems brought by new technologies and their political implications for projecting the future. A central trend associated to the ‘coming of the robots’ was *automation*, a phenomenon that had recurrently generated fear in capitalist societies over history. Examples are well-known: concerns on the introduction of machinery in early industrial economies (Ricardo, 1952; Smith, 1999); the alienating effects of manufacturing technologies in the post-war context (Blauner, 1964; Braverman, 1976; Friedmann, 1961); the implications of information technologies for surveillance in the workplace (Zuboff, 1984) and the supposed ‘end of work’ (Rifkin, 1995); the new dynamics created by the Internet and the digitalisation of labour (Boreham, et al., 2008; Huws, 2014). Some ideas were going to return in the 2010s, now focused on different innovations and in the context of a globalised, interconnected economy.

The ‘rise of the robots’ metaphor and the spectre of uselessness

Before I present what was new about the debates of the 2010s on this theme, let me first focus on what was not: this case showed both continuities and divergences with the past. As I have just mentioned, concerns about autonomous technologies had been a historical constant in previous decades, often grounded on the view that sees in innovation the potential of out-of-control utilisation (see Winner, 1978). The metaphor that concentrated these fears in the 2010s was that of the ‘rise of the robots’, which was precisely the name of futurist Martin Ford’s best-selling book that arguably opened the academic discussion on automation to the public in 2015 (Ford, 2015). Interestingly, the historical origins of this image can be found in American post-war society. Thomas Rid (2016), in his history of cybernetics, showed that the ‘robots are coming’ meme was created in that period, but in relation to automated warfare technologies, the ones revealed to the public through the bombing of Japan in the Second World War²⁷. The military and the media spread the idea that foreign powers could invade American territory utilising robots; in the subsequent decades, in America’s public opinion the ‘rise of the robots’ was recycled to imagine the consequences of computers for a potential jobless future. The *rhetoric of invasion* was also pervasive in the current debates on the future of work, especially to promote protections that would make jobs ‘robot-proof’ (Aoun, 2017).

A second recurrent trope gave shape to the current debates on automation was the threat of unemployment. Fear and anxiety about the future of jobs is not a novel phenomenon

²⁷ Reflecting the fears of retaliation, America’s Secretary of War Henry Stimson wrote in 1945 for the New York Times: “war may descend upon us by thousands of robots passing unannounced across our shorelines, unless we act now to prevent them” (Rid, 2016: 51)

whatsoever (Spencer, 2018). Sociologist Richard Sennett (2006, p. 83) has called this persistent idea *the spectre of uselessness* - a constant trope in modern societies that had appeared in many different contexts. Unlike in previous historical periods, in the 2010s it was the first time that this 'spectre' manifested at a *global level*. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) revealed in its 2017 Global Poll that there was a worldwide awareness about the transformative effect of intelligent technologies for the world of work:

more than half of the global respondents (55 percent) say that new technologies are making jobs more secure, while at the same time also 55 percent indicate that new technologies put financial pressures on the wages of workers (55 percent). Globally people view technology as bringing opportunities, but are aware that there is a chance for negative side effects on jobs that need to be addressed by rules and government action (ITUC 2017: 60)

The possibility of mass unemployment due to the adoption of labour-displacing technologies might affect, as studies suggested, all occupations (Arntz et al., 2016; Ford, 2015; Frey and Osborne, 2017; Susskind and Susskind, 2015) and, therefore, most countries of the world economy (McKinsey Global Institute, 2017b). The main reason was that intelligent technologies go far beyond the mechanisation of work – “the replacement of human and animal muscle power by machine power”; they could automate processes, adapting their own parameters based on artificial intelligence and deep learning, thus extending their reach to cognitive tasks (Chace, 2016). Besides the huge ‘resulting suffering’ that technological displacement could cause (Clark, 2017) and the vulnerability that workers might experience due to surveillance technologies (Moore, et al., 2018), from a constructionist view, automation *became* a global issue because influential actors depicted and treated it as such.

The ‘risks of automation’: the invention of a new social problem

Previous to the expansion of the ‘rise of the robots’ narrative in the media and in the global policy discussion, the same authors that through best-selling publications popularised these forecasts had already presaged a potential scenario of joblessness related to automation. In 2009, aforementioned Silicon Valley entrepreneur Martin Ford (2009) had unsuccessfully published *The lights in the tunnel: automation, accelerating technology and the economy of the future*, book that argued that mainstream economists were not aware of the coming wave of technological unemployment. In 2011, MIT economists Brynjolfsson and McAfee, authors of the highly influential *The second machine age* (2014), had proposed in their noticeably less popular ‘The race against the machine’ the same argument as Ford’s. These authors, and their ideas on the future of jobs, became mainstream some years after²⁸, and their predictions turned into sensitive, realistic expectations, after being depicted as ‘nightmarish’²⁹ in the media³⁰. What changed in this very American saga that could explain this substantial shift in common sense? From a technology perspective I could argue that the innovations they were

²⁸ With all the mechanisms that consecrate authors in the current ideas industry (Drezner, 2017): invitations to international conferences and TED talks; op-eds in the most prestigious newspapers of the Anglo-sphere; deals with large editorial companies, etc.

²⁹ Financial Times, October 30 2011.

³⁰ The expansion of the ‘robot uprising’ narrative did not come, of course, without scepticism. For example, Robin Hanson (2015) from conservative George Mason University interpreted Ford’s predictions just as an excuse to put forward a redistributive agenda led by basic income schemes, and in that sense proposed that “all that stuff about robots is a distraction”.

referring to –robotics and AI mostly- started being displayed by the media, giving occasional demonstrations that made them look more powerful and capable than before. However, this answer would ignore a big event in the scientific understanding of these matters that took place in 2013.

I am talking about the publication of a working paper named ‘The future of employment: how susceptible are jobs to automation?’, by Oxford scholars Carl Frey and Michael Osborne (2013). Being arguably the most relevant piece on the future of work in the last decade, their research critically determined the debate on the possible impact of intelligent technologies on the labour market. Their contribution was path-breaking not because of the theme they addressed, but due to their quantitative approach to it: they developed *a model to estimate the chances that individual jobs have of being automated away*, representing a move from the field of speculation to the empirical level. The authors introduced the paper alluding precisely to that gap:

To our knowledge, no study has yet quantified what recent technological progress is likely to mean for the future of employment... Needless to say, a number of factors are driving decisions to automate and we cannot capture these in full. Rather we aim, from a technological capabilities point of view, to determine which problems engineers need to solve for specific occupations to be automated (Frey and Osborne, 2013: 3–4)

The study was explicitly inspired by American labour economists who had established the analytical link between education and technological change (e.g. Autor and Dorn, 2013; Katz and Autor, 1999), Particularly, it incorporated the idea that both elements ‘compete’ with each other, in the sense that innovations require of a skilled workforce but they can also surpass labour supply, generating mismatches (Goldin and Katz, 2009; Goos, 2013). In that line, Frey and Osborne took a series of occupations and profiled them in terms of their required skills; then, calculating how susceptible to automation those skills were, they assigned them to specific occupations, calculating their risk of being replaced by machines. The key assumption behind this modelling (taken from Acemoglu and Autor, 2011; Autor and Dorn, 2013) was that the occupations most exposed to being computerised are those that perform primarily routine tasks, be they manual or cognitive; on the opposite, non-routine tasks (that either require high dexterity in perception or manipulation, or significant creative and social capacities) are the most difficult to automate. The results from their calculations were, as the quote above make clear, only based on the capacity of currently existing technologies to perform certain tasks, and thus replace occupations, leaving the political or economic limits to automation aside³¹.

The conclusion from their study was that *47 per cent of jobs* in the United States were at high risk of automation. This number was used as the ‘anchor figure’ to advertise the paper in newspapers and the academia (Willcocks, 2020). It was widely reported in the media and generated an extensive debate in mainstream economics, an outstanding result for a piece of research that had not been even published in a peer-reviewed academic journal. In truth, it was just as a working paper that could be found in any online searching engine, but the media

³¹ For example, the authors recognise that “workers can thus be expected to resist new technologies, insofar that they make their skills obsolete and irreversibly reduce their expected earnings” (Frey and Osborne, 2013: 6), but this conflict dimension is not integrated into their model.

and academics cited it as an ‘Oxford’ study, meaning that its legitimacy came primarily from the institution where its authors were employed and not from conventional sources of academic reliability³². Beyond its intellectual implications, I affirm that *the paper created a new social problem*: while automation, as I have mentioned, had caused tensions in capitalism since its beginnings, now it was *conceptualised in terms of risk*, one that can be measured and managed, unlike mere uncertainty (on the distinction between risk and uncertainty, see Beckert, 1996, 2016; Lidskog, 2013). Although in developed economies there were fears about unemployment or concerns about the rise in non-standard jobs, especially after the Great Recession, the 2010s saw the *economisation of uselessness*: the ‘rise of the robots’ was no longer a speculative business for futurists, but a scientifically shaped problem for society.

The initial measurements of the risks of automation, as Frey and Osborne’s, were so disproportionately high that they rapidly gathered public attention. The Economist in 2019 published an article focused on the success of their research in terms of coverage:

It is one of the most widely quoted statistics of recent years. No report or conference presentation on the future of work is complete without it. Think-tanks, consultancies, government agencies and news outlets have pointed to it as evidence of an imminent jobs apocalypse. The finding—that 47% of American jobs are at high risk of automation by the mid-2030s—comes from a paper published in 2013 by two Oxford academics, Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael Osborne. It has since been cited in more than 4,000 other academic articles (The Economist, 2019)

These authors expressed several times, despite their diffusion, that their figures were misunderstood: media reports were ignoring, perhaps on purpose, that they were just focusing on technical capabilities, not on actual risk (Frey and Osborne, 2018). What matters to us in terms of the construction of the problem is not their accuracy in forecasting future developments, but the fact that this study triggered a number of responses in the global academic debate, which will be analysed in the next section. At the same time, despite their study being centred on America, their model was replicated in numerous studies in different regions, thus globalising the risks of automation and representing them as a universal menace (ILO, 2016; Weller et al., 2019; World Bank, 2016).

The reasons that explain the success of Frey and Osborne’s framework are varied. For one, the prestige that the economics profession has all over the world, giving economists a symbolic power well above other social scientists (Earle et al., 2017; Milonakis and Fine, 2009), helps to understand how their predictions were considered feasible from the outset, especially coming from a renowned higher-education institution. Econometric models, the preferred epistemological tool in the profession (Morgan, 2012; Rodrik, 2015), have the capacity to create facts, thus altering the behaviour of economic actors (Callon, 1998; Cochoy et al., 2010; Mackenzie, 2007). That partly explains the fact that their figures, or even their model, turned a mere possibility into a fact. Another relevant aspect is the fact that mainstream economics is largely dominated by American intellectuals, and therefore a study focused on the United States’ jobs market resonated not only in that specific country but in

³² There is a whole industry in higher education related to ranking institutions (Hazelkorn, 2009) – Oxford University is consistently in the top positions, adding ‘evidence’ to its already positive reputation.

the whole world, being taken as a kind of universal trend. I will now study these and other responses, profiling the debate on the risks of automation in the 2010s.

Responses: the debate about the real impact of automation in economics

The intimidating predictions about the risks of automation in the mid-2010s caught the attention of experts in the global policy agora. In economics, the reaction was to assess the severity of the problem as described by previous works; students of industrial relations and other commentators approached it from a political perspective. In terms of problem construction, labour economists focused on the macroeconomic dimensions of automation, trying to show that technological unemployment was not the threat it was initially expected to be (for extensive reviews, Arntz et al., 2019; Prettner and Bloom, 2020). The first argument was that machines do not only replace human labour, but they also possess significant complementarities as far as tasks are concerned (Autor, 2015). In the same line, Autor and Salomons (2017, 2018) studied the productivity effect of robots in the manufacture sector in the United States and OECD countries, finding that while they displaced workers, they increased production to a level that generates more jobs. Other studies from American labour economists emphasised the negative impact that technological change had for workers: in the US it explained half of the decline in the labour share of the product (Eden and Gaggl, 2018); affected more strongly routine jobs and, to a lesser degree, high-skilled individuals (Acemoglu and Restrepo, 2017, 2018). Despite being mostly concentrated on the US case, these works were key in raising awareness about the effects of automation for inequality, which will be covered in the next section of this chapter.

A second group of responses questioned the model proposed by Frey and Osborne (2013, 2017) and other measurements that allegedly overestimated the proportion of jobs at risk of technological displacement (e.g. McKinsey Global Institute, 2017a). While Frey and Osborne's model assigned a risk score to each occupation, Arntz and colleagues (2016, 2017) proposed an alternative framework starting from the principle that individuals in similar occupations may perform very different tasks, and therefore it was not correct to use occupations as the basic unit of analysis. Taking the heterogeneity of tasks in each job –only some of which can be automated–, these authors concluded:

Our study reveals a serious and systematic upward bias in occupation-level estimates of automation potentials compared to a job-level approach, as workers specialize in non-automatable niches within their profession (Arntz et al., 2017: 160)

Unlike Frey and Osborne's estimates of 46 per cent of jobs in the US being at high risk of automation, *the job-level model exhibited a 9 per cent*, a drastic decrease, to be sure. The effect of this new measurements were immediate: while initially the OECD had supported their research (Arntz et al., 2016), then this organisation made it their own approach to the future of employment (Nedelkoska and Quintini, 2018; OECD, 2019). The OECD estimates were going to be reported by the press, affirming: "the research suggests far fewer jobs are at risk of disappearing than previous estimates from Carl Frey and Michael Osborne"³³. It meant that the 'threat of uselessness' had vanished: 'robocalypse' was cancelled, as Willcocks (2020) suggested. However, since many tasks could be replaced by

³³ Financial Times, April 1 2018.

technology, studies in this line focused instead on the dramatic changes that jobs will experience as a result.

In any case, the high variability of the estimates on automation was interpreted by some as a sign of unpredictability, undermining its condition of empirical fact. The World Bank (2019b: 22) in particular pointed to the stark differences in the percentage of jobs at risk of being automated, for example, going from one-digit estimates to more than half of the workforce in studies about the United States, Ukraine or Bolivia. The Bank criticised that estimates would not consider technology absorption rates, being particularly relevant in less advanced countries where low wages competed with capital investments. However, in previous studies inspired by the Frey and Osborne model, the Bank had predicted high risks of automation in developing economies (see World Bank, 2016b). The same situation occurred in the ILO: a 2016 study indicated that 56 per cent of jobs in East Asia was going to be replaced by machines in the next 20 years (ILO, 2016); nonetheless, two years later, another ILO publication concluded instead that the estimates had a high degree of dispersion, making them less convincing (Balliester and Elsheikhi, 2018). Even though the academic discourse showed significant disagreements to that respect, what was in dispute were not just simple statistics, but whether the future of work was as problematic as it could be in terms of technological unemployment.

Responses from the social sciences: the automation of work as a political project

In the late 2010s, two additional reactions to the ‘rise of the robots’ took place that are worth mentioning. They highlighted the political dimension of this phenomenon, one that was normally absent in economics modelling and forecasting. The first is a perspective embodied by industrial relations scholars that looked at the political economy of work. Their starting point was that the availability of new production technologies did not necessarily translated into actual implementation: there was a process of adoption in companies that involved tensions and new organisational adjustments (Shestakofsky, 2017). In a word, this approach looked at the largely ignored politics of automation (Wajcman, 2017). Following this research path, Paul Thompson (2020: 304) rightly pointed to several dimensions that could restrict the possibility of automating jobs: diverse sectors –“hospitality, warehousing, platform working”- rest upon low-skilled and flexible workforce; in financialised business models, shareholders may avoid investing in long-term strategies based on technological innovations; resistance from workers is another key factor. Economists in this debate, nonetheless, assumed a frictionless workplace in which the best available means were implemented just for the sake of efficiency, as if counter-strategies from labour or managers would not count (Hanson, 2017). The bottom line of this approach is that, when it comes to automation, the problem is more complex than it seems, particularly in relation to its organisational function.

In second place, several commentators understood this in a noticeably different fashion, framing automation not as a problem but as a desirable trend: “work is, for many people, a source of misery and frustration... the reality is that paid work monopolizes our time” (Danaher, 2017a: 75). Under this premise, Srnicek and Williams (2015: 63) have supported a ‘post-work world’ utopia “in which people are no longer bound to their jobs, but free to create their own lives”. Such a project would be possible by the construction of a ‘automation economy’ based on abundance instead of scarcity, one that is explicitly designed to replace

“non-elective human labor” (Swan, 2017: 27). Proposals in this line see technological change as a key driver towards ‘post-capitalism’ (Mason, 2015) or a ‘fully automated luxury communism’, a “political project of collective solidarity and individual happiness” (Bastani, 2019: 12). The twist in the terms of the debate made by these proposals is important, because seen from this lenses, *the future of work is not a problem to solve, but a project to construct*. The limits to this societal possibility were also emphasised by other analysts, however: from the ‘meaning deficit’ that a workless society could suffer (Danaher, 2017b) to the irrelevance that such a project would have in the Global South (Thompson, 2020).

Third claim: “new technologies will increase social inequalities”

The first statement analysed in this chapter was referred to an epochal shift grounded on technological change; the second had to do with the consequences of automation for the world of work. The third addresses the implications of new technologies for social and economic inequalities. The basic assertion here was that new trends in the labour market will worsen the already worrying state of inequality in all types of economies. A case that received a significant part of public attention was that of platforms: enormous multinational companies thriving in a digital environment, employing a growing portion of the workforce in unprotected and unregulated conditions. It was not the only area of concern in the 2010s, of course, as I will show in the next sections. While productivity benefits of innovation were recognised by scholars debating on this claim, *they highlighted the downside of technology and its potential to increase imbalances in terms of employment opportunities, income levels and decision-making at work*. The background of these analyses were a series of trends: the negative effects of globalisation on inequality (Mills, 2009; Phillips, 2017); the growing importance of the financial sector in the global distribution of wealth (Carruthers, 2015; Davis and Kim, 2015); the increasing gap between global elites and the have-nots (Milanovic, 2012).

The future of work did not offer a better picture. In fact, technology was seen as a key driving force in the expansion of the social gap in the 2010s. Before examining how this was associated to the world of work, it is worth mentioning in that line that this decade witnessed the rise of big technological monopolies, embodied in social media platforms (e.g. Facebook; We Chat), searching engines (e.g. Google) or technology manufacturers (e.g. Apple) (Galloway, 2017; Rahman and Thelen, 2019). Some of them became the highest-valued companies in the world, expanding their services to industries that well exceeded their original goals – for example, through the capitalisation of their users’ data for advertisement purposes (Zuboff, 2019). The characteristics of these firms were going to be taken as an indicator of broader trends in the labour market: their business models produced and extracted value with high private returns (Mazzucato, 2018b), commonly employing a tiny number of workers in comparison to the largest companies from previous eras (West, 2018). The digitalisation of the economy had allowed them to prosper and their social benefits were evident – indicated by their popularity in terms of users- but actors as diverse as the World Bank (2016b) to international trade unions (ITUC, 2017) started to show concerns about their broader impact on the economy and social cohesion.

Inequalities in the labour market: skill-biased technologies and the decreasing labour share

In the 2010s, assessments in economics about the expansion of artificial intelligence and robotics in the production system, had a strong focus on *class inequalities*, i.e. different positions in the labour market having uneven access to economic opportunities and resources (Weber, 1946). Two problems were especially resonant in the academic discussion: the *polarisation of the labour market* due to the automation of certain types of jobs, on the one hand, and on the other, the *changing balance between capital and labour* with respect to their share of the product. Technological innovations were seen, in this context, as a catalyser, a force that could enlarge already existing social gaps. In terms of the first theme, the polarisation thesis argued that routine jobs are more susceptible to be replaced by machines. Occupations in such category, normally considered middle-skilled jobs (e.g. machine operators) would suffer a hollow-out effect, while the proportion of non-routine skilled and non-skilled jobs would increase (Acemoglu and Autor, 2011; Autor, 2015; Autor and Dorn, 2013; Gallie, 2017; Goos, 2013; Hemous and Olsen, 2013). The key notion in this literature was that of *skill-biased technical change*, referring to “theoretical possibility that technological progress benefits only a sub-group of workers” (Violante, 2008: 523). This concept focused on the differential effects on unevenly qualified individuals, not on categories that could be disproportionately benefited from innovation – e.g. younger generations (Sachs and Kotlikoff, 2012).

In the context of the future of work debate, studies on polarisation proliferated. This theme had been popular decades ago in debates about de-industrialisation (Goos and Manning, 2003), and the literature showed some continuity in terms of interpreting polarisation trends in the 2010s *both* as a consequence of economic globalisation and skill-biased technologies that tended to automate manufacturing jobs (for a review, see Breemers et al., 2017). In emerging polarisation patterns, technology did not only affect intermediate occupations, but also benefited more qualified positions, as they were more apt to incorporate innovations at work. Economist Dani Rodrik summarised this dual implications of polarisation:

skill-biased technological progress has been ongoing in the manufacturing sectors of advanced economies for decades. Two immediate consequences of this were a steady loss of jobs in manufacturing (as a share of total employment) and a rise in the skill premium (the wage differential between skilled and unskilled workers) (2018: 8)

Evidence on the situation of developing economies was more mixed, showing that some countries were more resistant to automation due to low labour costs (Maloney and Molina, 2016), thus reducing their polarisation effect, while in other cases middle-skilled jobs grew due to their pushing manufacturing sector, for example in East Asia (World Bank, 2016b).

The second aspect that attracted the attention of scholars in relation to inequality were the implications of labour-saving innovations for the distribution of income. Joseph Stiglitz (2017) was particularly emphatic on this point, arguing that this type of innovations tend to depress wages by reducing the demand for workers; in consequence, in the ‘great next transformation’ capital would get an increasing higher share vis-à-vis labour. In the same line, Korinek and Stiglitz (2017) criticised views in economics that depicted productivity increases as beneficial for society as a whole; *when innovation markets are highly concentrated in a few*

leading companies, and when they introduce advances that reduce labour demand, the result was certainly going to be growing income inequalities. This trend was particularly worrying for advanced economies if we consider the reduction in the labour share they have experienced in the last four decades, a trend that could be worsened by the new generation of intelligent technologies (Korinek, 2019). Proposals to overcome, or more precisely to prevent this result, were varied, some of which proposed taxing robots as a solution for both redistributing wealth and dis-incentivising the automation of jobs (see, for instance, Freeman, 2015).

Inequalities in the labour process: algorithmic management and platform work

The previous point showed claims about potential disparities in access to employment and income in the future world of work. Other problems were identified by sociologists of work in relation to new technologies beyond the sphere of the jobs market, now focused on the *labour process*. This approach (see Smith, 2008; Thompson, 1983, 2010) pays attention to the efforts made by employers and management to control employment relations, the indeterminacy of labour as a factor of production. Scholars in that tradition pointed to how innovations were changing the organisational dynamic at work, developing novel digital mechanisms for controlling labour, affirming that “technological change continues to be used, as it has been used since the beginning of the industrial revolution, as a means to reduce the collective power of workers” (Evans and Tilly, 2016: 652). Problems in this field refer both to the situation of individual workers and to labour as a political actor, pointing to the reduction in autonomy that they could face in the future. Two innovations that were identified by scholars as emerging devices of control: I can mention first *the use of ‘data analytics’ at work for surveillance purposes* (Whittaker, 2018). Since computers could collect and process workers’ data in a much more efficient way than in the past, they were increasingly used to monitor electronically their performance, including “email monitoring, phone tapping, tracking computer content and usage times, video monitoring and GPS tracking” (Moore, et al., 2018, p. 18). In addition to concerns on workers’ privacy rights (Sharp, 2018), analysts suggested that their safety and occupational health was also endangered by these tracking systems (Huws, 2016; Moore, 2018).

The second development, in relation to management, that caught the attention of sociologists globally was the expansion of platform labour. Even though until the end of the 2010s it accounted for a small fraction of the workforce in advanced and less developed economies (World Bank, 2019b), it was taken as a proxy of future trends in employment relations. In relation to the discussion about control and surveillance at work, *the problem with platforms in their various forms was that they were a prime example of ‘algorithmic management’*, that is, a model of decision-making in the firm that relies on intelligent devices and their own data processing, rather than on methods directly led by managers or employers (Duggan et al., 2020; Valenduc and Vendramin, 2017). Key decisions about rating and ranking systems, as well as the value of labour, were made by automated mechanisms, opaque to platform workers and independent from conventional forms of bargaining (Gandini, 2019). Several other issues were emphasised in relation to this form of employment: some pointing to the lack of social protection and wage stability from the perspective of workers (Berg et al., 2018; Bodiřoga-Vukobrat et al., 2018; De Stefano, 2016) or the biases that algorithms have with regards to specific sections of the workforce (Howcroft and Rubery, 2019; ILO, 2019).

Scholars also studied in detail the collective response from platform workers to these conditions, analysing resistance and new forms of organisation in different regional contexts (BID, 2019; Graham et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2018). The policy challenges derived from platform work, with the debates on their possible regulation, will be covered in the next chapters.

Conclusion

The most evident observation derived from this chapter is that many things were said about the future in the past decade. Several claims were made to about potential social problems, from which I extracted the three most essential ones in terms of shaping the global debate on this issue. A summary of them will be useful at this point to open questions for the next chapters, building on my constructivist framework focused on claims, responses and ideational power. The future of work was understood, first, as the effect of a broader transformation in the world economy, namely the fourth industrial revolution. This concept was proposed by the World Economic Forum through a narrative that was mostly centred on the situation of the Global North, exhorting at the same time countries and companies to get on the train of technological development before they lose track of its progress. In line with the conventional imaginaries of the future in Western societies, this time it was primarily associated to technology, more specifically to a range of intelligent devices and innovations that depart from the usual mechanisation of work, leading to the automation of processes and activities. Projections about this future transformations were characterised by what I called the 'rhetoric of preparedness', put forward by global accounting firms and think tanks, while other observers, mainly in the academia, were much more hesitant to predict trends and, therefore, to call for action in that line.

The second claim referred to the revival of the 'spectre of uselessness' in the 2010s, now related to the persuasive metaphor of the 'rise of the robots'. The origins of this image were traced back to American society, and my analysis pointed out that most of the ideas on automation, as well as the most important scholarly works on this, were referred to that country. The main difference between previous forecasts about technological unemployment and current ones was the development of econometric models that reframed the threat of automation in terms of quantifiable risks. Initial estimations presented incredibly high numbers, giving the impression –certainly with the help of the media- that a large portion of jobs could be replaced by machines in the short run. The 'economisation of uselessness', as I called this development, raised attention all over the world about a possible scenario of mass unemployment. Alternative accounts emerged, disregarding such initial works, and scholars pointed to the limitations that automation might face in political and economic terms, making technological feasibility a less convincing dimension to estimate its true potential.

In third place, previous claims on technological transformations and the automation of production led observers to examine their implications for inequality. A series of emerging problems at work were spotted, particularly on class disparities. Skill-biased technologies were pointed as a driver of labour market polarisation; the introduction of labour-saving innovations was understood to affect the already decreasing labour share in the product. On the other hand, the implementation of monitoring techniques through data analytics, as well as the spread of algorithmic management, were denounced as a real threat to the individual

and collective autonomy of workers. The emergence of platform labour was considered the quintessential version of the new world of work: business models that aimed to reduce the employment relation to its minimum, affecting labour's access to social protection, collective bargaining and any form of influence over their management. Resistance and novel forms of organisation were also important in this dimension, showing that the implementation of new technologies face significant constraints when competing interests are at stake.

To finish with, I would like to highlight the themes that were not addressed in these pages, but that will focus my analysis hereafter. Coming back to the multiple streams framework (Kingdon, 2014) described in the first chapter, it is clear that I have examined the development of a given *problem*: the future of work. However, I have deliberately left aside the *policies* that relevant actors in global labour governance proposed to tackle the various dimensions of this issue, and the *politics* of that process. In the next two chapters I am going to investigate the relationship between policy and politics in international organisations, who, by the way, were critically influenced in their own approach to the future of work by the ideas that I have covered in this chapter. Such agencies were part of the same global public policy networks that brought together authors and institutions that I have referenced so far, and it will be clear from the outset that most times international institutions effectively tried to dialogue with them and position themselves through flagship reports and events. Many times their activities consist in responding to global issues constructed by other actors (Barkin, 2013), and in the case of the future of work agenda it was not any different.

Chapter 4: The ILO and the future of work. The politics of the human-centred approach³⁴

Introduction

My analysis so far has demonstrated the emergence of the future of work as a global issue, being constructed around the idea that a universal industrial transformation was under way in the 2010s, exposing workers to redundancy and a whole new set of risks in their livelihoods. In this chapter and the next, I introduce international organisations in the picture, now broadening the scope from the problem-definition dimension to the politics and policy streams. The interaction of ideas and interests within an institutionalised organisational setting will be the focus, in line with discursive institutionalism. I have explained in the first chapter that the three cases chosen for this study have different governance structures and have since their beginning followed their own trajectory in terms of agendas. The ILO is, in my view, the most complex of them, since it has to orchestrate a wide range of class and national interests, let alone the various units that form its organisational chart (Baccaro, 2015; Thomas and Turnbull, 2020). Studying the development of the future of work agenda in this institution in particular showed to be a challenging intellectual task, given the diversity of voices that the analyst has to listen to. As such, I think, this agenda represented the next ILO worldwide strategy after the Social Protection Floor initiative (2008-2012) for ‘an inclusive globalisation’ (International Labour Office, 2011). My main contribution to the literature, in that sense, is to provide an in-depth explanation of the actors and factors that characterised it.

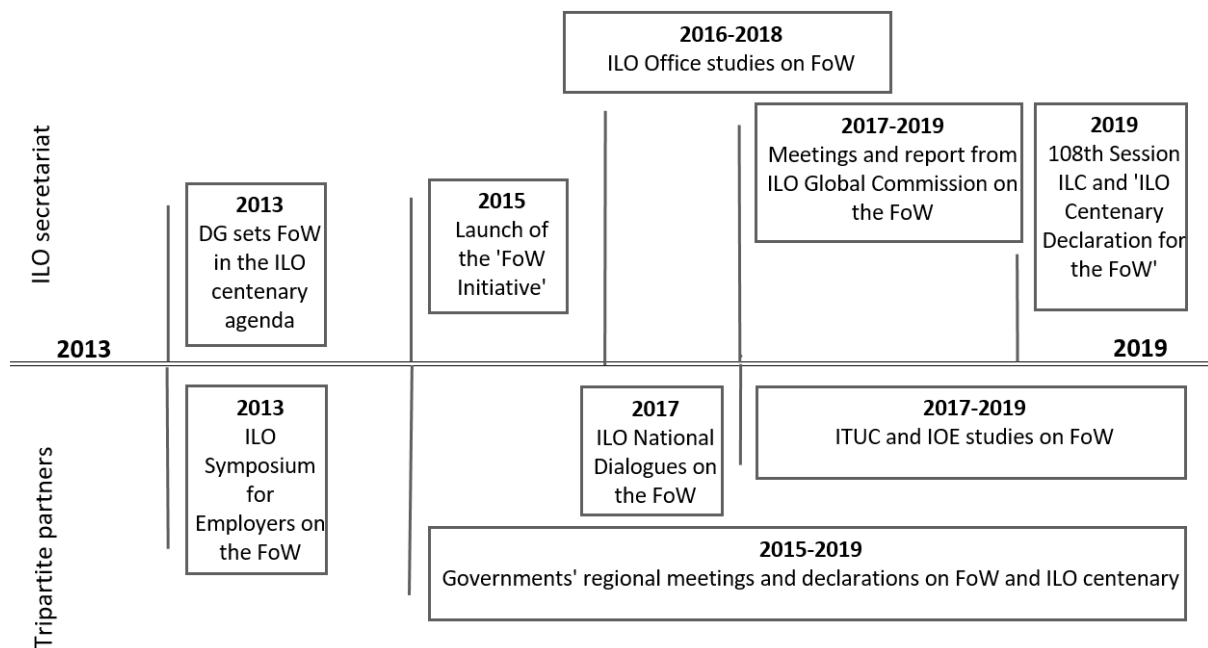
As the specialised agency in global governance to deal with labour-related issues, the ILO was not absent from the debates I described in the past chapter, not only as an observer but also as a legitimate rule-maker. Considering that the ILO, as well as other international organisations, has the capacity to shape labour markets and employment relations through different mechanisms of transfer (Baccini and Koenig-Archibugi, 2014), its role in this global agenda should not be underestimated. From 2015 to 2019, it developed the Future of Work Initiative (see figure 4 below), in which the ILO secretariat and tripartite partners –workers and business associations, as well as governments- dialogued to elaborate an official ILO perspective on this matter. A variety of studies and publications, dialogues and a series of negotiations in the International Labour Conference were part of the initiative. The ILO Office, at the same time, convened a Global Commission (2017-2019) to elaborate a ‘human-centred’ perspective for the future, which would eventually become the central framework in the institution (ILO, 2019g). The main outcome was the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, published in July 2019, a document that was expected to become a re-foundational text for the organisation – a ‘new Philadelphia Declaration’ (International Labour Office, 2019c: 8).

Preliminary scholarly studies have seen the ILO human-centred framework as a form of ‘countermovement’ to embed new technologies in humanistic normative principles (Novitz,

³⁴ A shorter version of this chapter, re-written but with significant similarities, has appeared in an academic journal with Open Access: Silva V (2021) The ILO and the future of work: The politics of global labour policy. *Global Social Policy*, March: 1–18.

2020), or as a critical contribution pointing to the worrying state of inequalities (Grimshaw, 2020). Nevertheless, these accounts pay attention to the ideas endorsed by the external, ad-hoc ILO Global Commission(ILO, 2019h), leaving aside the sharp political disputes between the interests of the ILO partners, as well as the process of institutional negotiations that led to the Centenary Declaration of 2019. The findings here indicate that, in contrast with the previous global strategy led by the ILO, the Social Protection Floor (2008-2012), in which capital and labour agreed on its orientation (Deacon, 2013a), the Future of Work Initiative sparked a new antagonism between both factions. The materials analysed expose the relevance of governments in resolving the tension between workers and employers in favour of the latter. Particularly, in the making of the Centenary Declaration, right-wing governments crucially supported employers’ deregulatory views on technological change by invoking the need to let states make policies according to their ‘national circumstances’. The result was the dismantling of several ideas from the ILO Office’s human-centred framework endorsed by workers. Employers, instead of behaving as a ‘brake’ as the literature has proposed (Rodgers et al., 2009; Thomas and Turnbull, 2020), reoriented the ILO towards a pro-business discourse, gaining ideational power in the institution as a result.

Figure 4: The ILO Future of Work (FoW) Initiative (2015-2019)



Source: Author

The chapter explains the development of this agenda (see timeline above), especially the ideas and interests behind the original the ‘human-centred approach’ to the future of work. The article is grounded on the theoretical framework proposed in the first chapter, studying different streams at the ILO focusing on communicative and coordinative instances. In that sense, it is based on a detailed analysis of the many documents made by the ILO secretariat and partners on this initiative, as well as on interviews with senior staff and researchers from the institution. The chapter starts with an analysis of the process by which the future of work was set at the core of the ILO’s activities in the 2010s. In that section, I delve into the policy window opened by the institution’s centenary and a set of initiatives proposed to rethink the

cognitive and normative approach of the institution for the next 100 years, taking into account a series of megatrends in the world of work. Then, I explore how ILO researchers framed such trends, defining the policy puzzle that was going to shape the Future of Work Initiative. I move then to the policy stream more explicitly, tracing the elaboration of the 'human-centred' approach by the mentioned Global Commission. The last section reveals the political conflicts in the making of the Centenary Declaration, which showed a really different version of the original human-centred agenda due to negotiations between the ILO partners.

a. The future of work: agenda-setting in the ILO

The centenary of the ILO, created in 1919, was taken by the Director-General and the Governing Body as an opportunity to reaffirm the institution's purpose for the future. In 2013 it was agreed that seven initiatives were going to be created to guide the organisation's activities until 2019: governance, labour standards, the green economy, enterprises, end to poverty and women at work (International Labour Office, 2013b). The seventh and most important one for the centenary was the Future of Work Initiative launched in 2015. In words of Director-General Guy Ryder,

"setting aside the rich symbolism and historic achievement of an Organization approaching 100 years of existence, there is much in this circumstance... that makes it appropriate for the ILO to engage in *a profound re-examination* of its overall place in the international system and in the world of work, and *indeed of the future of work itself*" (International Labour Office, 2014: iii emphasis added)

The reasons that explain the inclusion of this issue in the mentioned initiatives, and the pivotal role it was expected to have in that context, can be understood looking at the policy window and entrepreneurs behind such scenario. It was clear from the quote above that a political opportunity to renovate the ILO approach to social and labour policy had appeared, provided by the 'rich symbolism' of the centenary. The main actors that pushed in that direction were the ILO Director-General and the Employers' Group, respectively. First, Director General Guy Ryder (2012-present) gave centrality to this topic for mainly political reasons. The centenary was a platform to develop a new process that oriented the institution beyond the Declarations promoted by the previous Director, Juan Somavia (1999-2012), focused on core labour standards and the challenges of globalisation. As an interviewee³⁵ held, the future of work represented an attractive and engaging problem to build a new agenda led by the present directorate, especially given the attention that this theme had gained from the international media since 2013. The initiative was then created, divided in the three stages that will be analysed throughout the chapter (Table 10).

³⁵ Interview with high-level official at the ILO headquarters in Geneva.

Table 10: The three stages of the ILO Future of Work Initiative (2015-2019)

Years	Stage	Sub-initiatives	Outcome documents	Ideational processes
2015-2018	I. "Reflection on the future of work" through "the widest possible engagement and contributions"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research projects coordinated by the Office - 'National dialogues on the future of work' - 'Global dialogues' with ILO partners and experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FoW Initiative issue notes - FoW research paper series - Reports for G20 Framework Working Group (with OECD) - Research, and Employment Policy Departments working papers - 'The future we want. A dialogue" report - 'Synthesis report of the National Dialogues on the FoW' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creation of an original ILO approach in terms of ideas - Creation of a global policy network around the future of work - Construction of interests through dialogue and intellectual production
2017-2019	II. "Establishment of a high-level commission on the future of work"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creation of a 'technical secretariat' to support the Global Commission - Global Commission's meetings and elaboration of its final report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inception report for the Global Commission - Report of the Global Commission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elaboration of policy ideas under cognitive and normative consensus - Legitimation of ideas by an external 'neutral' body
2019	III. ILO's centenary commemoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ILO centenary events in each member state - 108th Session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proceedings of the 108th International Labour Conference - 'ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Renegotiation of organisational mandate and identity - Institutionalisation of ideas

Source: Author, based on document from the International Labour Office (2015). The list of outcome documents is not exhaustive. FoW = Future of Work

The first stage – that lasted approximately three years, corresponded to the elaboration of an innovative perspective on the process at stake, based on the ILO previous agendas and research projects. Different departments from the International Labour Office –Research, Employment Policy, Sectoral Policies; the Extension of Social Security, among other units–took forward a vast number of studies, reflected in dozens of papers, briefs and reports. Most of those works acted as inputs for the Global Commission on the Future of Work that started meeting in 2017. Altogether, they contributed with ideas and evidence, being finally condensed in the 'inception report' (ILO, 2017a) that the Office prepared for the commissioners. This was not the only consequence of this phase, however. Based on my analytical framework described at the beginning of this research, it is possible to assert that the ILO was facing a situation of *uncertainty* that had called its conception of the future of labour, and its very function within the world economy, into question. Such context demanded a re-orientation of its mandate under a new set of cognitive and normative ideas.

The second stage, then, consisted basically in the activities of this Commission, which meetings took place from October 2017 to November 2018 (ILO, 2019f). It was composed by high-level politicians from member states (presidents, ministers, etc.), leaders from employers or workers organisations, and experts. The characteristics of the Commission and its participants, as well as the political dynamics that took place in it, will be explained below. Its purpose was to funnel the ideas generated in the previous stage, reaching a *consensus* on a new agenda for labour regulation. In political terms, what was remarkable about the Commission was that it was set up by the ILO Office as an external, supposedly neutral body that was going to create a new perspective for the future of work. Nonetheless, since the ILO is inherently a forum for conflicting interests, the results of the Commission, especially its proposals, were subject to the subsequent political disputes between its partners – an aspect that most interviewees highlighted.

The third stage –the 2019 International Labour Conference (ILC) and the formulation of the Centenary Declaration- are also going to be scrutinised below. The mentioned economic and political interests that are constitutive of the ILO's institutional work were displayed and negotiated in the Conference of 2019. The Declaration represented a reorganisation of the ILO's historical *mandate and identity* to face the new world of work – situating technological change as the key variable to be regulated. In this context, the mentioned document *institutionalised* policy ideas and norms that were part of the debate. As it is frequent in processes of institutionalisation (Sum and Jessop, 2013), there were several –and fundamental- ideas that were *excluded* due to their controversial character in relation to the partners' interests. The relevance of this phenomenon should not be undervalued. As Michael Orenstein holds, “policy outcomes worldwide may depend on the outcomes of internal struggles within transnational policy actors” (2009, p. 71), and the regulation of the future of work was not an exception to that regard. For now, in order to look at the Initiative from a more detailed perspective, I can start by examining the first stage: the production of a conceptual approach to the future of work made by the ILO.

b. The problem stream: the ILO secretariat's framing of the future

The ILO has experienced several 'existential crises' before, generally related to endogenous factors –e.g. the globalisation of the economy (Standing, 2010). The emergence of intelligent technologies in the last decade posed again a serious challenge for its purpose. The Employers Group in 2013 had recognised that the future of work – especially the new advances in robotics and automation- had to be an integral part of the organisation's agenda for the centenary (International Labour Office, 2013a). Initially, the Director-General expressed the same type of concerns focused mostly on the threats of technological unemployment, the polarisation of jobs and skills mismatches (International Labour Office, 2013b, p. 8). In other terms, they had highlighted dimensions from technological change recognised as problematic by labour economists (e.g. Acemoglu & Autor, 2011). However, the Office's discourse on these issues would change over time as it started producing original contributions and empirical studies, representing a more multidimensional picture, beyond labour supply and demand.

Different departments at the ILO Office focused their attention on it: a technical platform composed by researchers from several areas and backgrounds was formed, particularly to

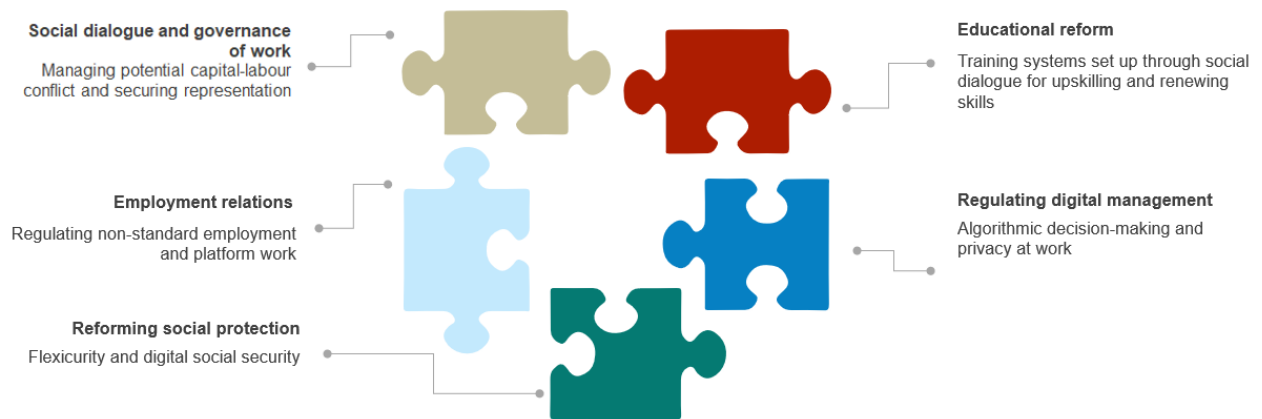
provide inputs to the Global Commission on the Future of Work that was going to start meeting in 2017 (International Labour Office, 2017). As with most researchers from the Office, this group elaborated a series of issue notes and policy briefs from a rather pro-worker perspective³⁶. Its publications expanded the discussion beyond the most resonant issues –e.g. the robotisation of work-, but still under the assumption that “the impact of technology” was the ‘pivot’ of the debate on the future of work (International Labour Office, 2016c: 1). For one thing, predictions about mass technological unemployment were considered overestimated (see Kucera, 2017). Their studies still stressed the relevance of skills development to avoid mismatches (Walwei, 2016), and particularly labour market polarisation, an “ongoing trend” that was “crowding out the middle class, and widening wage inequality” (International Labour Office, 2016b: 11). Such propositions were not too different from those made by other international organisations (e.g. World Bank, 2019; WTO, 2017). However, there were several additional dimensions that were highlighted in the ILO studies, setting the ground for the making of the human-centred approach.

First, *employment relations* were recognised as an area for potential disruption, particularly due to the digital platforms that often failed to provide security in terms of income and working conditions (Berg et al., 2018; ILO, 2018b). Second, there was also a strong emphasis on the role of new technologies for *management and industrial relations*. The use of workers’ data to monitor their performance (De Stefano, 2018), or decision-making methods powered by artificial intelligence (Ernst et al., 2018) had to be regulated to prevent discrimination or violations to employees’ privacy. Third, the reports from the Office highlighted that “technological changes have significant distributional consequences, with winners and losers” (International Labour Office, 2016b: 2). *Inequalities* between companies –with the upsurge of big tech companies in the 2010s- and between capital and labour -due to the global shrinking of unionism- were expected to increase in the future (ILO, 2016). In summary, the *problems of the future of work* were mainly linked to the labour market dynamics, employment relations, labour management, and economic inequality. They went beyond the mainstream narrative focused on the ‘rise of the robots’; however, it is noticeable that the relevant question of labour governance – what instruments could be used by the ILO to regulate these aspects globally- did not play a role in the Office’s framing.

Taken altogether, these dimensions constituted the ‘policy puzzle’ (figure 5) that were expected to be addressed by the next stages of the Future of Work Initiative. In terms of the conceptual basis of the policy recommendations made by the ILO Office to face that puzzle, there was *a conception of development as an institutionally-mediated process of creative destruction*, in which “a golden age of job creation” and “the emergence of new growth sectors” required of “new social and political choices” that redistributed productivity gains to consumers and innovative firms (Nübler, 2016: 23). For the ILO Director-General, against what he called ‘techno-determinism’, current societies had “to manage technological innovation in ways that correspond to our social objectives” (Ryder, 2016).

³⁶ Interviews with senior ILO researchers in Geneva.

Figure 5: The ILO's policy puzzle for the future of work



Source: Author

Institutional intervention was not only a matter of social justice in that logic, but also a functional pre-requisite for technologies to emerge and have a positive impact on the economy. Thus, in relation to automation, the ILO Office thus proposed a “system of *entitlements to training*, funded through a reconfigured employment insurance system” as a life-cycle measure to facilitate transitions and avoid technological unemployment (ILO, 2018c: 2 emphasis added). Such entitlement should be complemented by a social protection floor and *flexicurity* measures, These would guarantee “the portability of entitlements and ensuring effective minimum benefit levels” (Behrendt and Nguyen, 2018: 31), under the assumption that technology might increase flexibility in work arrangements. When it comes to platform labour, the Office suggested to tackle the *misclassification of workers* as self-employed, strengthening the contract of employment (ILO, 2018d), and designing a ‘portable security account’ that allowed them to keep their benefits regardless of their status or current employer (Berg 2016). Finally, proposals to regulate digital management included taking a *human-rights perspective on workers’ privacy and the use of their data*, as well as encouraging social dialogue to make algorithmic decision-making accountable for employees (De Stefano, 2018)

c. The politics stream (I): the ILO partners’ interests for the future of work

The construction of interest and ideational path-dependence

While the Office, through the technical secretariat and the Global Commission on the Future of Work, was developing a new set of policies and principles for the centenary, the partners that form the ILO’s tripartite structure –governments, workers and employers- were also elaborating their position vis-à-vis the coming changes in the world of work. Borrowing from ideational research (Blyth, 2002; Broome, 2013; Hay, 2011), these actors had to *construct their interests* related to this process, by adopting ideas from the international debate, and by conducting their own studies to support their positioning³⁷. In our empirical case, this is

³⁷ In an eloquent reflection on the relation between material and ideational factors, Daniel Beland argues: “the claim that interests are socially constructed does not necessarily mean that they have nothing to do with actors’

demonstrated by the fact that partners –states, capital and labour- developed numerous studies and dialogues since 2015 to inform the formulation of their strategies and goals for the coming technological transformations. The fact they proactively had to elaborate their new interests did not mean that they were operating in a historical vacuum, however: there were patterns of *ideational path-dependence* (Béland, 2016; Hay, 2011) operating in these actors' positioning. In previous moments of industrial transformation such as in the 1950s debate on automation (Hoehtker, 2019), employers in the ILO have recurrently supported the productivity gains from technology and the necessity of state-backed lifelong learning programmes, while workers have focused on their redistributive and individual effects³⁸. These arguments have also been present in the debate on the fourth industrial revolution and its advances.

There has been logic-of-containment between the social partners that has shaped their historical interactions. In their publication on the ILO history, Rodgers and colleagues hold:

For *workers*, the ILO is a major instrument to pursue their goals, and they have a much more *active agenda* than employers. On the other hand, *employers* frequently play the *role of the 'brake'* on initiatives put forward both by the workers and the Office and its Director-General, to slow action they consider hasty, or which would work against the perceived interests of business (2009, p. 16; emphasis added)

This idea about the role of employers has been extended in ILO circles since the first Director-General stated that they tend to 'apply the brakes'; most importantly for this study, scholars have interpreted the involvement of business in the Future of Work Initiative along those lines, reducing their participation to 'counter-framing' (see Thomas and Turnbull, 2020). It is tempting to assume that, in the context of the future of work agenda, the social partners assumed such positions again, just reproducing their conventional political strategies or their ideas on technological transformation. Nonetheless, I prefer to emphasise that the current wave of intelligent technologies has *posed new scenarios* about which the social partners hardly had a clear position. For instance, platform labour or algorithmic management did not exist as such until this decade. In that sense, and contrary to the logic-of-position argument, in this section I am going to put forward a logic-of-interpretation by examination of how the social partners *actively sought to develop their own conception of the future of work, to engage politically with its consequences*. In first instance, I will analyse the perceived interests of the Employer's Group, then that of the Workers', to finally compare them and interpret their interrelation in the light of the relationship that both factions have had in recent history. Later in this chapter, these views are going to be crucial to understand the elaboration of the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work in 2019 and its political dynamics.

Now, as far as governments are concerned, since the mid-2010s, they have developed dialogues between different stakeholders, and specific strategies to face the future of work. Many times these plans were merged with the governments' concerns about the irruption of artificial intelligence and automation – two factors that for different reasons pushed them to

social and economic position. Instead, it means two actors who occupy the same basic socio-economic position can understand their position and interests differently and, as a consequence, adopt distinct policy preferences" (Béland, 2016: 741).

³⁸ Interview with researcher from the ILO in Geneva.

take position and adopt courses of action. Governments have published studies and gathered commissions to develop policies for technological change - (see for example UKCES, 2014; U.S. Government, 2016). International actors and multinational companies have intended to steer such national strategies as well – for instance, in the Indian case, Deloitte and the WEF have organised events to gather experts, policymakers and industry leaders to discuss on this matter (Deloitte, 2019; Tata, 2019). In previous sections, we have described that between 2016 and 2017 the ILO encouraged member states to organise tripartite dialogues on the future of labour. Given the multiplicity of instances that were set up in this context, and bearing in mind that each country has their own strategies according to their respective labour markets, it is not possible to offer a comprehensive picture of governments’ position in the limits of this study. However, in a later section on the 2019 International Labour Conference, representatives from governments presented their particular points of view, which will be analysed then.

The Employers Group and the project of an ‘adaptable workforce’ for the future

Contextualising business’ political strategies in the ILO

Despite being recognised, as stated above, as the ‘brake’ to the progressive agendas at the ILO, the Employers Group had, in truth, a more complex role in the last decades in the organisation. I have explained in the first chapter that since the foundation of the ILO, businesses are represented in the institution by the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), who participate regularly in the Governing Body and the International Labour Conferences at the institution, with voice and vote³⁹. It seems more adequate to understand their function as an advocate rather than as a saboteur, recognising their agency within the ILO politics – in line with the literature about the active role of business in social policy development, beyond their alleged opposition to workers’ rights or social protection (Farnsworth and Holden, 2006; Kim and Darnall, 2016; Mares, 2003; Nelson, 2013; Paster, 2013). Recent history indicates the previous. In relation to the 1998 Declaration on core labour standards, the IOE expressed its support (IOE, 1998), partly agreeing with the ‘soft law’ approach adopted by the ILO since the 1990s, departing from its traditional standard-setting model (Baccaro and Mele, 2012).

Similar support was given to the 2008 ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation. After advocating for a less critical approach to globalisation, recognising the benefits of trade liberalisation and the integration in the global economy (IOE, 2004), the IOE accepted the content of the declaration about the ‘social’ dimension of globalisation. With respect to the ‘social protection floor’ agenda at the beginning of the 2010s, employers were against the idea that its policies became legally binding for countries or companies, but in the end they were –as the Workers Group- “broadly very supportive of the development of the Recommendation” on this agenda (Deacon, 2013a: 75, 96). In the last decade, though, employers took a more aggressive stance in their collaboration with the Worker’s Group (La Hovary, 2013), exposed in their rejection of the right to strike and the application of Convention n. 87 during the International Labour Conference of 2012 and 2014, thus

³⁹ When I refer to the Employers Group I consider the IOE and ACT/EMP, the bureau in the ILO secretariat that collaborate with the IOE and serve as a nexus between them and the Office. Likewise, when I talk about the Workers Group, I am alluding to the ITUC and ACTRAV, labour’s bureau in the organisation.

paralysing the ILO Committee of Standards' assessment of national cases in those instances⁴⁰. They also opposed in 2016 to take further the ILO Office's initiative to regulate work in global supply chains (Thomas and Turnbull, 2018).

In parallel to those events, in 2013 and before the launch of the ILO Future of Work Initiative, the IOE and the ACT/EMP had organised a symposium on the future of work. The statements given by the IOE officers in that occasion were indicative of the position that this organisation was going to assume in the following years. When the international discussion about the emergence of intelligent technologies was just starting to spread, the IOE stressed that "it was necessary to move *beyond the discussion on the increasing precariousness of work relationships*", as Roberto Suarez, Deputy Secretary-General, affirmed (International Labour Office, 2013; emphasis added). That is precisely what happened: while the Director of the ILO Research Department, Raymond Torres, referred with concern to the increase of non-standard employment in the same symposium, Suarez from the IOE held that "while continuing to play their role as wealth and job creators, enterprises were now in a constantly changing environment, and the process of creative destruction was intensifying" (International Labour Office, 2013a). Working conditions and social security lost relevance before the *perceived* need to adapt companies to a new technological era.

The employers' perspective: flexibility, skills and social protection for adaptability

The conception of employers on the future of jobs, and their policy recommendations, were contained in two extensive reports: *IOE Brief: understanding the future of work* (2017), and the study *Changing business and opportunities for employers' and business organizations* (ILO and IOE, 2019). Generally speaking, and this will make more sense in the next chapter, the IOE approach is strikingly similar to that of the World Bank⁴¹. On the one hand, they shared the same analytical framework grounded on labour economics; on the other, the Bank's reports have been decidedly pro-business, as an interviewee from the Employers Group conceded, meaning that the primary concern for them was to help companies adapt for the new technological era. For the IOE, the future of work was almost exclusively linked to technology, an emphasis that was also part of the ILO Office approach, thus leaving other phenomena –such as ageing or climate change– in the background. The starting point of the IOE was the assumption that standard employment was in retreat:

⁴⁰ A report on these events indicates that "the attack on the right to strike started at the International Labour Conference in June 2012, when the spokesperson of the Employers' Group unexpectedly announced that the Employers would refuse to agree to a negotiated short list of countries that included any case where the right of strike was involved. This intransigent statement provoked a deadlock and completely blocked the discussion of cases in the CAS [Committee on the Application of Standards]" (IndustriALL, 2014).

⁴¹ As my interviews with IOE personnel indicated, the World Bank's (2019b) report on the future of work was regarded in the group as a very complete piece of research that, according to them, covers most of the knots that will be problematic in the upcoming decades. The reception of the report was amply negative at the Office (ILO, 2018a), however, showing that employers in this agenda were paddling against the current. In an indirect but significant, reference to the World Bank, one of their reports referred to the current transformations as 'the changing nature of work', which is precisely the title of the World Development Report 2019 (see ILO and IOE, 2019, p. 11).

The latest technological revolution is characterised by a faster rate of change, continuous transformation and greater volatility than its predecessors... Jobs in this context are no longer considered to be within the traditional employment contract (IOE, 2017, p. 10)

The argument was basically that *since technological development promotes non-standard jobs –such as those in platforms–, companies should follow that trend, creating the conditions for more flexible work relations, instead of reverting it.* This is the central argument of the World Development Report 2019 too (World Bank, 2019b), and it was echoed by other business associations: the World Employment Confederation (WEC), the global confederation of human resources companies, saw platform labour as the new normal, or “crowdsourcing as the new template for work” (WEC, 2016, p. 11).

In any case, the IOE supported a flexibility agenda to face the future of jobs, putting emphasis on the role of skills to facilitate transitions in the labour market, especially social and emotional skills: “employment flexibility goes hand in hand with autonomy and empowerment. Individuals will be increasingly responsible for their own development and training” (IOE, 2017, p. 25). This combination between constant skills updating, and less tight employment relations, would give room for managing their workforce according to business’ interest, presenting a future scenario with greater levels of autonomy for employees, with increased productivity and growth for the economy as a whole. The benefits of creating this ‘adaptable workforce’ (ILO and IOE, 2019, p. 12) were plenty in this formulation.

The centrality of skills did not only respond though to a future demand, but to an alleged already-existing scenario of shortage in companies⁴². For this reason, executives “want to see business playing an active role in shaping educational systems to boost skills” (ILO and IOE, 2019, p. xiv). Nevertheless, the creation of a ‘culture of updating skills’ and the new means for social protection derived from such flexible labour market, should not impose new regulations to companies “in tax, competition, fiscal, trade and Employment Protection Legislation” (IOE, 2017, p. 50ff). Their duty in the future of work had to do mostly with skills formation: “companies should prioritise support for education and targeted reskilling programs that will help firms to recruit skilled talent” (ILO and IOE, 2019, p. 70). Such responsibility had to be shared with governments that manage educational systems, as well as with individual workers, who were encouraged to have “motivation, a sense of responsibility, ownership and an entrepreneurial approach” (ILO and IOE, 2019, p. 24). Whereas the ILO secretariat was going to propose an ‘entitlement’ to lifelong learning, the IOE framed it as an individual duty⁴³.

⁴² A global survey of companies from different sizes and regions showed that “executives across regions express concern that it is becoming harder to recruit people with the skills needed. 40 per cent of employers noted lack of skills as the main reason for entry-level vacancy, and 60 per cent stated that new graduates were not adequately prepared for current work” (ILO and IOE, 2019, p. xiv)

⁴³ If it was not clear enough, an IOE report holds: “individuals will be increasingly responsible for their own development and training... How education is delivered is important, but individuals must adopt positive attitudes towards learning. Those needing to re-skill or making important educational investments need to understand where the demand for workers lies, the type of skills required and the income-earning potential” (ILO and IOE, 2019, pp. 25, 33). Information asymmetries between employers and workers would be expectable, but the IOE discourse did not consider that possibility.

To finish with, and in line with the WB position on these issues, the IOE supported this time the social policy perspective advocated by the ILO in the past decade:

The ILO's 'social protection floor' concept may be useful as it deals with the fundamental needs of individuals, but caution is called for when learning lessons from past experiences especially where developed countries offer overgenerous social protection schemes (IOE, 2017, p. 40)

This position is consistent with what was mentioned above about business' support to this concept since it was launched (Deacon, 2013a). The protection floor⁴⁴ was reinforced now in relation to the *relevance of investing in human capital* that the IOE, and the Bank in parallel, supported in the future of work debate. An IOE report held that, "as the relationship with work changes, it becomes ever clearer that businesses will become more reliant on their most important resource: human capital" (ILO and IOE, 2019, p. 11). This notion involves not only focusing investment on skills but also on individuals health and living conditions (Midgley, 2013), so it is consistent with the promotion of a social protection floor for labour.

The employers' perspective: digital management and platform labour

Another area about which the Employer Group took position was that of digital management. In relation to the disposition of new techniques for human resources, the IOE showed a largely optimistic perspective, dismissing cautions that the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) –another global business association- had flagged:

While many business models face increasing disruption from the rapid acceleration of digital technologies, trust in the transparent and responsible use of these services is eroding... We will also support the human-centric evolution of emerging technologies (ICC, 2019, pp. 1–2)

The point here is that the IOE position was, even in the field of business organisations⁴⁵, quite radical, going *contra* the threats that the public, the academia and ILO publications had highlighted in relation to algorithmic management, and also to digital platforms. For example, the IOE stated:

new technologies will enable companies to better evaluate individual productivity using available data, allowing them to compensate individuals in line with their performance. This could increase productivity and the capacity of companies to distinguish between the more and the less productive employees... [It is recommendable to] provide further guidance on the growing challenges of data collection at the workplace, as well as on excessive regulatory constraints, from a human resources perspective (IOE, 2017, p. 24, 50; emphasis added)

Regulation of labour management was thus discouraged, the same as with intervening the functioning of work-related digital platforms. The latter were portrayed in their

⁴⁴ According to an interviewee from business side in the ILO, in relation to the social protection floor, "employers love it".

⁴⁵ As occurs in national context, at the international level there are several associations that represent companies' perspectives: "the interests of business are often (but not always) differentiated in separate organizations: employer associations, trade associations, and Chambers" (Ebbinghaus, 2010, p. 210). In the ILO, only employers have an authorised representation of such interests.

understanding as job enablers, operating as a ‘showcase’ for people’s skills (ILO and IOE, 2019), which regulation “could halt innovation and the growth of new job opportunities” (IOE, 2017, p. 38). Other business organisations had also recognised the apparent positive outcomes that these platforms generate for the economy, stressing that, for example, “online labour platforms secure access to specialised talent” (WEC, 2017, p. 5), and dismissed the creation of new legislation to monitor them (Adecco Group, 2019). In conclusion, there seemed to be consensus in the global business community about a deregulation approach to platform work.

The Workers Group and labour rights in the digital transformation

Contextualising labour’s political strategies in the ILO

The role of workers in the recent ILO history can be understood if we take into account the dynamic of international unionism in the context of globalisation. After 1945, this field was ideologically divided between associations from the Communist sphere, grouped in the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), and the ones in the West, represented by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), but after the fall of the Soviet bloc the latter became *the* global organisation of national unions (Harrod and O’Brien, 2002). Since then, labour internationalism has been growing due to the expansion of wage labour all over the planet, and the triumph of the capitalist project has at the same time unified associations from different sectors and regions under the Global Unions Confederation, created in 2002. In the same decade, in 2006, the ICFTU merged with the Christian-inspired World Confederation of Labour (WCL) and formed the ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation), the current voice of labour in the ILO (O’Brien, 2018). The consolidation of the ITUC and Global Unions as the key players in the union movement, as mentioned, was made possible by the globalisation of capitalism, which has been also their target in terms of campaigns and political demands.

Even though international unionism has been marked by ideological and sectoral divisions, some contemporary trends have been at the centre of their focus: the rapid expansion of transnational corporations, and the protection of workers in global supply chains (Burgmann, 2016). Workers’ strategies in the ILO have been intimately related to the previous. For one, they were involved with the Social Clause Campaign, led by the ILO and other international civil organisations to add labour standards in the creation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in the mid-1990s – although differences between Southern and Northern members created a division in the ICFTU (Collombat, 2014). Conversely, the initiatives on the Social Protection Floor at the ILO had a wider support in the ITUC at the end of the 2010s, led by the current ILO Director-General Guy Ryder (Deacon, 2013a: 64). In these cases, following Burgmann (2016: 110) we can say that the Workers’ Group has defended the ‘everyworker’, a universal conception of the individual beyond their employment status, their inclusion in the formal economy or adscription to social categories. Their perception on the future of work had precisely this type of universal scope, with a social-democratic support of institutional reforms to manage it, in contrast with federations that used the Marxist categories of class and exploitation⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ An interesting counterpoint to the ITUC’s perspective is that of the WFTU, mentioned above. The latter interprets technological change from a Communist viewpoint: “the application of robotics and artificial

The workers' perspective: inequalities, job loss and social protection

The Workers Group, by contrast, portrayed a more pessimistic picture of the future. According to one of their reports (ITUC, 2017) the “global workforce” was “in serious trouble”, with two thirds struggling under informal and unprotected working conditions; a decreasing income share for labour, and the consequent “concentration of economic power” by transnational companies (ITUC, 2017, pp. 1-3). Technological innovations could make this situation worse unless governments reorient their relation with the market:

Unions know that technology itself is not the issue - innovation will be successful or not on its merits. ... The major issue is in whose interests technology is being deployed, in such a way as to create an imperative to deregulate labour markets... Until now however, governments have been slow to focus on the need for regulation to ensure that all of society benefits from the next wave of technological innovation (ITUC, 2017, pp. 3–4)

As other observers in the future of work debate, workers at the ILO pointed technological unemployment as a possible outcome of unregulated future labour markets. A global poll made by them revealed that 73% of workers in the world were ‘worried’ about people losing their jobs, and that a 51% is concerned about ‘technology taking over jobs’ (ITUC, 2017a, p. 17). In relation to this, workers at the ILO expressed their support for larger investment in reskilling and training:

Substituting workers with technology is a result of choices made, too often by employers alone. But where it does occur, it doesn't have to automatically mean overall job losses. New jobs will be created, although potentially not enough. Reducing working hours, with workers getting a share of the productivity gains to maintain living standards, is part of the solution. Workers will need training for different tasks in their existing jobs, including managing the technologies introduced... Investment, social dialogue and information sharing will be crucial, so workers are ready to transition into new jobs (ITUC, 2017, p. 5)

The ITUC agreed with business on a broad support of training schemes to avoid redundancy – this was arguably the only notion where capital and labour had consensus. Apart from that, the Workers advocated for other social protection policies in this context. In particular, reducing working hours thanks to the productivity boost from innovation; the establishment minimum living wage that improves the unequal distribution of income, and the establishment of a universal basic income (ITUC, 2017b, pp. 5–6). Other policy ideas were related to reducing inequalities were “eradicating tax avoidance and evasion”, especially referring to multinationals that pay “low-to-zero taxes”, and; regulation of working conditions in global supply chains through making “them legally accountable for due diligence” (ITUC, 2017b, p. 6-7).

The workers perspective: digital management and platform labour

intelligence, networking and generally the so-called ‘fourth industrial revolution’ in the production process and the reduction of socially necessary labour time in capitalism does not alter or abolish the exploitative nature nor the production relations of capitalism, on the contrary, intensifies and exacerbates exploitation” (World Federation of Trade Unions, 2019: 70–1).

Whereas employers, as described above, were against regulating intelligent technologies for management purposes, the ITUC and Global Unions warned about their potential negative effects for workers' situation. For instance, Cristina Colclough from UNI Global Union suggested that using artificial intelligence could significant biases and injustices at work: "we cannot risk that people are prevented from working or thriving in the labour market due to an algorithm that nobody claims to control, and nobody can rectify" (2018: 7). The ITUC presented the same kind of concerns in relation to monitoring workers through digital means. These can cause problems in different levels, from privacy to mental health:

Some companies are also using social engineering techniques on their workforce to increase productivity and profits, but without commensurate increases in pay or protection from overwork and stress... The blurring of private life and life at work is also a reality for many, with disruption of work/life balance and often extra hours worked without compensation, especially in mobile work (ITUC, 2017c: 9)

The solution to prevent these issues would be the establishment of "regulatory frameworks around data and on the use of algorithms... to protect workers and the public in general" (ITUC, 2017a, p. 4). They adhered the *Principles for workers' data privacy and protection* published by UNI Global Union (2017), in the same line.

The rise of digital platforms in the last decade was another topic of concern for the Workers Group. While employers had favoured a *laissez-faire* approach, an ITUC report conversely criticised platforms for thriving at the expense of their workers:

Digitalisation is contributing to fragmentation of work, breakdown of employment relationships and social dumping, as companies organise work through online platforms which (e.g. 'ride-sharing' such as Uber and piece-work services such as Mechanical Turk and UpWork) seek to expand and as they lobby effectively for deregulation. Governments need to ensure that these companies are regulated... Online platforms in particular must be required to ensure that workers' social protection and other entitlements are met, and that their rights are respected (ITUC, 2017b, pp. 9–10)

It is possible to recognise in these statements that labour at the ILO had a diametrically opposite understanding of the future problems in the world of work in comparison to business, given that the first were for an active role of the government in setting the rules for technological development and the operation of the private sector. These differences were only ideational, up to that moment of the Future of Work Initiative of construction of interests. They were going to spark more severe political disputes in the making of the Centenary Declaration in the following years.

d. The policy stream: the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work and the creation of the 'human-centred agenda'

The creation of the Global Commission

From 2015 to 2017, in the first two years of the Future of Work Initiative, the different actors that compose ILO's tripartism had been reflecting on this issue, making reports and statements to present their viewpoints in the global agora. In the next two years, an

additional voice was included in the mix: the creation of a commission with members external to the ILO to elaborate what would become the official discourse of the ILO Office and the Director-General on this topic – not necessarily of the ILO, considering its partners. In October 2017, this group started its meetings, concluding in November 2018 (ILO, 2019h: 75). The timeframe that was managed by the Governing Body established:

in 2019 the ILO will publish the report of the High-Level Global Commission on the Future of Work that will contribute to shaping the ILO's agenda over the medium- and long-term (International Labour Office, 2017: 56)

The contents of such report were going to be crucial, as they were expected to be the main input for the discussion on the Centenary Declaration, published in June 2019; on its part, this declaration was going to decisively influence the ILO programme and budget for the years to come. The creation of the commission followed two principles, that were not necessarily made explicit by the Office management, but that were known for its employees, as an interviewee commented⁴⁷. Firstly, the design of the Global Commission was made in order to *take the discussion on the future of work out of the ILO's internal political process*. The organisation has spaces where the partners' diverse interests can be exposed –such as the meetings of the Governing Body or the ILC-; in contrast, the Commission offered a more neutral instance to legitimate the Office's position. Since it was an external actor, not subject to the conditions of negotiated tripartism, the Commission's proposals were not expected to represent the ILO as an institution. The second characteristic of the Global Commission was that it was modelled following the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation that met between 2002 and 2004 with the purpose of elaborating a report for positioning the ILO in the globalisation debate. In that occasion, the 2008 Commission developed a normative alternative to the market-fundamentalist discourse of the international financial institutions, based on the notion of decent work (Hughes and Haworth, 2011; O'Brien, 2014a).

The Global Commission of 2017 mirrored the former in terms of structure. The one from 2002 was co-chaired by the Presidents of Finland and Tanzania. The Commission on the future of work was co-chaired by Stefan Löfven, Primer Minister of Sweden, and by the South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. In the two cases, a leader from a Nordic country with unionist past was designated along with an African governor from a social-democratic party. In terms of composition, the two commissions were joined by high-level politicians from different regions, by leading academics, as well as authorities from the labour movement and the world of business. Representatives from the Employers and Workers Groups of the ILO were ex-officio members in the Global Commission on the Future of Work, which means that they could participate in its debates if invited by the Co-Chairs⁴⁸. Now, they did not sign off the final report “in order to preserve the independence of the Commission” (ILO, 2019h: 75).

⁴⁷ Interview with high-level ILO official in Geneva.

⁴⁸ Details about the commissioners and the ex-officio members can be found in the annex to the Global Commission report (ILO, 2019h). The members of the Commission were, apart from co-chairs Stefan Löfven and Matamela Ramaphosa, Thorben Albrecht (German Social Democratic Party); Haifa Al Kaylani (Arab International Women's Forum); Winnie Byanyima (Oxfam International); Chinsung Chung (Seoul National University); Claudia Costin (Center for Excellence and Innovation in Education Policies); Alain Dehaze (Adecco Group); Enrico Giovannini (Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development); Olga Golodets (Russian Federation for Sport, Tourism and Cultural Development); Rebeca Grynspan (Ibero American Conference); Philip Jennings (UNI Global Union);

There was a key difference between the institutional process of the 2000s and the one in the 2010s. Between the publication of the report made by the commission and the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation there were four years of internal discussion, leading to a more or less consensual position. In contrast, the Global Commission report on the future of work, and the Centenary Declaration were published in the same year. The short time period between these two events, according to interviewees from the Employers' Group, *affected the capacity of the ILO to reach a consensual and negotiated position before the 2019 ILC*, when the new Declaration was formulated. The deadline of the organisation's Centenary on the horizon precipitated such situation, and the sensation that the whole process was 'rushed' was repeated by several of the interviewees – a point about which we will come back later.

The human-centred conception of the future of work

In a previous section I have described the framework developed by the ILO secretariat to make sense of the upcoming technological transformations. The reports produced by the Office and its different research units served as inputs to the Global Commission, and for this reason it was expectable to find some parallels between the discussions that took place in it and the mentioned reports⁴⁹. The policy proposals were effectively similar. The 'policy puzzle' introduced by the researchers at the ILO Office had put an emphasis on a variety of dimensions that were directly addressed in the commission: the role of social dialogue in the future world of work; the need for educational programmes that prevent skills mismatches; the challenges of non-standard and platform-mediated work; the regulation of digital management, and; the possible reforms to social protection systems due to all the previous. As an interviewee explained to me⁵⁰, the reason behind the continuity between the ILO secretariat framing and that of the commissioners can be found in the fact that the latter were not precisely experts in the field - it was not an "academic committee". Hence, the secretariat was pushed to generate policy ideas for the Commission, providing them with materials and data. The aspects that were a source a disagreement between the commissioners were not included in the final report, titled 'Work for a brighter future: Global Commission on the Future of Work' (ILO, 2019h), meaning that the policy ideas in the document corresponded to consensual elements from the meetings⁵¹.

The report presented the approach that the ILO Office, and the Director-General in particular, were going to advocate for from 2019, both in the making of the Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work, and in other multilateral events, such as the G20's. Such agenda was

Carlos Lopes (University of Cape Town); Reema Nanavaty (Self-Employed Women's Association); Josephine Ouedraogo (Burkina Faso ambassador); Richard Samans (World Economic Forum); Atsushi Seike (Keio University); Alwyn Didar Singh (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce); Kristin Skogen Lund (Schibsted Media Group); Alain Supiot (College de France); Darren Walker (Ford Foundation); Xiaochu Wang (Congress of China), and: Jayathma Wickramanayake (UN Envoy on Youth).

⁴⁹ Especially the ILO Office's *Inception report for the Global Commission on the Future of Work* (ILO, 2017a).

⁵⁰ Interview with ILO researcher in Geneva.

⁵¹ The meetings of the Commission were not open to the public, so I learnt about its internal dynamics based on my interviews with officials involved in its operations. Although there were disputed ideas, the 'spirit' of the Commission was positive, in the sense that its members tried to reach a genuine agreement, according to an ILO official that assisted to the meetings.

summarised in the Global Commission report as follows, referring to its main spheres of intervention:

we call for a new approach that puts people and the work they do at the centre of economic and social policy and business practice: a *human-centred* agenda for the future of work. This agenda focuses on three pillars of action. First, it means *investing in people's capabilities*, enabling them to acquire skills, reskill and upskill and supporting them through the various transitions they will face over their life course. Second, *investing in the institutions of work* to ensure a future of work with freedom, dignity, economic security and equality. Third, *investing in decent and sustainable work* and shaping rules and incentives so as to align economic and social policy and business practice with this agenda. By harnessing transformative technologies, demographic opportunities and the green economy, these investments can be powerful drivers of *equity and sustainability* for the present and future generations (ILO, 2019h: 24 emphasis added)

The idea of a 'human-centred' normative framework was not new, in all truth. The World Economic Forum (WEF) had already proposed a similar idea. It is worth noting the characteristics of such antecedent, partly to highlight the particularity of the Global Commission's proposals *vis-à-vis* other analogous positions in the international debate. In a white paper published in 2017 - written precisely by Richard Samans, Managing Director at the WEF and member of the ILO Global Commission- they presented the 'human-centred model of economic growth'. It could be hypothesised that the WEF's approach, via Samans, had a direct influence over the Commission, reflecting the increasing influence of the Forum in global social governance that I pointed out in the previous chapter. Samans would become the Director of Research at the ILO from 2020, after managing the Forum for seven years, thus reflecting the emerging convergence between both institutions' orientations⁵².

The WEF model proposed a "a narrative vision and policy agenda aimed at ensuring that the technological progress of the 21st century augments rather than substitutes for human potential and employment" (World Economic Forum, 2017a: 2). Based on a critical diagnosis of the current hegemonic business model (short-term and shareholder-oriented), and its negative consequences in terms of inequality and sustainability, the WEF aimed to reorient their mission to face the Fourth Industrial Revolution – a concept coined by themselves, as explained above. The main ideas at the basis of the WEF framework were contained in an earlier paper called *The new social covenant* (2014), which argued for overcoming the 'old contract' between 'citizens' -not workers-, business and governments⁵³. The guiding principles to do so would be three "universal values" recognised by the WEF, supposedly present in every culture:

The *dignity* of the human person, whatever their race, gender, background or beliefs; the importance of a *common good* that transcends individual interests; the need for *stewardship* – a concern not just for ourselves but for posterity (World Economic Forum, 2014: 2)

⁵² See Samans' professional profile on: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/authors/richard-samans>

⁵³ In the same document we can find even more emphatic statements: "Yesterday's social contract has been broken. As a result, people have lost trust in politics and business... But rather than trying to piece this broken contract back together again, we instead need to establish how we can build new social covenants infused with moral values and commitments" (World Economic Forum, 2014: 4).

Once applied to the future of work, this ‘human-centred’ framework led the WEF to propose the following policy ideas:

Five dimensions of workforce development and security merit particular attention in industrial countries seeking to keep pace with the labour market challenges accompanying the Fourth Industrial Revolution... 1. Active labour-market policies... 2. Equity of access to quality basic education... 3. Gender parity... 4. Non-standard work benefits and protections... 5. School-to-work transitions (World Economic Forum, 2017a: 15–7)

To what extent the WEF, through this ‘covenant’ and its multi-stakeholder governance approach, aimed to implicitly replace the ILO position in the global governance system⁵⁴, is a matter of further reflection. What seems important now is to recognise how the Global Commission’s ‘human-centred approach’ was critically influenced by the Forum, but they were not exactly the same. In that sense, the particularity of the ILO Commission was that, first, its proposals were formulated by a heterogeneous group of people, in which economists did not necessarily have the last word, as it happens in other global economic institutions and, certainly, the WEF⁵⁵. Second, and perhaps more profoundly, the Global Commission’s framework was rather inspired by the notion of *human development* that had shaped the UN agenda in the last two decades, which could not be found for instance in the WEF’s. In fact, the ideational roots of the latter refer to the work of liberal economist Adam Smith and his *theory of moral sentiments*, in which he suggests that actions can be founded on moral values such as altruism or sympathy, not only on economic efficiency. On its part, the concept of human development is a normative horizon in which societies are expected to orient themselves towards the enrichment of human life, understanding economic progress and democratic advance as a means to that end (Welzel, 2011). Such notion is, furthermore, grounded on *humanism*, i.e. a universal conception of the human being and their conditions for progress, under the liberal conception of freedom (Davies, 2008).

Inspired by Amartya Sen’s (1999) work, the Global Commission took the *capabilities approach* as its theoretical basis, which understands development as the increase of people’s freedom, in terms of political rights, economic resources, social opportunities, transparency and protection. Applied to the future of work, this concept implied that technological progress should lead to greater freedom for workers, as the Commission report makes clear:

our approach goes beyond human capital to the broader dimensions of development and progress in living standards, including the rights and enabling environment that widen people’s opportunities and improve their well-being (ILO, 2019h: 11)

There is an implicit reference to other actors, such as the World Bank, that have effectively focused much of its attention on adapting the workforce to the new technologies under the idea of investing in human capital. In this line, the Commission (ILO, 2019h) supported ‘increasing investment in people’s capabilities’ as one of its pillars, expressed in four proposals: establishing a universal entitlement to lifelong learning; supporting work transitions; a gender equality agenda, and; guaranteed social protection over the whole life

⁵⁴ Although its founder, Klaus Schwab, has made explicit that he does not want the WEF to replace UN agencies, as they possess a legitimacy that the WEF does not in terms of decision-making (Financial Times, 2020).

⁵⁵ Interview with ILO official in Geneva.

course. The aspect that seemed most innovative there, considering that gender equality and a social protection floor had been part of the ILO agenda for a long time, was the centrality of lifelong learning. Since the beginnings of the last century, ‘adult’ or ‘continuing’ education had been a key dimension in the ILO and the UN discourse; likewise, promoting lifelong learning opportunities has been explicitly incorporated in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals from 2015 (ILO, 2019d). What made this proposal by the Commission stood out in relation to the previous, and separated the Commission from the mainstream perspectives on the future of jobs, was that it alluded to lifelong learning as a *universal entitlement*, a service that everyone should accede regardless of their status. Most of the international discourse on reskilling had taken it from a *discretionary* point of view – that is, as something necessary but not demandable by workers (on this analytical distinction, see Clegg, 2015).

Table 2: The human-centred agenda for the future of work, by the ILO Global Commission (2017-2019)

Pillar	Recommendation
Increasing investment in people’s capabilities	1. Recognise a universal entitlement to lifelong learning
	2. Support people through future of work transitions
	3. Agenda for gender equality
	4. Guaranteeing universal coverage of social protection from birth to old age
Increasing investment in the institutions of work	5. Establish a Universal Labour Guarantee, with ‘adequate living wages’, limits on working hours, and safety and health at work
	6. Expand time sovereignty to balance work and private life
	7. Promoting collective representation of workers and employers through social dialogue
	8. A ‘human-in-command- approach to harness and manage technology
Increasing investment in decent and sustainable work	9. Incentivising investment in key areas for decent and sustainable
	10. Encouraging long-term investment in the real economy and supplementary indicators of progress

Source: Author, based on ILO (2019g: 51)

The second pillar of the Commission’s report vowed for ‘increasing investment in the institutions of work’. This was an important pillar, as it included several proposals that were highly resisted by the Employers Group after the publication of the Commission’s report, as I will demonstrate in the next section. The first of them referred to a “universal labour guarantee”, consisting in ensuring the provision of social protection, fundamental rights, and an ‘adequate living wage’ for workers regardless of their employment status⁵⁶ (ILO, 2019h). This concept created disagreement in the Commission’s debates according to my interviewees⁵⁷. It pushed forward the frontiers of ‘decent work’, the notion that had concentrated much of the ILO normative agenda in the last decades (Felix Hauf, 2015).

Whereas minimum wages were, at a conceptual level, linked to the required conditions for subsistence for workers or their households, living wages were focused on *quality of life* - thus

⁵⁶ The universality of this concept represented a significant departure from the conventional ILO approach focused on formal or standard employment.

⁵⁷ High-level officials and senior researchers that witnessed the Commission’s discussions from within.

being an extension of the capabilities approach mentioned above (Carr et al., 2016; Yao et al., 2017)⁵⁸. Such notion had been included in several founding texts from the ILO, for instance, in the ILO constitution preamble from 1919 (the urgency of “an adequate living wage”), or the Philadelphia Declaration from 1944 (ensuring “a minimum living wage to all employed and in need of protection”) (Anker and Anker, 2017: 3–4). It was, therefore, a concept that was consistent with the organisation’s mandate and its more recent normative approach, though it was going to cause controversies in the debates on the Centenary Declaration.

Two other policy ideas stood out in the mentioned report, both of which are also grounded on a humanist perspective on the future of work, aiming to subordinate technological innovation to human development. The suggestion of ‘expanding time sovereignty’, firstly, held that “workers need greater autonomy over their working time, while meeting enterprise need... Harnessing technology to expand choice and achieve a balance between work and personal life can help them realize this goal” (ILO, 2019h: 12). In this proposal, digital and communication technologies open a potential scenario of autonomy in which individual workers have more agency in the production process. A similar tone could be found in the idea of a “human-in-command approach”, especially with reference to artificial intelligence for human resources management purposes:

The exercise of algorithmic management, surveillance and control, through sensors, wearables and other forms of monitoring, needs to be regulated to protect the dignity of workers. Labour is not a commodity; nor is it a robot (2019h: 53)

By stressing the human component of labour, the Commission suggested that no matter how mediated by technology work could be, it had to be embedded in a normative framework that effectively protected people from its de-humanising potential. The extension of this principle led the Global Commission to recommend the creation of an “international governance system for digital labour platforms that sets and requires platforms (and their clients) to respect certain minimum rights and protections”; similarly, it suggested the regulation of data ownership and its uses for monitoring workers (ILO 2019 GC, p. 44). In summary, what these recommendations had in common was their humanist character: they aimed to orientate technological development to the increase of workers’ freedom in terms of their resources and activities in the workplace. They were broad proposals, as they did not specify mechanisms or indicators to perform them.

Reactions to the Global Commission report: the opposition of the Employers Group

The report was finally published in January 2019. The reactions to its recommendations were exhibited in statements by different organisations and in the many instances in which ILO researchers presented the document to selected audiences⁵⁹. Since the report was in essence more political than technical, most of the remarks had a normative and moral character. The

⁵⁸ The link between the living wage concept and that of capabilities has been stressed by the Carr and colleagues: “the construct of capability offers an operational definition of a living wage... Earning a living wage can be conceptualized as securing a resource that – in principle – enables valued functioning to grow and develop. Thus, whilst a minimum wage might enable people to function in society in a minimal sense (i.e. not starve and have somewhere basic to live), a living wage should go further” (Carr et al., 2016: 3–4).

⁵⁹ Most of this presentations, as they were open to a broad audience, are available online.

reception in the academia was mixed⁶⁰. On the one hand, there were positive comments from a normative point of view, highlighting the fact that the ILO had elaborated an alternative approach to the mainstream narratives colonised by economics. The Commission's agenda was recognised as a valuable keystone by academics that traditionally had been associated with a pro-labour position: industrial relations scholars and sociologists of work, mostly. I could witness this positive reception in two events where the Global Commission report was presented⁶¹. There were criticisms as well. A relevant one was that its human-centred conception did not recognise class divisions, and the fact that workers needs to be protected from employers' practices, not from 'technology' as an abstract entity. A second point that was criticised was the role of sustainability and the challenge of climate change in the report. Although it was present, it was commented that these issues did not have the centrality they deserved in terms of imagining the societies of the future.

Even though these were relevant considerations from scholars, in the political process that the ILO was facing in the context of the future of work initiative, the reaction of the social partners was key. It could be said that international workers organisations, in general, had a positive reception of the report. It was conceived as an attempt to renovate the social contract for the future (ITUC, 2019). Luc Cortebeek (2019), ex-officio participant in the Commission and speaking on behalf of the ILO Workers Group, mentioned that the notion of a universal labour guarantee "makes a difference", though he recognised that "this is a difficult point for our colleagues of the Employers Group". The idea of an "international instrument" to regulate platform work "was supported" by workers, as were the human-in-command approach and the concept of time sovereignty.

Some relevant dimensions for workers were missing, however: the "challenges for democracy and the danger of populism"; "the actual business models" led by shareholders; the management of global supply chains, among others, but the commissioner made clear that despite these "weak points, the report as a whole is very strong" (Cortebeek, 2019). As an interviewee from Worker's bureau at the ILO mentioned, the Commission was "not pro-worker at all", but the result was well regarded. The same applied to global unions that are not officially part of the ILO. IndustriALL (2019), representing workers in the manufacturing sector, released a statement holding that the report "is an impressive, visionary outline for a new social charter". On its part, Phillip Jennings (2019) from UNI Global Union, who was part of the Commission representing workers from the services industry, concluded that "this report provides the seeds for a 'spring of hope' for working people".

The main actor that plainly opposed to most of the report's proposals was the Employers Group from the ILO. At the launch of the report at the ILO, the ex-officio representative of the employers, Mthunzi Mdwaba, put forward a quite frontal strategy of opposition. As was mentioned above, their participation via an ex-officio integrant implied that the social partners were not going to be signatories of the report, but the comments made on behalf of

⁶⁰ Interview with official from the ILO in Geneva.

⁶¹ The first one was the event 'Debating the future of work', organised by Sheffield University in May 2019, and the second was the ILO conference 'Regulating for decent work' that took place in Geneva in June 2019. In both instances, researchers and officials from the ILO commented on the report, discussing with an audience that was mainly composed by academics from different regions.

business caught officials from the ILO secretariat and the workers bureau by surprise⁶². In terms of the report, Mdwaba (IOE, 2019b) expressed that “whilst some of the recommendations are practical and forward-looking, others are aspirational and difficult to implement in the short to medium term”. The proposals supported by his speech were the emphasis put on skills and lifelong learning; supporting transitions for workers; measures for gender equality and to enhance social protection. Yet, employers’ representative opposed to every single suggestion made by the Commission that had been supported by the Workers Group and Global Unions:

I must though take this opportunity to distance myself from the recommendations on establishing a “Universal Labour Guarantee” and on the “expansion of time sovereignty” due to their non-feasibility and vagueness in terms of possible means of financing. Likewise, the recommendation on “setting an international governance system for digital labour platforms that sets and requires platforms and their clients to respect certain minimum rights and protection” is highly challenging. I do not see this system of transnational rights being established and successfully managed... Moreover, there is no acknowledgement of the positive role of the private sector into the future of work... the recommendations require actions mainly from Governments and companies, thus leaving aside all other stakeholders that could have seized the occasion to take ownership and develop their own responsibilities. Everyone has an active role to play in the future of work (IOE, 2019b)

The reasons behind these criticisms were basically two: the IOE demanded policies that, instead of putting a burden on the private sector, would improve “the business environment”, recognising their contribution to growth and development. At the same time, it was alleged that “some recommendations proposed are costly” for companies (IOE, 2019b). As an interviewee from the Employers Group observed, from the IOE perspective, the Commission’s proposals situated workers in a passive position, as recipients of benefits – less working hours, more training schemes, etc. The absence of references on their responsibilities was related by them to the idea that the ILO secretariat, which influenced importantly the contents of the report, was once again on the side of workers. In summary, this discourse of unfair treatment by business at the ILO justified that the report was catalogued just as “a working paper”, a document that has no normative value as it lacked of tripartite consultation⁶³.

The ‘move’ made by employers can be read in various levels. One possible explanation is that, as a key actor in the ILO’s agenda-setting, they simply continued the non-collaborative approach to tripartite negotiations they started displaying in the 2012 controversy about the right to strike, described above. Given that tripartism as a governance method involves reaching a consensus between actors whose perceived interests often clash with each other, the possibility of opposing to the other partners’ ideas operates as a *de facto* veto power that employers were utilising with increasing aggressiveness. Another interpretation, suggested by several interviewees, was related to a more ‘backroom politics’ dimension: the employers’ positioning was supposed to be part of a broader IOE strategy to gain the Direction of the ILO in the future, undermining the current one led by Guy Ryder, a former ITUC General Secretary.

⁶² There was an anecdote that was interpreted as an aggressive and “really rude” gesture by several of my interviewees from the ILO. At the launch of the report, the Employers Vice-Chairperson of the ILO Governing Body used his phone during most of the speech given by the Director-General, which was read as a sign of the political distance that business was creating vis-à-vis the ILO Office.

⁶³ For an extensive and detailed review of the report’s recommendations, see IOE (2019a).

It seems plausible considering that the framing developed by the ILO secretariat on the future of work, and the Global Commission itself, were expected to represent the Director-General's position on this matter. In fact, in the Centenary Conference of 2019, the Report of the Director-General to be discussed by the plenary was precisely the Global Commission's report on the future of work. And, as it happened in its launch, employers fiercely opposed to it, influencing the contents of the ILO Centenary Declaration elaborated in such conference in a critical manner.

e. The politics stream (II): the ILO Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work (2019) and the dissolution of the human-centred approach

The previous sections have dealt with different ideational processes that took place in the ILO as part of their Future of Work Initiative. The secretariat, through research and dialogues with a variety of social actors, developed a framework to make sense of the future challenges, stressing the importance of institutional mediation to steer technological change towards human development. On their part, the social partners also took position in the debate, consulting workers and employers respectively from all over the world to construct their interests for the future of work. The Global Commission organised by the ILO Office, as a fourth actor joining this saga, elaborated the human-centred agenda based on the capabilities approach to development, reflecting its members' consensual perspective on this matter. Although the ideas promoted by Commission were highly relevant for the international discussion on the future of jobs, they did not possess the normative value that only a tripartite debate could get, taking place within the official ILO fora –the yearly International Labour Conference (ILC) or the Governing Body meetings. The 108th session of the ILC (2019) –also called the 'Centenary Conference' - offered such a space to institutionalise the ideas promoted by the Office and the Commission,; to give them normative strength or discard them in case of not reaching an agreement with the rest of the partners. This section analyses the development of such conference, aiming to link the elaboration of the ILO Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work and the previous ideational processes that were taking place in the organisation.

Expectations for the ILO Centenary: redefining the future of global labour policy

In January 2019, the Global Commission had presented its report on the future of work, with the mixed reception described above. In March, the Governing Body of the ILO held its 335th session, in which the ILO Director-General affirmed that the report “had been widely and positively received among tripartite constituents , the greater public and the international system” (International Labour Office, 2019b: 5). With regard to the Employers Group's open opposition to the text, Guy Ryder mentioned, nonetheless, that he agreed with them “that the Commission was not fully tripartite and its recommendations would not bind the Governing Body” (International Labour Office, 2019, p. 25). The Office would present the Commission's document as the Director-General's report to the International Labour Conference in June 2019, representing not only the commissioners', but the secretariat's proposals for the future of work. In terms of contents, the ideal scenario for the secretariat would had been that the human-centred agenda became the cornerstone for the ILO Centenary Declaration, to be redacted during the conference. In relation to its normative weight, the expectations for the Declaration were clear, as Director-General Ryder ratified:

“the text should be in the form of a Declaration and able to stand in comparison with the historic constitutional texts of the ILO, such as the Declaration of Philadelphia (International Labour Office, 2019, p. 25).

The partners also exhibited their prospects for the conference and the Centenary Declaration, prior to its realisation (International Labour Office, 2019, pp. 19-31). From the outset, it was possible to foresee that some ideas were going to have more predominance than others, and that there were going to be controversies as well. The Workers Group expressed that they expected the ILO to “revitalise the social contract”, particularly through the “establishment of a universal labour guarantee”, an idea described above. The Employers Group, on their part, highlighted the centrality of lifelong learning measures for the future, as well as providing an “enabling environment for employment creation through open, dynamic and inclusive labour markets”. Governments, as it is usual in the ILO’s debates, were grouped into regional blocs⁶⁴ to represent their standpoints in the Governing Body’s 335th meeting and likewise the ILC. In previous regional meetings they had shown an approach to the future of work that was rather close to that of the Employers’ Group. Thus, the isolation of the Workers’ Group to defend the proposals included in the Global Commission report was going to be manifest in the discussion of the ILC, were the employers got to revoke most of their amendments.

In the Panama Declaration (ILO, 2018), the Americas had expressed their commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Agenda, while remarking the importance of an enabling environment for companies; the need for ‘workforce development policies’ related to skills, to “match labour supply and demand”, and; the appropriateness of minimum wage policies. Asia and the Pacific, via the Bali Declaration (ILO, 2016), supported the same principles, stressing as well the ‘decent work deficits’ in global supply chains and multinational companies – thus adding a theme that certainly was not part of the employers approach. Thirdly, Europe and Central Asia’s representatives expressed similar concerns, valuing also the “protection of labour rights” and “a fair transition towards new forms of production and employment relationships, digitalization and automation”, as stated in the Istanbul Initiative (ILO, 2017). Africa, lastly, met in 2019 after the publication of the Centenary Declaration, so their meeting was basically to reaffirm its contents; but, in any case, their last declaration from 2015 had supported the same policy priorities from the previous regions, perhaps including relevant dimensions such as “enhancing labour migration governance” (ILO, 2015). In summary, these regional declarations set the tone for the ILC in 2019, indicating that their concerns were similar to those of employers, thus reflecting a trend that had been developing throughout the 2010s, when employer-friendly countries –mostly the BRICS- started to gain weight in ILO debates (La Hovary, 2018a).

The International Labour Conference 2019: adapting the human-centred agenda to tripartite interests

To make sense of the ILC’s ideational and political dynamics, I have referred to various ILO documents, including the proceedings from the conference, as well as the different drafts

⁶⁴ In the 2010s, several regional meetings were organised by the ILO, every 4 or 5 years, where each ‘region’ (Asia and the Pacific; Europe and Central Asia; Americas; Africa) has released a ‘declaration’ with their policy priorities and expected actions for the ILO to reach them.

that were made when its members were composing the Centenary Declaration. The interviews made to ILO officials and researchers were also crucial to guide my own reading of the process, taking different standpoints to observe its evolution. The first aspect that I must mention is that the conference consisted in two weeks of conversations among representatives of governments, workers and employers. In the ILC, the proportion of members from these three partners is as follows: from every two government officials, there is one representative from labour and one from business – therefore, to make decisions all of them have one vote, but states have a majority in relation to the social partners (La Hovary, 2015).

The negotiations on the Centenary Declaration occurred mostly in the Committee of the Whole, the space that gathered the ILO partners with equal voting rights, where they could present their amendments on the first draft Declaration that was made by the Office to be discussed in the conference (International Labour Office, 2019c). The draft was made by a technical group from the Office, which was different from the technical secretariat that had previously led most ILO studies related to the future of work since 2015, also feeding the Global Commission's report with their ideas. This change in the administration of the drafting obeyed, according to my interviewees, to political reasons, and had as a consequence the fact that such first draft did not fully represent the proposals from the Global Commission, especially the capabilities approach⁶⁵.

The ILC was the final stage of the ILO Future of Work Initiative, and a key moment in the organisation's history. The negotiations developed at the heart of the conference were hard, and they mostly had a political character – diagnoses about emerging trends in work and employment were taken for granted and many times disputes were about norms or values. At the end of the two weeks there was uncertainty about the very promulgation of the Declaration, as agreements could not be reached until the partners compromised part of their strategies⁶⁶. In any case, from a practical viewpoint the ILC “was a success as it produced a declaration and a convention”, but based on “the smallest common denominator they could reach”, as an interviewee put it. The primary opposition, from an ideational perspective, was between the Workers and the Employers Groups, who constantly refuted each other's amendments in the Committee of the Whole (ILO, 2019f). The place of governments' representatives in this opposition was crucial: they operated as mediators between the two social partners, tipping the balance in favour of one group or another. This situation reflects why the state of international politics –related to the configuration of forces between the great powers and their ideas (Cox, 2006)- is so relevant for the ILO.

In this case, considering the international expansion of ‘neoliberal nationalism’ (Harmes, 2012) and ‘global Trumpism’ (Blyth, 2016) in the past decade, we can understand that

⁶⁵ The production of the Centenary Declaration's first draft was coordinated by Greg Vines, Deputy Director-General for Management and Reform. From a backroom politics point of view, some interviewees suggested that he was commissioned to do so by the Director-General, as Vines is one of the current administration's candidates to succeed Guy Ryder as the head of the ILO, and this would give him visibility. The formulation of the draft was not made by the secretariat's intellectual authors of the human-centred agenda displayed in the Global Commission report, which had as a consequence that the conceptual foundation of such agenda –the capabilities conception of development- was left behind.

⁶⁶ Interviewee who participated in the Drafting Group of the ILC's Committee of the Whole that proposed the last draft of the Centenary Declaration.

governments aligned with employers most times in the debates on the Centenary Declaration, particularly adducing the principle of national sovereignty. Governments did not want to commit with rights or guarantees due to such principle: for instance, Brazil, speaking on behalf of Latin American governments, held that advancing the human-centred approach had to be done “in conformity with international law and consistent with their respective capacities and national circumstances” (ILO, 2019c: 121). Thus, national representatives supported at the same time the soft law (Abbott and Snidal, 2000) approach defended by employers, who did not want to commit either to additional regulations now related to technological change and the future world of work.

The making of the ILO Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work

The first draft of the Declaration, submitted by the ILO Office to the ILC’s Committee of the Whole, was largely based on the Global Commission report’s human-centred approach. It included the three pillars that supported by the Commission, with some changes (International Labour Office, 2019a). The first one –enhancing people’s capabilities- was presented in the draft as “strengthening the capacities of all people”, changing its conceptual basis from the original focus on capabilities⁶⁷. The idea of an ‘entitlement to lifelong learning’ from the report was changed to the ‘effective realization of lifelong learning’. The universal labour guarantee proposed by the Commission and supported by international unions was not in the draft as such, but its elements were there: adequate living wages, limits on working hours, and safety and health at work (ILO, 2019b). Other crucial elements on the future of work that were part of the Commission’s report –an international mechanism to regulate platforms and the human-in-command concept on algorithmic decision-making were not considered in the draft. This could be surprising given the centrality of these issues in the international policy debates (see the previous chapter), but the truth was that they had become a highly polemic theme at the ILO. One ILO official told me, to illustrate this point, that there was a *strong resistance from the Employers’ Group* to the publication of a flagship study on digital labour platforms in 2018 (Berg et al., 2018). The lack of institutional consensus on this matter made impossible to incorporate it into the Centenary Declaration.

⁶⁷ Greg Vines, in charge of the mentioned draft, justified this change in the ILC mentioning that “the main difference was that “capacity” covered the acquisition or possession of specific characteristics, whereas “capability” tended to suggest having or not having the wherewithal or the means to do something or not. When drafting the text, the Office had considered that “capacity” was the correct word” (ILO, 2019, p. 124).

Table 11: The ILO Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work – key ideas

Section	Key ideas
Part I	The ILO should respond to the future transformations in the world of work: technological change, demographic shift, climate change, globalisation and persistent inequalities. Such response is to be grounded on its mandate for social justice, and its human-centred approach to the future of work
Part II	To pursue its constitutional mandate for the future, the ILO should direct its efforts to: harnessing technological change; skills development and lifelong learning; supporting the private sector through an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises; universal access to social protection; fundamental rights for workers; gender equality; social dialogue and tripartite cooperation
Part III	The ILO encourages its Member States to develop the human-centred approach by: strengthening the capacities of all people; reinforcing the institutions of work and the centrality of the employment relation; the respect for fundamental rights; an adequate minimum wage, maximum limits on working time, and safety and health at work; promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Source: Author, based on ILO (2019b, 2019e)

The discussions in the Committee of the Whole show the fate of each of these ideas and how they successively negotiated, often at the expense of the Office’s and the workers’ positions. Table 11 summarises the contents of the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work. In relation to the Global Commission’s proposals, the next reflections focus on the ones that were most debated in the Centenary Conference of 2019, and will be primarily based on the proceedings from the event.

i) Rejection of the ‘universal labour guarantee’ concept:

As I have mentioned above, the universal labour guarantee did not appear in the first draft as such, but the later had its main elements. However, this idea was going to be completely rejected in the conference. It was further criticised by the Employers Group, who “did not support the use of the word ‘guarantees’”, as well as by the representatives of Canada and the United States for the same reason ” (ILO, 2019, p. 132-3). Since the concept was under siege, the Worker Vice-Chairperson from proposed an alternative way to present the same notion, defending

the novel idea of a universal labour protection floor. The Declaration needed to be ambitious, as it could make a difference for the millions of insufficiently protected workers in new and emerging forms of work (ILO, 2019c: 133)

The notion of a ‘floor of rights’ attached to the concept, was not developed in the later discussions, and the idea of living wages as a guarantee was also rejected,⁶⁸ while the less conflicting concept of ‘adequate minimum wages’ was accepted in to be in the Declaration. Though this was a relevant loss for workers in the Conference, they could incorporate in the final text a phrase that held that institutions of work should “ensure adequate protection of

⁶⁸ The employers’ representative affirmed to that regard: “the reference to a guaranteed “adequate living wage” – even within quotation marks – was not acceptable. Although the term was taken from the ILO Constitution, it should be considered as an aspirational concept rather than a guarantee” (ILO, 2019b, p. 4)

all workers". It was an important amendment for labour, as it meant that the ILO's orientations would cover "new and emerging, or non-standard, forms of work", including platform labour" (ILO, 2019c: 133) . Such inclusion reaffirmed that the ILO norms did not only apply to jobs in the formal sector. The employment relation remained a key instrument for labour regulation in the Centenary Declaration (ILO, 2019b: 5) but it was not represented as *the* normative tool to make their standards applicable.

ii) Universal access to social protection, not activation measures:

The conference held a debate on the role of social protection for the future of work. The notions that were disputed referred to the meaning of universality when it comes to social policy, and to the role of active labour market policy in the Declaration. The first draft of the Declaration that was proposed by the ILO Office supported the strengthening of "universal, comprehensive and sustainable social protection" (International Labour Office, 2019a). The workers' representative expressed at the ILC that "they were quite happy with the Office text"; the governments of Canada and the United States expressed that they would prefer it to say universal access to social protection. Employers expressed their agreement with the notion of financial sustainability in social spending that could be derived from the proposed wording" (ILO, 2019c: 128–9). Governments from several regions –the European Union, Latin America- declared that 'access' was a correct term, arguably because it relieved part of the state's burden to reach effective social protection – and, as I have shown, governments did not want extra commitments. In the end, universal access was accepted as the principle to be incorporated in the Centenary Declaration, despite workers' resistance (ILO, 2019b: 5).

There was a second point of dissent apart from the previous one. The Declaration's first draft included a paragraph that braced "active measures to support them [workers] through the increasing transitions they will face in working life" (International Labour Office, 2019a). The Workers Group opposed to the notion of 'active' support and to the paragraph's assumption that transitions are increasing. The Employer Vice-Chairperson stated, on the contrary, that business "did not support the first amendment proposed by the Workers Group as she precisely did want measures to be active and activating" (ILO, 2019c: 129–30). Since governments did not jump in to change the balance between the workers' and employers' position on this, as it happened in other moments of the conference, the word 'active' was replaced by 'effective measures' to manage transitions -a rather empty statement. Given that active labour market policies are usually linked to notions of conditionality -'welfare-to-work' (Sengenberger, 2011), or 'work for your benefit' (Wiggan, 2015)-, their deletion from the Centenary Declaration was effectively a success for the Workers Group. It would have been at odds with the principle of universality defended by them.

iii) Lifelong learning as a shared responsibility, not an entitlement:

Another point that is worth examining was the role of skills in the Declaration. I have already suggested that, as with the labour guarantee, the initial draft did not include the 'entitlement to lifelong learning' that was promoted by the Global Commission. I suggested above that such a policy would have distanced the ILO's discourse on the future of work from virtually all other observers in the international debate, as most of them had recognised the centrality of skills to prevent technological unemployment, but without framing it as an entitlement for

individuals. Aware of this situation, the Workers Group supported in the conference the ‘right to lifelong learning’ (ILO, 2019c: 129–30). On the contrary, employers suggested the opposite idea:

The Employer Vice-Chairperson introduced her group’s amendment, stressing the importance that the group placed on the notion of the acquisition of skills as a shared responsibility... General education, access to schools, universities and public training institutions was the responsibility of governments; vocational training, lifelong training and training for specific jobs was the responsibility of employers; and workers were responsible for attending training to upgrade their skills (ILO, 2019c: 68)

The conception of a ‘shared responsibility’ was adopted by the conference, despite the initial opposition of workers and several governments (Africa, Canada, and Latin America). Its inclusion ended up being central as the Workers Group dropped their amendment for a right to skills development, now understood as a responsibility instead (ILO, 2019b).

iv) The private sector understood as a driver of growth and job creation:

The role of companies in the Declaration in the future of work, as the previous themes, was a matter of debate in the ILC. The Employers Group proposed an amendment to “introduce the notion of the role of business as a driver of inclusive economic growth and productivity” (ILO, 2019c: 81). In the 2008 Declaration for a Fair Globalisation, the ILO had supported that “productive, profitable and sustainable enterprises, together with a strong social economy and a viable public sector” were key for development (ILO, 2008). In the Centenary Conference, employers planned to expand this idea – accepting that companies broadly speaking are critical to development, not only ‘sustainable’ enterprises. In my view, this was not a superfluous distinction. The ILO’s mandate, based on the idea that employers have a structural advantage vis-à-vis workers in regulating their relationship, assumes also that companies can, and do, engage in practices that are not beneficial for their employees –e.g. forced or child labour; unequal or low pay; harassment, etc.

The previous explains that labour’s Vice-Chairperson at the ILC criticised that “enterprises were already fully fledged drivers of inclusive growth”, as that was more a desired normative scenario than an existent reality (ILO, 2019c: 84) . The Cuban representative, countering employers’ amendment, “argued that the purpose of the ILO was to promote social justice, not to support businesses in their role as drivers of growth” (ILO, 2019c: 83). That argument, in my perspective, was true, as the ILO’s position in global governance had historically been linked to reducing inequalities at work and other spheres (Deacon, 2015). However, the employers’ proposal found ample support in most governments. The United States member stated that “the fact that enterprises were generators of growth needed to be recognized clearly”, while the Chinese government, along with workers, proposed to add public enterprises and cooperatives in the formula. The support for giving a stronger role in the Declaration to the public sector was scarce; therefore, it was recognised only “as a significant employer and provider of quality public services” (ILO, 2019c: 80ff) . The final text of the Declaration held, in turn, that the private sector should be supported “as a principal source of economic growth and job creation by promoting an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and sustainable enterprises” (ILO, 2019a, p. 4). It reflected what was

considered by the employers at the ILO as a key victory⁶⁹, showing how business was not represented as a self-interested actor to be tamed in the new ILO discourse anymore, but as a driver of development that had to be supported with an enabling environment.

Political implications of the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work: a new Philadelphia Declaration?

The analysis of the ILC and the making of the Declaration has indicated that several policy ideas developed by the Office, as well by the Global Commission, had to be negotiated, and thus transformed to be institutionalised as part of the ILO official discourse for the future. The Centenary Declaration is, in any case, a re-foundational text, as it introduced and reinforced principles that the ILO was to support in the decades to come. The most immediate consequence were related to the design of the ILO's programming and budget for 2020-21 (International Labour Office, 2019d), which were prepared taking the Declaration as its main reference. There are elements that gained prominence after the Centenary Declaration – particularly the role of skills development and the private sector, which were not as central in the programme for the previous biennium (International Labour Office, 2017).. Experts in labour governance have mistakenly understood the Global Commission's human-centred approach as the ILO perspective on the future (Grimshaw, 2020; Maupain, 2020; Novitz, 2020). On the contrary, my analysis here proves that the Commission and its policy innovations –e.g. establishing a universal labour guarantee- did not represent the interests of the partners, and hence were not going to be institutionalised as part of the ILO official discourse. A different way of building a transversal political consensus could have led to different outcomes perhaps, but it just was not the case.

How was the reception of the Declaration by the ILO partners? First, employers were evidently content about the resulting orientations of the document. Their Group expressed “their satisfaction with the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work” (ILO, 2019f: 3). The reasons have been mentioned above: the recognition of the private sector as an engine for growth and development; the centrality of skills; the promotion of an enabling environment for business, among others. The Declaration was, as acknowledged by an interviewee from the IOE, admittedly ‘pro-business’. The help of key governments at the ILC was crucial to make that happen. An example of this can be found in the rejection to include a paragraph on the regulation of multinational companies and their labour force, proposed by workers. The latter affirmed that, apart from following the ILO's Declaration on multinationals from 2007, the Centenary Declaration could be also inspired by “the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises or the OHCHR Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights” (ILO, 2019, p. 88). Employers opposed, rejecting the normative value of texts that were not part of the ILO's mandate. At the same time, the European Union argued against the inclusion of multinationals in the Declaration, as well as the African group, which were not supportive of including references to corporate social responsibility (ILO, 2019c: 80–90). This reluctance to take a firmer position in relation to the private sector was a continuous source of convergence between business and governments in the making of the Declaration.

⁶⁹ Interview with officials from the IOE.

The evaluation made by the labour was rather ambivalent. On the one hand, they stated that “the Workers’ group would have welcomed a more visionary and ambitious Centenary Declaration”, particularly due to the rejection of the Global Commission’s ideas and, equally central, the lack of references to inequality and wealth redistribution measures. Furthermore, they affirmed that

the ILO is the house of social justice and, in order to keep on with the excellent work that it has been doing for a century, it should take seriously the fight against inequality as the backdrop against which challenges to the future of work are developing (ILO, 2019e: 7–8 emphasis added)

An interviewee from the ITUC recognised that there were serious criticisms in relation to the Declaration in the organisation, but they were not made public – the ITUC actually published a statement welcoming it (ITUC, 2019). The reason for such silence is that any attack on the ILO mechanisms or even its outcomes could be interpreted by the international community as an attack on multilateralism, which was already under a large pressure exerted by the right-wing populist wave (Hopewell, 2017). In spite of not seeing their interests and ideas realised, they were cautious about revealing their real position about the whole process.

Even under this sense of defeat, the ILO staff –from the Workers Bureau or the Director-General’s office- had a more optimistic view of it. A high-level official suggested in an interview that, though the rough discussions in the ILC could have led to “a total disaster”, the Declaration retained some elements from the universal labour guarantee proposed by the Global Commission –not explicitly, to be sure. The social protection floor was reaffirmed as a policy concept; adequate minimum wages –although not ‘living wages’- were still central for developing countries. Overall, there was a sense at the ILO Office that enabling policies based on human rights and the capabilities framework were somehow replaced by a focus on employability and human capital – similar to that of the World Bank. But, again, some elements were positive from a workers perspective. In the same line, an interviewee from the Workers Bureau at the ILO suggested that “workers were quite happy” with the Declaration. There was a reference to ‘all workers’, beyond their employment status, which was seen as an advance; the document did not have the language workers wanted to use, but it was considered an adequate starting point. As an interviewee⁷⁰ held:

that is tripartism, that is democracy. You cannot have it all. At least it is not as in the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank or the World Trade Organisation, where workers do not have a voice.

To finish with the section on the Centenary Declaration, it is worth asking whether the initial expectations about its influence were met – becoming a new Philadelphia Declaration. According to an interviewee⁷¹, the setting was really different in relation to the latter: the Philadelphia document was made due to a contextual pressure, in the aftermath of the Second World War when global institutions were being designed with the goal of bringing stability to capitalism. In the present case, it was the Centenary which propelled the making of the Declaration, not the international context. Although there was consensus about some pressing issues –particularly new technological innovations-, the partners could not reach

⁷⁰ Interview with official from the ILO Workers Bureau (ACTRAV) in Geneva.

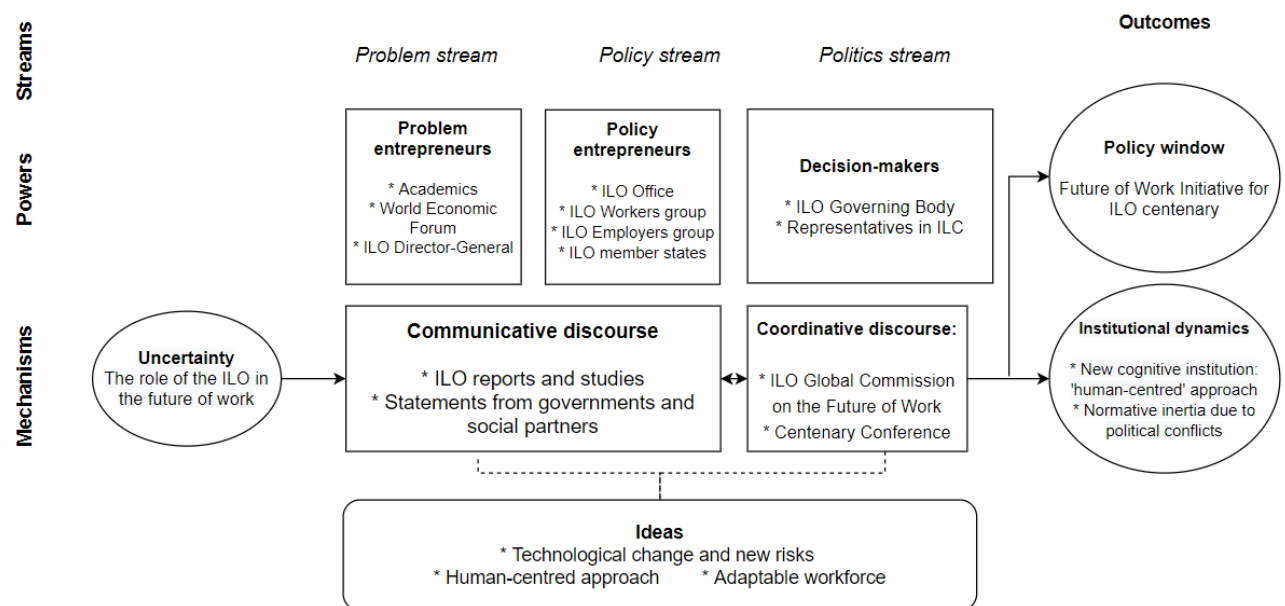
⁷¹ Interview with ILO researcher in Geneva.

basic agreements on how to face them – which relates to the tone of international politics and the increasingly aggressive opposition by employers to set future labour regulations. Other members of the ILO considered that the Declaration did not add any strong concept that could have made it endure for the next decades. The internal conversation at the ILO reflected that it had been considered “quite pointless”, and that there was a shared sense that “its influence will not last one hundred years”⁷².

Conclusion

In this chapter I have made a detailed examination of the ILO’s engagement with the global future of work agenda. In particular, I have shown the discursive construction of the future by ILO actors, who built their interests and advocated for different policy ideas along the way. Figure 6 below summarises the logic of this process, dissecting the multiple streams and institutional factors involved in the Future of Work Initiative. I have held that the future of work posed a situation of uncertainty for the ILO, in the sense that the organisation had to redefine their place in global governance in light of emerging trends in work and employment. The international academic discussion on such trends was itself a powerful reason to innovate. The centenary represented a window for the Director-General and the Governing Body to develop a novel approach to global labour policy. This approach was developed through a variety of communicative means: the ILO Office, the social partners and regional blocs respectively produced statements and studies that revealed their expectations for the ILO centenary. New diagnoses about the future, mostly linked to emergent technologies-were prepared by ILO researchers; the IOE suggested that it was time to prepare the workforce to make it more adaptable to change, while the ITUC expressed concern about the negative side of innovation, for example the displacement effect of automation.

Figure 6: The future of work and the ILO: streams and institutional dynamics



Source: Author

⁷² Interviews from the Workers and Employers Group at the ILO.

In this context of diverse framings and interests circulating the ILO, Director-General Ryder created a Global Commission as a coordinative space composed by people external to the ILO that would agree on a new framework for the future. The Commission was in charge of elaborating the 'human-centred' agenda, focused on investing in workers' capabilities, the institutions of work and sustainable and inclusive growth. The approach viewed technological change as an opportunity to improve work conditions, ensuring a fair redistribution of gains derived from innovation. The Commission, however, was not a legitimate tripartite instance, and for that reason their proposals had to be negotiated in the main coordinative event in the ILO, the Centenary Conference of 2019. The institutionalisation of such proposals, and the broader intent to establish a new cognitive institution at the ILO, failed due to the opposition of employers and governments. These partners emphasised a more positive stance towards the private sector as the key driver of development, effectively dismantling the efforts of the Workers Group and the ILO secretariat to create new normative ideas related to the future of jobs. I have labelled the outcome of the Future of Work Initiative as normative inertia, since the impossibility to reach political agreements between ILO constituents explained the lack of innovation in the definitive human-centred framework contained in the ILO Centenary Declaration.

Now I must reflect on the consequences of these developments for global labour governance, even if I will elaborate on this more extensively in the last chapter. The main point that can be drawn is that, despite the efforts made by academics, researchers or public agencies to address the potential issues of the future, the role of politics cannot be underestimated. This chapter has shown the political limits of a human-centred perspective, indicating that both companies and governments are highly reluctant to implementing measures that have workers' well-being or autonomy as a primary goal. Regulating the future of work depends critically on the politics stream: problem and policy entrepreneurs are free to communicate their own ideas, but when decisions must be made, interests are likely to prevail. Unless labour or international agencies have institutional means to exercise ideational power, they will clash against a wall of opposition. Tripartism might be an effective method to give voice to workers, but in this agenda, it involved compromising the core aspects of the human-centred perspective. In that sense, the Initiative reconfigured the balance of powers between the ILO partners, but it will be a matter of further studies to define whether that it had the same effect on labour governance in each of the member countries.

Chapter 5: The WB, the OECD and the future of work. From neoliberalism to the inclusive-growth approach

Introduction

The cases I am now going to study are two international bodies, active players in global labour policy in the last decades: the World Bank (WB) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The future of work occupied a significant role in their agenda in the second half of the 2010s, after the global financial crisis lost centrality in their discourse. In this chapter, I analyse their respective approaches to social and labour policy, the core ideas and recommendations proposed to face the future of jobs. The thesis I would like to advance is that the future of work agenda represented a critical juncture in the policy trajectory of these organisations, one in which they have abandoned their neoliberal stance to embrace different principles on labour policy. The background of this departure were their respective initiatives to design a new development strategy under the notion of inclusive growth, a position that intends to reconcile labour market efficiency with equity and social cohesion (Deeming and Smyth, 2018; Mahon, 2019).

Even though in each organisation inclusive growth had been announced as their new approach in the early 2010s, it was only during the future of work agenda, between 2015 and 2020, that they remade their social policy frameworks to give inclusiveness a more prominent place. Thus, I have found two similar trajectories in these two cases: the WB, rebuilding their de-regulatory agenda by promoting an original version of the flexicurity model for the developing world, tailored for the ‘changing world of work’; the OECD, re-elaborating its Jobs Strategy, supporting measures to improve job quality and address growing inequalities in a context of rapid technological change. Aiming to make sense of this process, the chapter introduces first the notion of inclusive growth and its place in the two organisations. It then examines in detail the ideational and institutional changes experienced by each in the setting of the future of work agenda, analysing the intersection of multiple streams (problems, policies and politics) in that process. Finally, I conclude with some reflections about their commonalities and divergences, examining their recent trajectories in social and labour policy.

a. The ‘liberal pole’ in global labour policy: similarities between the WB and the OECD

From neoliberalism to inclusive growth: a new concept of development

The decision to consider the two cases in a single chapter rests on the similarities that both present, at least on their position in global labour policy. To be sure, as international organisations, they are quite different from one another. The WB is overall a development agency that offers technical and financial support to poorer countries, certainly influenced by American politics and academic debates⁷³ (Vestergaard and Wade, 2014; Woods, 2006). For its part, the OECD is composed by richer states, being run by a relatively autonomous secretariat, operating as a forum and as a technical platform to support policy-making in a

⁷³ Given the fact that the WB is headquartered in Washington D.C. and that the President is nominated by the United States government, being the largest shareholder in the institution.

wide range of themes (Martens and Jakobi, 2010). Both institutions have different mandates, governance structures and transfer mechanisms. However, they present at least three common traits that justify studying them in parallel: they share a common trajectory in their approach to social affairs; in recent years, both have followed the ‘inclusive growth’ conception of development, and; they are largely dominated by the economics profession in terms of ideas. Despite these commonalities, I will review in this chapter their differences in their way of approaching the future of work, indicating what this juncture can tell us about where they are standing in global social policy.

Firstly, the rise of the neoliberal ideology in the 1980s (Flew, 2014; Jones, 2012; Mirowski, 2014; Peck, 2013) and the so-called Washington Consensus as a transnational policy paradigm that embodied such ideology (Babb, 2013) pushed forward a liberalisation agenda in labour market policy in various regions of the world. As I suggested in chapter 2, the WB took part of this ideational path by attaching flexibility conditions to its loans, aiming to reduce wages in the public and private sectors and deactivate the structural power of trade unions (Blanton et al., 2015; Murphy, 2014), similar to the IMF conditionality measures (Reinsberg et al., 2019). Until the 2000s, social policy prescriptions in the Bank were rather linked to human capital formation –investing in minimum education and health levels- and poverty alleviation schemes (Stein, 2008; World Bank, 1990). In the WB perspective, social policy was crucial for growth, as the provision of basic services would help the private sector access a better qualified and capable workforce (Vetterlein, 2014; World Bank, 1995); the emphasis on poverty, on the other hand, was justified by the recognition that the incorporation of developing countries into global capitalism –e.g. through ‘structural adjustment’- could create disruption and worsen living conditions in the short run (World Bank, 2001).

In a similar pattern, but not as focused on development policies, in the 1990s the OECD embraced free markets and recommended member countries to follow the American model in labour market policy, characterised by flexibility and a minimum role for state intervention (Jacobsson and Noaksson, 2010). After the fall of the Soviet Union, the OECD redefined its mandate: from defending liberal democracy and market economy to managing globalisation, contributing to the expansion of the world capitalism (Clifton and Díaz-Fuentes, 2011). The WB and the OECD, naturally, had different counterparts, since the first would focus on developing economies, while the second was the ‘rich countries’ club’, but their goals in terms of development paths and policy ideas were certainly analogous.

The 2007-2008 financial crisis transformed the agendas of these organisations and provoked an ideational change in international organisations towards inclusiveness, pointing toward the reconciliation of economic growth and equity (Deeming and Smyth, 2018). The core of this new approach has been summarised by American economist Eric Thorbecke as follows:

Inclusive growth, as a development strategy, is the new paradigm embraced by the development community. It follows directly from and is based on the broad, highly multi-dimensional and contemporary definition of human development... It recognises that the pattern and structure (arguably even more so than the pace) of growth are crucial determinants of inclusive growth. All segments of society must be involved in, and benefit from, this process—the poor, the middle class and the rich. On the production side, involvement is through productive employment. On the public policy side, involvement is through voice and representation in local and national policymaking decisions (2019: 61)

How did the Bank adopt this strategy? In the 2000s, before the crash, the so-called Washington Consensus –the transnational support of the market ideology, from which the WB was one of the most influential advocates (Williamson, 2008)- was already in retreat, delegitimised by the negative social effects of structural adjustment policies (Peet and Hartwick, 2015). The Bank, as I advanced earlier, reoriented its strategies to poverty reduction and political reforms, under the idea that underdevelopment was not only a caused by insufficient integration in global markets, but also a consequence of corruption and poor governance,, as part of a broader post-Washington Consensus trend (Güven, 2012, 2018). A key milestone in this novel focus on the social and political dimensions of development was the 2008 Growth Report (World Bank, 2008), a document that positioned sustainability and equality of opportunities as necessary conditions for steady economic growth.

The WB changed its conception of development as pure economic growth, then promoting a ‘sustainable and inclusive globalisation’ led by the private sector, as the WB President Robert B. Zoellick (2007) put it. The relevance of environmental costs (World Bank, 2012a) and of social inclusion was added to the Bank policy framework. Growth was considered inclusive when it was *pro-poor* –improving income levels of the poor in absolute terms-, being the result of a more productive labour force and a diversified economic structure (Ianchovichina and Lundstrom, 2009). Inclusiveness was essentially linked to *productive employment*, not to equality of outcomes in this conception. In that sense, it did not necessarily represent a sea change in the WB policy preferences, but it will be clear later in the chapter that in the context of of the future of work agenda, the focus on inclusiveness would trigger a significant shift as far as labour market policy was concerned.

The OECD, particularly in the 2010s, adopted the inclusive growth concept as an essential foundation for its notion of development. The organisation had positioned economic growth as its main policy goal since its creation in the OECD Convention of 1960, and until recently it was still the “number one priority” according to Secretary-General Angel Gurría (Schmelzer, 2016, p. 335). In 2012 the OECD created its Inclusive Growth Initiative, a programme that was meant to restate the institution’s development strategy beyond conventional approaches centred on economic output and supply-side investment. In a joint effort with the WB, the OECD prepared a book named *Promoting inclusive growth: challenges and policies* (de Mello and Dutz, 2012) that supported redirecting the discussion towards poverty, inequality and territorial imbalances. In the subsequent reports made for the Initiative, the fact that income inequality had been growing in OECD economies –“including the egalitarian ones”- was presented as the long-term consequence of the financial crisis and as the key challenge to be addressed by the organisation (OECD, 2014). Despite the recovery of pre-crisis growth rates in its member countries, the OECD aimed to address a inclusiveness deficit in that scenario, especially as a way of countering the anti-globalisation ethos that characterised the right-wing populist wave in the late 2010s:

Such inequalities undermine economic performance and trust in public institutions, and threaten social cohesion – more and more people are lashing out against globalisation and the established political and economic order (OECD, 2018, p. 2)

The OECD framework thus paid attention to inequality and inclusiveness but not only from an income-distribution viewpoint, but also adding non-income and well-being indicators to its 'multidimensional' concept of growth (OECD, 2014). The effects of this reorientation were crucial in the OECD approach to the future of work as it critically influenced its 2018 reassessment of its Jobs Strategy. I will thoroughly explain this later. It will become more evident that the notion of inclusive growth was the 'lens' through which these institutions framed the future of work in the past decade. Despite their different conceptions of what inclusiveness implies, both are committed with equality of opportunities as a normative horizon, one that is not only desirable but also necessary for sustained growth.

The primacy of economics in the WB and the OECD

The last commonality that can be mentioned, and that turns out to be crucial to make sense of their mutual support to the inclusive growth concept, is the ideational power that economists have in these two institutions. On the one hand the WB has historically aimed to establish itself as an original 'knowledge bank' (Kramarz and Momani, 2013), but its intellectual sources are certainly embedded in mainstream theories of growth and development. Furthermore, the Bank actively recruits economists and newly-graduated researchers from US and UK elite universities that, due to their professional background and the institution's liberal tradition, share common principles about the nature of their object of study (Toye, 2009; Woods, 2006). As Sarfaty (2009) suggests, the predominance of economics in the WB has meant that many 'fashions and trends' in such field have been replied in the Bank research agenda, trying to keep up with the latest evidence and debates. In my second case I found a similar pattern: the Economics Department "constitutes the very essence of the OECD staff's self-definition" (Marcussen, 2004) considering their influence of economists and their evidence-centred approach to policy issues. Despite the role of governments and its own political agenda, the OECD organisational culture aims to be directed by evidence and expertise, nurturing the ideal of the unpolluted international civil servant (Marcussen and Trondal, 2011). The same occurs in the IMF, where "economists think of themselves as non-doctrinaire, 'practical', and policy-oriented" (Clift, 2018: 51).

It is fundamental to add that the passage from a strict neoliberal position towards the inclusive growth framework in international organisations, in effect, followed the trajectory of development economics since the 1990s. Neoclassical growth theory –which understands growth as the result of the accumulation of capital and labour (Szirmai, 2010; Yusuf, 2014), has been challenged in the last decades by three alternative notions of development: the capabilities approach, endogenous growth theory, and new institutional economics (for an extended analysis, see Evans, 2014). The capabilities approach has been primarily embraced by the United Nations agencies⁷⁴, and in the previous chapter, I showed that it is still central in the ILO discourse. In my perspective, the inclusive growth approach results from a combination of the last two. From endogenous growth theory (Aghion and Howitt, 1999; Romer, 1990), it has taken the idea that human capital is a key development factor, arguing

⁷⁴ An example of this trend was the creation of the Human Development Index by the United Nations Development Programme, explicitly grounded on the capabilities framework. Babb and Chorev hold that the Index "represented an intellectual challenge to the fetishisation of economic growth that had long dominated the development regime, but also indirectly enabled an institutional challenge to the dominance of the World Bank" (2016: 96),

that knowledge allows workers and organisations to internalise technological innovations. From new institutional economics (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2010, 2012; Hodgson, 2007; North, 1990), it has adopted the idea that the ‘rules of the game’ of the economy must improve everyone’s material and productive conditions to generate growth, limiting the expansion of extractive institutions and behaviours. In both theoretical currents, *the state plays an active role*, either in human capital formation or in distributing economic gains. Since development theory and social policy have become increasingly connected in international organisations (Deeming and Smyth, 2018), these assumptions have shaped the WB and the OECD discourse, though in the future of work case we will see that each organisation had a different interpretation of these common principles.

b. The future of work agenda in the World Bank

The WB’s engagement with this international agenda had an element of ideational continuity in relation to previous strategies, but it also exhibited relevant institutional innovations, thus leading to a new social policy framework for a changing world of work. My interviews with WB researchers indicated that the usual way of making social policies in the institution consists in approaching emergent topics using previous flagship studies as building blocks, as they contain positions and arguments already validated by the organisation higher spheres. With that in mind, my analysis of the WB not only focuses on documents on digital technologies at work, but also on previous strategies and reports that help to make sense of the specific way in which the Bank constructed the problems of the future. The analysis pays more attention, as the reader will note in a second, to the streams related to the definition of the problem and the policy solutions offered to face the coming industrial revolution. The issues emphasised by the Bank were primarily about the jobs market, understanding work strictly as an economic resource –for companies, as labour force, and for individuals, as a source of income (for alternative conceptions of work, see Beamish and Biggart, 2006; Budd, 2011). From that assumption, solutions had to deal with supporting labour supply, e.g. improving human capital, and with giving workers’ resources –e.g. skills or a minimum guaranteed protection- to survive in an increasingly flexible and unpredictable labour market.

The policy recommendations given by the WB for the future of work –for example, establishing a universal basic income or a ‘pentapartite’ system of social dialogue-, might be surprising for those that expected a *laissez-faire* response, closer to the one supported by international business associations. The Bank in this agenda clearly moved from a ‘neoliberalism with a human face’ position, towards a flexicurity model closer to a social democracy imaginary. In these pages I analyse the evolution of this agenda (see Figure 7 for a timeline). I must note as well that the role of the political stream in the WB case was not as important as in the ILO or the OECD⁷⁵. The first section will show that agenda-setting was defined by WB researchers, aiming to position the institution in the international discourse on the future of jobs; at the same time, it notes that the Bank’s ideas were mostly inspired by mainstream economics and previous WB reports, not precisely by social partners,

⁷⁵ This does not mean that interests and disputes are not part of this organisation: in chapter 1, I held that the Bank’s financial strategy is derived from its shareholders’ interests (Babb and Carruthers, 2008), and its social policy agendas have been clearly shaped in recent decades by a free-market ideology (Murphy, 2014; Woods, 2006). My comment about the irrelevance of the political stream is only restricted to the Bank’s positioning on the future of work agenda.

shareholders or international interests⁷⁶. The following sections explain how the WB constructed the problems of the future of work, as well as the policy proposals that should tackle them.

Figure 7: The future of work agenda at the WB in the 2010s

Coordinative discourse			WB Chief Economist Paul Romer proposes future of work as focus of next WDR	Launch of the WB 'Human Capital Project'; consultations for elaboration of WDR 2019 on future of work	Publication of white paper 'Protecting all: risk sharing in a diverse and diversifying world of work'
Communicative discourse	World Development Report 2013: 'Jobs'	World Development Report 2016: 'Digital dividends'		World Development Report 2019: 'The changing nature of work'	World Development Report 2020: 'Trading in the age of global value chains'
<p style="text-align: center;">2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020</p>					

Source: Author

The politics streams: the interest of the WB in avoiding over-regulations

The centrality of the private sector and the plateau of labour policy

In recent decades several World Development Reports (WDRs) have reflected the organisation’s political stance on labour regulation as well as its broader ideological orientations on social policy reform. For instance, the 1995 WDR *Workers in an integrating world* (World Bank, 1995) was an extension of the institution’s pro-globalisation discourse. The report defended free trade and capital flows as means to promote growth and, thus, increase wages and employment opportunities. The main proposal was to allow labour markets –including migration- be flexible, aligned with liberalised product markets. Basic social protections and human capital formation were considered necessary to let individuals adapt. More recently, in a similar tone, the WDR 2013 *Jobs* was again centred on labour market dynamics, now in a post-crash context. In terms of ideas, this report contained the seeds of later WB studies on the future of work in the same decade. Jim Yong Kim, President of the WB Group from 2012 to 2019, stated in the foreword that employment was crucial for development –for poverty reduction, social cohesion and economic growth-, and that “the private sector is the key engine of job creation, accounting for 90 percent of all jobs in the developing world” (World Bank, 2013, pp. xiii–xiv; emphasis added).

The problem, then, was to support companies in employment creation in the ‘changing world of work’, one characterised back then by fast urbanisation, demographic changes, the

⁷⁶ This observation has been confirmed with WB researchers in my interviews. To be sure, officials in this institution regard themselves as non-biased by ideologies;

globalisation of the economy and the connectivity provided by information technologies (World Bank, 2013: 6–7). The policy recommendations were conventional WB ideas. On the demand side of the labour market, the report argued for an “enabling business environment”, meaning that “regulations can increase the cost of doing business, in money or in time needed to comply” (World Bank, 2013: 23–4). On the supply side, active labour market policies were supported, particularly training programmes for jobseekers, job search assistance and wage subsidies (World Bank, 2013: 269). Another central element – key for the WB later studies on the future of jobs- was the notion of *the plateau of labour market regulation*:

The challenge is to set labor policies on a plateau—a range where regulations and institutions can at least partially address labor market imperfections without reducing efficiency. Labor market rules that are too weak or programs that are too modest or non-existent can leave problems of poor information, unequal power, and inadequate risk management untreated. In contrast, rules that are too stringent and programs that are too ambitious can compound market imperfections with institutional failures (World Bank, 2013: 20)

The same idea of the ‘plateau’ can be found in the *Doing Business Reports*, one of the star products of the WB in terms of research. Since 2002 such reports had depicted flexibility and de-regulation as key for an enabling business climate (Clemens and Kremer, 2016; Stein, 2014). The 2018 *Doing Business Report: Reforming to create jobs* included quality of employment as a positive indicator, in dialogue with the ILO. However, it still reproduced the plateau idea:

While reforms toward more flexible labor regulation could increase employment, labor under-regulation can also have negative impacts by, for example, creating an unsafe workplace or undermining worker quality of life... The challenge in developing labor policies is to avoid the extremes of both over- and under-regulation by balancing labor flexibility with worker protection (World Bank, 2018a: 131)

In a nutshell, these reports assumed that the problem of job creation was to be addressed through a ‘balanced’ labour strategy, avoiding making regulations too extensive and counterproductive. There was a significant degree of continuity and consistency in the WB jobs-related publications to that respect. The need to strike a balance would be at the basis of the novel support for flexicurity measures for the ‘new’ world of work in the late 2010s, aiming to find an equilibrium between under- and over-regulation.

The policy window: the WB digitalisation agenda

The WB reports that looked at the future of jobs were elaborated between 2016 and 2020: the World Development Reports from 2016 (*Digital dividends*), 2019 (*The changing nature of work*), and 2020 (*Trading in the age of global value chains*). These publications explicitly referred to a ‘new’ or ‘changing’ world of work, deeply transformed by several megatrends, but they showed a consistent focus on technological change. Such documents will be at the centre of my analysis in the sections below. It seems crucial, however, to take into account previous studies that paved the way for the WB strategy on the ‘changing nature of work’. Before it was set in the organisation’s agenda, WB researchers in the first half of the 2010s had studied two related subjects extensively: jobs markets in the context of the financial crash, on the one hand, and on the other, the irruption of new digital technologies. As in the

OECD case, the approach to the future of work in the WB combined part of the institution's jobs strategies with their agenda on digitalisation.

In the WB, the President, the Board of Governors and the Chief Economist normally define the topic of the WDRs, responding to the tone of the international debates on development. In that sense, they are the crucial policy entrepreneurs that set the agenda in WB studies. In 2015, these actors had recognised that digitalisation had become a central trend in the discussion in policy circles, but mostly centred on advanced economies. They decided then to focus the 2016 WDR on this trend, offering a framework and empirical evidence on the opportunities that the digital revolution could bring for the developing world⁷⁷. The study identified, to be sure, several risks that should be addressed in order to exploit such potential, namely the control that digital companies could exercise over individuals and their behaviour; future increases in income inequalities, and the rise of digital monopolies (World Bank, 2016b). This scenario had to be managed, according to the report, through adequate institutional responses from governments:

Digital technologies have spread rapidly in much of the world. *Digital dividends*—the broader development benefits from using these technologies—have lagged behind. In many instances digital technologies have boosted growth, expanded opportunities, and improved service delivery. Yet their aggregate impact has fallen short and is unevenly distributed... To get the most out of the digital revolution, countries also need to work on the “analog complements” — by strengthening regulations that ensure competition among businesses, by adapting workers' skills to the demands of the new economy, and by ensuring that institutions are accountable (World Bank, 2016b: 2)

The WDR 2016 had, in fact, a strong focus on jobs and the implications of digital technologies for the labour market. It is relevant then to see that the problem of the future of work was significant in the WB agenda already in 2015, the same year when the ILO launched their initiative on this theme (see previous chapter). However, 2019 was the year in which the Bank devoted a whole study on labour, following a trend in international organisations of publishing flagship reports about it that year (Grimshaw, 2020).

The decision of focusing the WDR 2019 expressly on the future of work followed the regular path of policy-making in the Bank. In this case, it was the WB Chief Economist Paul Romer (2016-18) who proposed in 2017 that the ‘changing nature of work’, with an emphasis on new technologies, should be the main topic of the publication, a decision that received support from the WB President and the organisation's management⁷⁸. Romer turned out to be key in the report for two additional reasons. Indirectly, his endogenous growth theory, for which he was going to receive the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2018, had been highly influential in the WB approach to development, as I have mentioned above, with the centrality that it gives to human capital as a productivity factor (see Romer, 1990). In a more direct way, an interviewee held that as the WB Chief Economist, Romer promoted that the making of the WDR 19 should be as ‘democratic’ as possible. This meant that the research team would have to upload draft versions of the report every Friday to the WB website to receive inputs from any external organisation or individual that could be interested in it. Such team was led by two economists:

⁷⁷ Interview with WB researcher in Washington D.C.

⁷⁸ Interview with WB researcher from the WDR team in Washington D.C.

Simeon Djankov –creator of the *Doing Business Report* in the Bank- and Federica Saliola –who had worked in previous WB studies on development economics. The stage had been set for the WB to join in the debate on the future of jobs, making links with other interlocutors.

The WB social agenda: advocating for workers' adaptation in the global economy

The conceptual grounds of the WB approach to the future of work were inevitably linked to organisation's understanding of economic development, and its political agenda of expanding the market economy in the developing world. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the neoliberal viewpoint conventionally associated to the WB in the academic discourse (i.e. Peet & Hartwick, 2015; Prügl, 2017; Stein, 2014) in the last decades was complemented by alternative frameworks in development economics, all of which were part of the concept of inclusive growth. In the WB conception of development, the prominence of the private sector as the most efficient economic actor, was complemented by an emphasis on human capital formation –derived from endogenous growth theory-, and on governance mechanisms would avoid rent extraction and centralism –derived from new institutionalism. When these various elements were combined, we get the formula for development that the WB constantly promoted in its documents and initiatives. The WDR 2016 summarises accurately such formula:

The triple complements—a favorable business climate, strong human capital, and good governance— will sound familiar—and they should because they are the foundation of economic development (World Bank, 2016b: 4)

Beyond the conception of growth and its ideological roots in 'inclusive liberalism' (Cammack, 2003), the Bank consistently elaborated its position on labour market policy *following a single discursive logic*, explicitly inspired by Schumpeter's (1994) notion of creative destruction, same as the ILO's conception of development examined in a previous chapter. When the WB aimed to enter into an international debate on work, its studies presented an external megatrend that acted as a disruptor for the jobs market, causing both creative and destructive effects on it⁷⁹. The paradox that was presented was solved by a series of proposed actions that private and public actors should complete, mainly to 'prepare' or 'adapt' the workforce to a new scenario. Appropriate institutional responses would allow societies to extract the benefits of a global process, while controlling its downsides. In this way, actors would pave the way for its further expansion. Table 12 compares the application of this creative-destruction understanding of labour markets in two key WDRs, one from 1995 focused on globalisation, and the more recent report from 2019 on the future of work and technological change.

⁷⁹ The WDR 2016 on digitalisation presented a narrative deeply inspired by Schumpeter's understanding of capitalist development: "as a result of this process of job creation and destruction, technological change disrupts labor markets and can hurt individuals whose skills are substituted by technology... The speed of these changes appears to be accelerating, intensifying creative destruction and the pace of labour market changes (World Bank, 2016b: 130).

Table 12: The logic of labour market dynamics for the World Bank

Dimension	World Development Report 1995: 'Workers in an integrating world'	World Development Report 2019: 'The changing nature of work'
External process shaping the labour market	Globalisation of the economy	Technological change and digitalisation
Creative dynamics (opportunities)	"International flows of goods, services, capital, and people bring new opportunities for most workers" (p. 4) ... "increased integration between countries, including through migration, can benefit workers in poor and rich countries at the same time. But governments have an important role in helping workers who are adversely affected by changes in trade patterns and capital flows" (iii)	"[Historically] innovation and technological progress have caused disruption, but they have created more prosperity than they have destroyed... Technology is creating opportunities, paving the way for new and altered jobs, increasing productivity, and improving the delivery of public services" (p. vii)
Destructive dynamics (threats)	"For some it feels as though international integration has increased their vulnerability to volatile international conditions; others – especially those living in Sub-Saharan Africa – remain largely disconnected from international market opportunities. And within industrial countries there is a small but vocal minority who fear they will lose from the introduction of new technologies, the growth of international trade, and movements of capital and people across national boundaries (p. 4-5)	"Workers in some sectors benefit handsomely from technological progress, whereas those in others are displaced and have to retool to survive. Platform technologies create huge wealth but place it in the hands of only a few people" (p. 19) "The advent of a jobless economy raises concern because tasks traditionally performed by humans are being—or are at risk of being—taken over by robots, especially those enabled with artificial intelligence" (p. 20)
Solutions to overcome the paradox	"Restricting trade or capital is not an effective way of dealing with this problem – a better strategy for any country is to improve the skills of its people or ease their transition to new jobs, while staying engaged with the world economy" (p. 5)	"Preparing for and adapting to the changing nature of work require a strong social contract. While the precise components of such contracts may vary, it is important that they ensure the appropriate investments in education and social protection" (p. 136) "Creating a skilled workforce for the future of work rests on the growing demand for advanced cognitive skills, sociobehavioral skills, and adaptability" (p. 72)
False solutions from other actors	"Protectionism... is a self-defeating response. Imposing trade or capital restrictions to help those who lose out will only make the domestic economic pie smaller" (p. 58) "Labour policies in many countries have been misguided in favouring those in good jobs at the expense of workers in the rural and informal sectors and the unemployed" (p. iii)	"If public regulations limit innovation, employment is more likely to fall" (29) "The Bismarckian social insurance model... is also increasingly unsuitable for the changing nature of work in which traditional employer-employee relationships are no longer the norm" (113)
Normative goals	"To reverse the long-run trend of widening international inequality between workers... and bring new hope and opportunities to millions currently trapped in poverty" (125)	"Changes in the nature of work, compounded by rising aspirations, make it essential to increase social inclusion. To do so, a social contract should have at its centre equality of opportunity" (14)

Source: Author, based on World Bank (1995, 2019b)

In the 1995 report the main concern were the consequences of trade openness for workers – which were going to a spark in that decade a widespread anti-globalisation movement (Martell, 2017). The Bank aimed to demonstrate the creative side of globalisation and neutralise criticisms, arguing that economic openness could improve the situation of developing countries, reducing poverty levels and creating jobs. The argument in the WDR 2019 was similar, but now applied to the new technologies associated with the fourth industrial revolution. In line with mainstream labour economics (see, for example, Cahuc and Zylberberg, 2004), technology was framed as a factor of creative destruction that both displaced and generated jobs. The problems with the future of work according to the WB – analysed below- could be prevented only if governments and companies were able to channel technological change towards higher productivity and social inclusion.

The problem stream: constructing the future of work at the World Bank

As in the other cases analysed in this research, the future of work was predominantly projected around technological change, though in previous studies (e.g. World Bank, 2013) the Bank's prospects put a much clearer emphasis on other macro-trends: globalisation, aging, climate change, to name some. The main transformations identified in that sense were the augmentation or automation of physical mechanical devices, on the one hand, and the spread of information technologies that assist or even replace office work, on the other (World Bank, 2018b: 3). The consequences of this wave of technological change, hence, were extensive to blue and white-collar jobs alike, changing the nature of physical *and* cognitive tasks:

A defining characteristic of the Fourth Industrial Revolution seems to be that while, previously, technology was increasingly able to perform routine manual and cognitive tasks, in the current digital and computing revolution, machines can also perform some non-routine tasks that had been hitherto reserved to humans (World Bank, 2018c: 2)

The WB consistently highlighted over the past decade the economic benefits that this scenario could spur, not just stressing their 'destructive' potential. The WDR 2016 indicated how digital innovations in production promoted economic development in three ways: by broadening access to information and knowledge; by implementing more efficient processes via automation, and; by creating scale economies through platforms (World Bank, 2016, p. 18). Additionally, in terms of job creation, the WDR 2020 remarked that new technologies can generate opportunities in three indirect ways:

First, the productivity gains in supplier industries can yield steep increases in the demand for labor because of input–output linkages... Second, productivity growth can boost final demand. And, third, adoption of robots may lead to compositional shifts in the structure of the economy and could create jobs by spurring the growth of sectors with high labour share (World Bank, 2020: 151)

Despite these potential benefits, which were mostly associated to automation in this narrative, the WB identified a series of problems that must be addressed from a public policy perspective, in order to align technological development with the broader goal of inclusive growth. The following sections will present such problematic areas.

i) The risks of automation: technological unemployment and skills demand

As I have just affirmed, the trend that gathered most of the Bank's attention among the several innovations that characterise the fourth industrial revolution, was the automation of work. The fact that the WB disregarded other relevant dimensions—e.g. the effect of such innovations on workers' well-being, performance monitoring, employment relations, etc.—, indicated that their conception of this process was less complex than the one depicted by the ILO and part of the academic debate. However, in comparison, the WB was able to generate over time a fairly pioneering approach to the future of work by introducing an international development level of analysis, especially in their WDR 2020 on global value chains, which included a substantial discussion about jobs (World Bank, 2020). Still, their initial concerns – expressed in the WDR 2016 for example- had to do with the implications of automation for national labour markets. In this line, the message that the WB aimed to deliver was that a possible scenario of mass unemployment was highly unlikely, and in developing economies above all:

Two-thirds of all jobs could be susceptible to automation in developing countries in coming decades, from a pure technological standpoint... Not all disruptive technologies are adopted quickly, implemented fully, or yield immediate benefits. Barriers to technology adoption, lower wages, and a higher prevalence of jobs based on manual dexterity in developing countries mean that automation is likely to be slower and less widespread there (World Bank, 2016b: 126)

The unfeasibility of automating production from an economic point of view was highlighted by the WB as an argument against the most pessimistic predictions on this trend (e.g. they criticised Frey & Osborne, 2013). The WDR 2019 on the future of work reaffirmed such position by emphasising the wide variations found in estimates about “the percentage of jobs at risk from automation”, which went from a one-digit number to more than half of jobs (World Bank, 2019b: 22). The directors of such report held in a separate paper that “fears of robot-induced unemployment have dominated the discussion over the future of work. The World Development Report 2019 finds that on balance, such concerns appear to be unfounded” (Djankov and Saliola, 2019: 57).

ii) Changes in the demand for skills

The fact that predictions on automation were overestimated did not mean that this trend would not have any effect on the labour market. On the contrary, the WDR 2019 identified three associated concerns: changes in the demand for skills; jobs polarisation, and the reshoring of production. In relation to the first, the Bank held that automation and the spread of information technologies at work were

reshaping the skills needed for work. The demand for less advanced skills that can be replaced by technology is declining. At the same time, the demand for advanced cognitive skills, sociobehavioral skills, and skill combinations associated with greater adaptability is rising... Since 2001, the share of employment in occupations heavy in nonroutine cognitive and sociobehavioral skills has increased from 19 to 23 percent in emerging economies and from 33 to 41 percent in advanced economies. The payoffs to these skills, as well as to combinations of different skill types, are also increasing in those economies (World Bank, 2019b: 6, 12)

The analytical model followed by WB publications –based on American labour economics (in particular, Acemoglu and Autor, 2011)- argued that routine tasks had a much higher chance to be automated, be they more intensive in cognitive skills or in manual skills (see World Bank, 2016b: 122). This rationale, along with several references to WB enterprise surveys (World Bank, 2019b), led their studies to stress the need to invest in human capital and address the new demand for skills that cannot be automated in principle. The problem for the WB was therefore to generate policies that respond to the *needs of the private sector*, adapting the workforce to their requirements. The question about the adaptability of business models to the new technological scenario was far less relevant in that sense.

iii) Inequalities: polarisation, decreasing labour share and the rise of ‘superstar firms’

Once again reflecting the state of art in mainstream economics, with the emphasis on the uneven effects of technological displacement, the WB listed the increasing polarisation of the jobs market in advanced economies as one of the most problematic trends for the future. Their argument was that technology, same as globalisation, affects specific sections of the workforce, while benefiting some others. In the WDR 2016, it was affirmed that in most developed economies, but also in emerging ones, there was a visible ‘hollowing-out’ effect, by which the share of high- and low-skilled jobs had increased, while the share of middle-skilled occupations was in decline (World Bank, 2016b: 21). In developing countries evidence was more mixed, and while some economies were showing a U-shaped employment growth –such as Malaysia, Turkey or China-, the causes were not necessarily linked to technology (World Bank, 2018c). In a large portion of the developing world, inequality had been on the rise nonetheless, because returns to higher education and ICT skills were also rising, primarily benefiting those with access to them (World Bank, 2016b). The rise in inequalities in advanced economies, for its part, was also linked to skill-biased technological change, with its polarisation effects:

In advanced economies, employment has been growing fastest in high-skill cognitive occupations and low-skill occupations that require dexterity. By contrast, employment has shifted away from middle-skill occupations such as machine operators. This is one of the factors that may translate into rising inequality in advanced economies. Both middle- and low-skill workers could see falling wages the former because of automation; the latter because of increased competition (World Bank, 2019b: 24)

The *falling income labour share* was another related trend that the WB has studied more in detail, arguing, as the quote reveals, that globalisation and technological change may tend to depress wages. The WB denounced this as a problem partly due to their inclusive growth agenda, which embraced equality of opportunity as a key normative goal. Inequality implied that there were also ‘winners’ from such processes, being “high-skilled workers , and richer countries” who can take advantage most from “the skill-biased nature of technological change” (World Bank, 2018b: 2).

Interestingly, the discussion on inequality and its implications for the future of work took a more critical turn in the WDR 2020 on trade. Its argument *identified companies as a main beneficiary of new technologies*, implicitly aligning their position with that of progressive economists (e.g. Stiglitz, 2017). According to the report, “the primary beneficiaries of

automation are the *owners of capital*” (World Bank, 2020: 149; emphasis added). It was an idea that certainly developed over time: the WDR 2016 had shown concerns about the existence of natural monopolies in the internet (World Bank, 2016b), and the WDR 2019 had pointed to the emergence of ‘superstar firms’ in the digital environment and their broad concentration of market power (World Bank, 2019b). Unlike the OECD –I will indicate it below–, such concerns about inequality would not lead to major shifts in their discourse about redistributive policies or the role of the institutions of work, however.

iv) The international dimensions of the future of work: platforms, crowdsourcing and reshoring

I have stated already that the main phenomenon emphasised by the WB reports was automation; on a national level of analysis, its effects were linked to the polarisation of the jobs market. Their studies also reflected on the international implications of new technologies at work. First, the WDR 2019 stated that the global expansion of platforms was “eliminating many of the geographical barriers previously associated with certain tasks”, representing a “remotely distributed community of talent” (World Bank, 2019b: 25). Along the same line, the WDR 2016 had already asseverated that they “increase the pool of talent for firms, especially for smaller enterprises, and provide an opportunity to monetise skills that may not be in sufficient demand in the local economy” (World Bank, 2016b: 110). Platforms would be a temporary solution for labour market frictions, whenever local firms would not find skills or affordable labour, or even when the unemployed would not find other employment alternatives. The problematic reverse of that would be the noticeable concentration of economics gains coming from these platforms, which “create huge wealth but place it in the hands of only a few people” (World Bank, 2019b, p. 19). The lack of protection that workers may have in their functioning was also an issue, but was not relevant for these reports⁸⁰. The Bank, again, presented a paradox, but in this case without proposing a defined strategy to face the downsides of platform labour.

Secondly, from an international viewpoint, the Bank examined the potential shifts in the geography of production due to robotisation – as the ILO (Kucera, 2017) and the OECD (De Backer et al., 2016, 2018) had done in parallel. These organisations had remarked the lack of evidence that supports the reshoring thesis, described in the WDR 2020 as follows:

If tasks previously performed by low-skilled workers in the South (low-wage developing countries) are performed by relatively inexpensive robots in the North (industrial countries), there may be a reversal in North–South trade flows and a greater reliance on domestic production (World Bank, 2020: 147)

Although the WB did not find this trend to be particularly extended, an important study from the institution (Artuc et al., 2019) pioneered in this debate by analysing empirically the repercussions of automation in the United States for the manufacture sector in Mexico. The results estimated that recent robot adoption in the former had reduced exports growth in the

⁸⁰ For example, the WDR 2019 discussion on platforms focused on their benefits for the economy and the possible mechanisms to tax them properly. It remarked, still, that “platform firms often operate in regulatory grey areas” and that “regulation becomes important if platforms provoke a race to the bottom in working conditions” (World Bank, 2019b: 40). However, there was not a more extensive reflection on what such regulations should be, unlike the ILO (Berg et al., 2018; ILO, 2017a) or the OECD (2019b).

latter. However, that effect had been offset by a reduction in exports prices coming from the US, benefiting the Mexican economy as a whole. In other words, in this perspective automation could affect emerging economies indeed, but also benefit them. In this case, as well as in relation to platform work, we see the WB's discourse addressed potential global issues balancing them by positive by-products at the same time. Policies, thus, would become less urgent in that front.

The policy stream: preparing for the future via flexicurity and investing in people

The previous has indicated that the WB framed the future of work primarily in relation to technological change, highlighting several challenges that it poses for labour markets: technological unemployment, skills-biased innovations, increasing inequalities and the appearance of new developments in the geography of production. The reason behind such framing was to define strategies for developing countries to 'prepare' for the future. As it usually does, the Bank generated what Vetterlein (2012) calls 'actionable knowledge', that is, referential statements that make a certain policy path more convincing or adequate than others. The policy solutions suggested by the Bank revealed a pattern of continuity with regards to previous social agendas –poverty reduction, the social protection floor, inclusive growth- but also a substantive degree of innovation. The sections below examines the nature of such move in policy orientations in the WB in the context of the 'changing nature of work'. In a nutshell, the analysis made by the Bank on the future of jobs justified, in their logic, a departure from the de-regulatory agenda on labour markets combined with poverty alleviation measures (Cammack, 2003; O'Brien, 2014a; Vetterlein, 2014), to instead adopt the Nordic 'flexible security' model in social policy. Although this incipient trend had been recognised by scholars (specifically Mahon, 2019), the fact that the *WB understanding of the future of work has justified such shift* has not been discussed yet, and our analysis will prove that their framing and their policy proposals can only be fully understood in relation to each other.

From preventive to active to proactive social policy: preparing for the 'new' world of work

The trajectory of the WB in terms of social and labour policy has followed a certain path that can be reconstructed if we consider key reports on this topic from previous decades (see Table 13). After the 1990s and the formal recognition of the social consequences of structural adjustment programmes, the WB set poverty reduction at the core of its discourse, as the 2001 white paper 'From safety net to springboard' remarked (World Bank, 2001). That framework provided recommendations for governments to deal with population with vulnerability or at risk of poverty, for example, via means-tested transfers and old-age schemes. In terms of labour policy, the Bank supported core labour standards –eradication of child labour, of discrimination and forced labour-, while privileging skills development. A new report in 2012 updated the previous strategy, introducing an inclusiveness element to it by accentuating the importance of activation policies (World Bank, 2012b). The context in this case was the aftermath of the global financial crisis and its later effects on jobs markets. Conditional cash transfers –enthusiastically advocated by the WB in the previous decade (Clemens and Kremer, 2016; Lavinias, 2013) – were proposed as a key measure for activation in working age population and for raising educational attainment in children.

Table 13: Approaches to social and labour policy in the World Bank (2001-2019)

World Bank white papers	'Social Protection Sector Strategy. From safety net to springboard'	'Social Protection and Labor Strategy 2012-2022. Resilience, equity and opportunity'	'Protecting all. Risk sharing for a diverse and diversifying world of work'
Year of publication	2001	2011	2019
Policy goal	Social risk management for poverty reduction	Social risk management for social resilience, poverty reduction and inclusive growth	Protecting people, not jobs, for the changing nature of work
Policy orientation	Preventive	Active	Proactive
Population target	The poor Vulnerable groups	Formal and informal workers Self-employed Vulnerable groups	Progressive universalism
Social and labour policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Core labour standards (ILO) - Old-age income security schemes - Pre- and in-service skills development - Three-pillars pensions system - Needs-based cash transfers - Temporary public employment schemes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active labour market policies, involving private sector - Old-age income security schemes - Conditional cash transfers - Work training - Harmonisation of social policy systems - Temporary public employment schemes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Core minimum guarantee - Liberalising minimum wages, severance pay - Unification of employment contracts - Core labour standards (ILO) - Active labour market policies - Tapered universal basic income
Risks	Micro (life-cycle; health); meso (unemployment); macro (financial or political crisis)	Economics shocks; financial turmoil; epidemics; climate change	Technological unemployment; informality; low welfare coverage

Source: Author, based on Packard et al., 2019; World Bank, 2001, 2012b

The two previous documents (2001 and 2011) had focused on risk management and building resilience for individuals and households. The report 'Protecting all: risk sharing for a diverse and diversifying world of work' (Packard et al., 2019) presented a different narrative, partly because the main disruptive factor were no longer environmental catastrophes, financial collapses or biographical events, but the rapid technological advances related to the fourth industrial revolution. Although this report did not represent the official WB voice –unlike the WDRs-, it was a white paper made by researchers from the institution, and presented an extension of several ideas from the WDR 2019. The key change in this white paper was the passage from an active approach to social policy to a proactive one, based on anticipations on future developments of the economy. In other terms, the risks identified in technological change do not operate on types of individuals or households, but on the economy as a whole, affecting all occupations and income groups. Therefore, the measures the WB stood for in this report had to be *universal* in coverage – there was a need to 'protect all', as the title of the document suggested. The new WB approach favoured 'progressive universalism' and the

decoupling of social protection from employment status, ideas that were already present in the WDR 2019:

A guiding principle for strengthening social assistance is progressive universalism. The aim of this approach is to expand coverage while giving priority to the poorest people. This bottom-up expansion occurs while navigating the fiscal, practical, and political trade-offs that incremental levels of coverage involve. Social assistance should be complemented with insurance that does not fully depend on formal wage employment (World Bank, 2019b: 106)

The *progressive* component was explained by the difficulties that poorer or more unstable economies might have from a fiscal point of view (Packard et al., 2019). The idea, in line with the transitional labour market school (Auer, 2010), was that policies protect transitions and individual workers, not specific jobs or occupations. The goal was then that employers could make shifts in their workforce without limitations, and that at the same time people could have institutional resources to adapt to a context of rapid and constant technological transformations. As *Protecting all* explains, “rather than protect workers *from* change, governments can shift their efforts to protecting them *for* change by supporting transitions and reemployment” (Packard et al., 2019, p. 1; emphasis in original). It represented an ideational shift considering the WB previous perspectives, one that would bring the WB closer to the flexicurity principle – very extended in Europe, but not a main protagonist in the Bank’s tradition of thought. A new element was, without any doubt, the centrality that technology had as a catalyser for such conceptual adjustment.

Flexicurity à la World Bank: minimum universal guarantees under flexible labour conditions

The argument presented by the WB to support its new framework started from the ‘erosion of the social contract’: even though the promise of welfare policies was to standardise and formalise jobs, non-standard employment was actually expanding in advanced economies, and the rates of informality in the developed world persisted (World Bank, 2019b). This scenario led the Bank to declare that, instead of pursuing the enhancement of standardised jobs, it was now necessary to abandon the traditional employment model –of long-term contracts, with strong unions and stable careers- as a normative reference point. Pursuing higher levels of employment formalisation –backed in the WDR 2014 on risk management⁸¹- remained a policy objective, but it did not “have to be synonymous with homogeneity, and certainly not with dependent wage or salaried employment in factories or firms” (Packard et al., 2019: 7). According to one interviewee from the institution who participated in the making of the *Protecting all* strategy, the WB recognised in the past decade that waiting for countries to increase their formalisation rates had taken too long, and hence had become an unrealistic objective given the lack of progress exhibited by developing economies⁸². Despite being supported by the ILO and until recently by the Bank, formalisation was not considered a viable path anymore, and the ‘changing nature of work’ was actually going in the opposite direction.

⁸¹ In that publication, the Bank supported a dual strategy, closer to their conventional de-regulatory perspective: “with sound regulations and incentives for flexibility in place, the government can pursue policies that improve both flexibility and formality” (World Bank, 2014: 184).

⁸² To that regard, the WDR 2019 affirmed: “Informal employment exceeds 70 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa and 60 percent in South Asia. In Latin America, it is more than 50 percent” (World Bank, 2019b: 94).

The model chosen by the WB in this setting was the one centred on flexible security (*flexicurity*). In the face of abrupt technological disruptions,

in the transition period, policies are needed to facilitate labour market flexibility and mobility, introduce and strengthen safety nets and social protection, and improve education and training (World Bank, 2018c, p. 1)

Interestingly, the Bank's novel version of flexicurity was different from the European 'original' type. In the last decade, WB publications had expressed support about the Danish case (see World Bank, 2011, 2014). Since the 1990s, as an example of a resilient setup to manage crises in the labour market, Denmark's flexicurity model had succeeded in combining three elements: a "low set of regulations on hiring and firing"; "generous income protection in case of unemployment", and; "an activating, tripartite organised labour market approach" (Tros and Wilthagen, 2012: 127). An interview from the Bank affirmed that in the future of work agenda, the WB embraced the Danish model not because they expected developing countries to become Denmark. Instead, the WB captured the premise of their model: flexibility must be complemented by measures that re-insert individuals in case of dismissal and protect groups from technology-related socioeconomic risks. The WB version promoted flexibility, but not income protection for the unemployed or tripartite industrial relations, aspects that were relevant in the Danish case.

The idea was that governments should *protect all* citizens, regardless of their employment status, as we have mentioned before, which would involve providing a universal protection floor and making labour market institutions more flexible (World Bank, 2019b). The *Protecting all* white paper indicated in a more technical tone alternatives that could go in that direction. First, the establishment of a 'core minimum guarantee' with a progressively universal coverage, independent from employment condition or individual contributions. It consisted in a publicly financed minimum aimed "to prevent poverty and further impoverishment of people who are already poor", assuming that in many countries "the current core minimum is insufficient" (Packard et al., 2019, p. 92, 94). With respect to the labour market, such guarantee would include intermediation services and skills development programmes for the workforce, the enforcement of core labour standards and increasing workers' voice" (Packard et al., 2019, p. 180-1).

What seemed novel in such formulation was the fact that these elements were considered a *guarantee* – I have described in the previous chapter that in the ILO the idea of a 'universal labour guarantee' was highly resisted by the employers and consequently eliminated from their Centenary Declaration. In the case of the Bank, the mentioned white paper understood minimum labour standards and activation measures as a requisite to face the future of work, also in complement with some kind of universal income assistance. The document rejected 'guaranteed minimum income' programmes with means-tested criteria due to their "higher risk of undercoverage of poor people and significant work disincentives"; if that was a "minimal-minimum model", the alternative of a universal basic income (UBI) was the "maximal-minimum option when set generously" (Packard et al., 2019: 93). The proposal was to move "toward a more substantial minimum", but the authors expressed concerns about

the regressive potential and the fiscal implications of a UBI⁸³. In turn, the paper supported the idea of a ‘tapered’ version of such policy:

All else being equal, tapering the guaranteed minimum poverty-prevention benefit lowers its fiscal costs and increases its impact on poverty... Tapering refers to decreasing people’s benefits as their observable income or consumption increases, whether through a progressive tax system or with resort to other administrative means of assessing households’ income or wealth. Tapering provides a more fiscally viable way to offer universal coverage: a TUBI (Packard et al., 2019: 115)

It would be rushed to affirm that the WB left behind its adherence to free markets, nevertheless. The core minimum guarantee would be, in that sense, accompanied by substantial changes to labour regulation, aiming to normalise flexibility. The first referred to social dialogue: given that standard employment was receding in numbers, the document proposed a ‘pentapartite’ model of social dialogue and industrial relations. This model would include voices from non-standard workers –temporary or outsourced-, and the self-employed, to the traditional tripartite institutions joined by employers, employees and governments (Packard et al., 2019: 159–161). This would stand, as it is evident, against the ILO’s core principles and the international union movement. Secondly, as an interviewee from the WB put it, current measures for employment and income protection should be made more adaptable. For example, minimum wages: they “can impose distortions and costs that become less justifiable if social protections outside of the work contract are strengthened” (Packard et al., 2019, pp. 182), meaning that they should not be considered a replacement for income assistance. The same was argued about severance pay, which in developing economies was imposing a big financial burden on companies, making labour harder to reallocate according to the report. Or about labour contracts: as the world of work was becoming more complex, governments should avoid regulating the types of contracts and focus instead on creating a base of standards and protections that apply to *all* contracts (Packard et al., 2019, p. 157). Altogether, these measures would bring a new face to labour market policy, giving companies and individuals tools to adapt to an increasingly changing environment.

The Human Capital Project: ‘investing in people’ for the future of jobs

In parallel to the reformulation and reassessment of their social policy framework, the WB started an actual programme derived from the WDR 2019 on the future of work, focused on nurturing human capital in developing countries. Human capital had been at the centre of the Bank development discourse for decades. The WDR 1990 on poverty had suggested that although this dimension was key for poverty reduction, in poorer countries investment in education, children’s nutrition and health services was “too little” (World Bank, 1990: 79). According to Cammack, the role of the state in that approach was to make labour –“the poor’s most abundant asset”- more productive (2003: 193). More recent WB works on human capital put a stronger emphasis on skills. In the post-financial crisis context, the WB launched the

⁸³ Another WB volume dealt extensively about the pros and cons of a UBI programme (Gentilini et al., 2020). The book valued the redistributive possibilities that a UBI would entail, but was cautious about the chance that benefits towards the poor are decreased or less generous due costs of the UBI. In that sense, it recommended its application but under certain conditions.

Skills Toward Employment and Productivity (STEP) framework, stressing the relevance of technical, cognitive and social skills for economic growth, while arguing that businesses were falling short in skilled workers (World Bank, 2010). The two notions derived from these previous accounts –investing in people and adapting skills to companies’ needs- were definitely present in the WB discourse on the future of work. The idea –central in the WDR 2019- that, in order to allow businesses to incorporate technological innovations, they needed a life-long learning workforce, was also part of previous studies (e.g. World Bank, 2014).

The WB went a step further this time and created an international initiative on the topic. The *Human Capital Project (HCP)*, started in 2018, was the main policy output taken from their studies on the future of jobs: technology adoption was going to be possible only if the workforce was endowed with appropriate skills and material conditions. The Project was built with the objective of supporting “countries through a customised package of data, policies, and interventions to accelerate human development outcomes” (World Bank, 2018d). Such support was translated into two main outcomes: the design of the *Human Capital Index*, on the one hand, and the creation of a knowledge network for policy-makers. The index measured the human capital (education and health conditions) of the next generation of a country, taking schooling levels and survival chances of children as its main proxies. The resulting number ranged from 0 to 1, indicating the rate of productivity that the average future worker would lose because of their sub-optimal human capital provision⁸⁴ (World Bank, 2018d: 3ff.). Jim Yong Kim, former WB President, stated that the index was expected to become an international metric for benchmarking and monitoring – resembling the impact of another metric, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) developed by the OECD (Kim, 2018). Lastly, the Project –joined by 63 countries in its first year of operation- organised regional fora to bring together leaders and raise awareness about the relevance of ‘investing in people’, as well as coordinated networks of ‘focal persons’ to discuss national experiences (World Bank, 2019a).

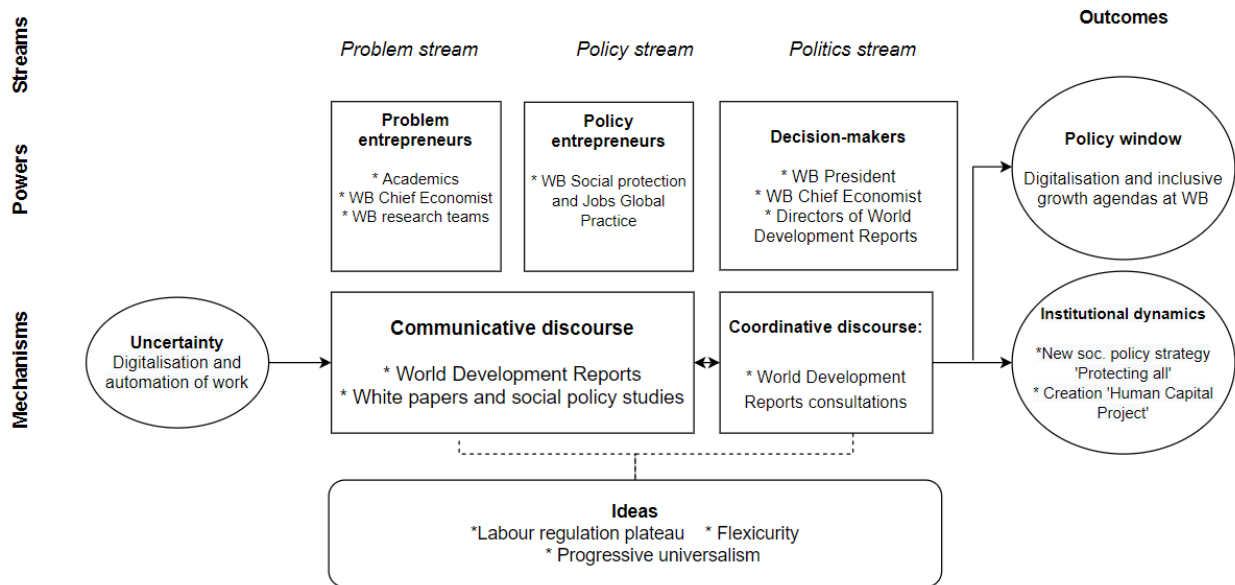
Ideational change at the WB: streams and institutional dynamics

I can summarise the analysis of the future of work agenda at the WB taking my framework on multiple streams and institutional dynamics as a basis (Figure 8). The mechanism that initially pushed policy-makers at the Bank to elaborate studies and statements on this topic was the uncertainty associated to the digitalisation of the economy, and more precisely the automation of production. Debates in development and labour economics were pointing at the same time to the possible effects of robotisation on the labour market, and consequently the WB Chief Economist along with the WB Board of Directors decided to focus the institution’s research agenda on these issues. The World Development Report team, as well as the Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice, directed their attention to the ‘changing world of work’ and the challenges posed by digitalisation, taking position in a series of flagship reports. The making of the key publication in the WB on the future of work –the WDR 2019- was made in consultation with several external stakeholders, though it was designed by a group of economists and social scientists, building on concepts, data and insights from

⁸⁴ For example, “a score of 0.70 signals that the productivity as a future worker for a child born today is 30 percent below what could have been achieved with complete education and full health” (World Bank, 2018d, p. 4).

previous WDRs. The policy approach that resulted as an outcome of this agenda –the ‘Protecting all’ strategy- was the natural consequence of the WB problem-definition, and therefore did not respond to clear political interests in the institution. Hence, the WB ideational shift supported a series of new measures in social and labour policy, promoting a flexicurity model that, despite its European origins, should be then expanded to the Global South to prepare countries for the changing nature of work.

Figure 8: The future of work and the WB: streams and institutional dynamics



Source: Author

c. The future of work agenda in the OECD

In the 2010s, the OECD experienced significant ideational shifts in terms of their jobs strategies and social policy frameworks. The direction of such changes was similar to the WB trajectory: these institutions decisively abandoned the paradigm they had supported in previous decades, i.e. a neoliberal approach to social issues and labour market regulations. Whereas in the Bank this process had been associated to the evolution of development economics and the emergence of inclusive growth as a dominant perspective in the field, ideational change at the OECD was triggered by a broader institutional commitment to address economic inequalities in member countries. Under the assumption that inequality had spurred the right-wing populist wave in world politics and its attacks on multilateralism, OECD decision-makers started showing a serious interest for inclusiveness, social dialogue and cohesion in the mid-2010s (Mahon, 2013; OECD, 2014a). A natural implication of this would be to remake their policy approach to social and labour market policy, and the juncture that presented that possibility, in my perspective, was precisely the future of work agenda at the OECD (2016-2020). Predictions about a world of work with more inequities and less economic opportunities for workers in OECD reports pushed policy-makers in the organisation to suggest measures that were completely out of the OECD’s repertoire: focusing on jobs quality, on expanding collective bargaining and categorically opposing to a de-regulatory approach to the future of work and new technologies.

My analysis, inspired by the theoretical framework from chapter 1, studies this institutional change by looking at the discourse that took place at the OECD in the context of this international agenda (Figure 9). In terms of communicating the institution’s position on the future of work, such discourse was expressed in several documents –most crucially, the Jobs Strategy of 2018 and the Employment Outlooks at the end of the decade. In relation to the coordinative instances where decisions were made, I have highlighted the role of the OECD Ministerial Meetings in setting the organisation’s social policy agenda, as well as dialogues between policy-makers and social partners. My reading of the future of work agenda at the OECD is that the politics stream was relevant for pushing the Economics Department and the Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (DELSA) to elaborate a new OECD Jobs Strategy for a ‘changing world of work’, published in 2018. Governments suggested the elaboration of such strategy, recognising the pressure they had to keep up with the fourth industrial revolution, and trade unions and business at OECD were also important in giving a balanced perspective to such strategy. Despite the role of these actors’ interests, the contents and recommendations of the strategy, as well of the diverse reports made by the organisation, were primarily chosen by policy-makers and researchers. Thus, the problem and policy streams were not determined by the politics of the OECD, but responded to a broader institutional reorientation in terms of ideas.

Figure 9: The future of work agenda at the OECD in the 2010s

Coordinative discourse		Labour and Employment Ministerial Meeting: support for remaking OECD Jobs Strategy	Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee's (ELSAC) 130th session; launch of 'Going digital' project	Social Policy Ministerial Meeting: promoting flexicurity approach	Start of OECD 'AI strategy' and elaboration of new OECD Skills Strategy: 'Skills to shape a better future'
Communicative discourse	Publication of OECD Framework for Inclusive Growth	OECD study on risks of automation		Launch of the new OECD Jobs Strategy: 'Good jobs for all in a changing world of work'	Publication of OECD Employment Outlook 'The future of work', and other related studies
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
					2019

Source: Author

Setting the agenda at the OECD: the need for a new approach to social and labour policy

The trajectory of this agenda has to start with the fact that for the OECD the future of jobs was fundamentally linked to technological change. Previous to the beginning of the agenda, the OECD unit working on the information economy had published reports on this

phenomenon, and eventually elaborated documents about the impact of digital innovations on work (OECD, 2014b). Prior to 2016, new technologies were in a secondary place in the OECD discourse on jobs, however, given the impact generated by the Global Recession on employment in their member countries. In the first half of the decade, the flagship OECD reports on this theme –the Employment Outlook–, primarily revolved around the consequences of the crisis and policy options to reanimate jobs markets⁸⁵. The approach followed by the organisation during the crisis as far as labour policy was concerned, combined a promotion of activation measures with temporary social protection mechanisms. Led by the Economics Department, the OECD aimed to bring things back to their previous state instead of creating a new normal (McBride and Merolli, 2013).

In the future of work agenda, in contrast, the Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (DELSA) was the policy entrepreneur that steered the institution’s position about the new technological scenario. The complex relationship between the Economics Department – mandated by Finance Ministers- and DELSA –mandated by Labour and Social Policy Ministers- has been crucial to determine previous OECD jobs strategies and agendas (Mahon, 2011). I will examine this relationship below. For now, concerning the agenda-setting process, it is key to consider that beyond the secretariat’s dynamics and outputs, the main proponents of new directions are often the OECD member states. The institution has relative autonomy in its governance mechanisms (Martens and Jakobi, 2010) –the Council sets strategic directions; the secretariat creates and assess policy ideas-, and in this agenda governments effectively stressed the need to take the future of work seriously in the institution⁸⁶. While governments had discussed in previous Labour Ministerial Meetings⁸⁷ about activation and inclusion (2003) and the effects of the subprime crisis (2009), in the 2016 Meeting (‘Building More Resilient and Inclusive Labour Markets’) ministers urged the OECD to reconsider their approach to labour market policy in the face of a coming industrial transformation (OECD, 2016).

The secretariat expected such a call, and was already planning to remake their policy framework in light of the growing concerns about technological change in international debates⁸⁸. The main aim of the event for DELSA was precisely to find a consensus with governments to rebuild the standing OECD Jobs Strategy. Last redesigned in 2006 (see OECD, 2006), the strategy had grown outdated after the financial crisis, the launch of the Inclusive Growth Initiative and the recent trends in the world of work. Before the 2016 meeting, Director of DELSA Stefano Scarpetta indicated the importance of the coming ‘digital revolution’, affirming:

⁸⁵ Published yearly since 1989, all the Employment Outlook reports can be found on: <http://www.oecd.org/els/employmentoutlook-previouseditions.htm>

⁸⁶ Interview with OECD researcher in Paris.

⁸⁷ Ministerial Meetings in the OECD gather government representatives from all kind of areas, representing the variety of issues covered by the institution’s work, and take place with different time intervals according to each area. In the ones that are of interest for this research, in the past decades the Labour Ministers met in 2003, 2009 and 2016. The Social Policy Ministers, on their part, met in 2005, 2011 and 2018. Interestingly, in both areas the first time the call was focused on activation and inclusion; in the second meeting the financial crisis was the primary theme, and in the third the future of technology and the new world of work were at the focus. Details about these and other high-level events in the OECD can be viewed on: <http://search.oecd.org/newsroom/oecdforumsministerialandhigh-levelmeetings.htm>

⁸⁸ Interview with OECD researcher from DELSA in Paris, who led the creation of the 2018 Jobs Strategy.

the OECD expects a strong mandate from ministers to develop a new and extended OECD Jobs Strategy in which such factors as ageing, globalisation and migration, digitisation, and new work practices will be key. The new Jobs Strategy will not only draw the lessons from the recent crisis, but also look forward at how policy and institutions should evolve to allow workers to grasp the opportunities of the structural changes ahead, while receiving needed protection and support. It will be an important chance for all stakeholders to forge a renewed social dialogue and ensure that, as with previous employment revolutions, the era now unfolding also yields more and better jobs (Scarpetta, 2016)

In the meeting, Labour Ministers from OECD countries agreed to move on from the consequences of the crisis and look at the future of jobs. The basic reasons for this was, first, the prominence that technology was gaining in the public debate, and perhaps more importantly, the fact that governments did not want their countries to be caught by surprise by new disruptive events or trends⁸⁹. The Ministerial Statement issued by the end of the event declared:

we agree that grasping the opportunities while addressing the challenges of rapid technological change requires a comprehensive strategy involving a whole-of-government approach as well as a close collaboration with social partners and relevant stakeholders (OECD, 2016: 5)

With the mandate of governments, hereafter, the OECD secretariat started a redesign of their approach to labour policy. It is worth examining in more detail the significance of the Jobs Strategy in their previous versions, as it can inform the analysis about the recent trajectory experienced by the organisation in terms of policy frameworks and proposals.

The politics stream: the new Jobs Strategy (2018) and the role of the social partners

The trajectory of the OECD Jobs Strategies

The OECD, since the 1990s, has elaborated successive plans for labour reforms in a very compressed set of recommendations. In comparison to other global actors, perhaps an analogue could be the ILO Declarations, which often present a distilled institutional message on a given international juncture. The OECD Jobs Strategies are packages of policy ideas backed by a more extensive study on recent employment trends in member countries, meant to address common problems by following certain 'models' in labour market policy. Once published, they are used by OECD researchers to assess countries' performance in reports such as the OECD Economic Survey or the Employment Outlook. The historical evolution of the mentioned strategies has gone from a neoliberal de-regulation agenda in the 1990s, to a more social democratic stance in the late 2010s. The first strategy was presented in the 1994 Jobs Study (OECD, 1994) under the premise that high unemployment in OECD economies had to be addressed. It recommended increasing flexibility in work arrangements, eliminating barriers for companies to expand and setting wages according to market prices. It also supported training and skills development, as well as structural reforms to social policies that could limit the private sector. The benchmark was explicitly the United States labour market and its flexibility mechanisms, arguing that its better employment rates made it a role model for the other countries (McBride et al., 2008).

⁸⁹ Interview with OECD researcher from DELSA in Paris.

The first strategy failed to influence member countries and reorient their welfare policies towards the one-size-fits-all, supply-side perspective defended by the institution, which had 'naming-and-shaming- as its only mechanism of policy transfer (Armingeon, 2004). Still, it inspired other international actors, most noticeably the European Employment Strategy of 1998 (Dostal, 2004b). In any case, the strategy received significant criticisms from labour scholars, arguing that 'liberal' countries of the OECD were outperformed by Nordic economies when it came to labour market indicators (for a review of such responses, McBride et al., 2007). Mounting evidence and a renewed interest in the OECD on inclusion –activating the inactive-, led the 2003 meeting of Labour Ministers to propose a reassessment of the 1994 Jobs Strategy. The DELSA –less influenced by the free-market oriented Economics Department this time- developed the 2006 Jobs Strategy in consequence. The two main features of this plan were that the OECD discourse got closer to what Mahon (2011) calls 'inclusive liberalism', introducing new elements to their framework to assess labour market performance, such as the promotion of family-friendly arrangements or job-search assistance programs (OECD, 2006). Instead of defending a single model for policy-makers –the Anglo-Saxon liberal path-, the new strategy argued that both the neo-liberal and the Nordic models could deliver efficient employment results.

I have mentioned above that the Great Recession centred most of the OECD's attention in the following years, a period in which the 2006 Jobs Strategy, with its emphasis on activation, was a relevant source in assessing the employment situation of countries. However, as I explained, it was going to be reassessed once again from 2016. Governments had demanded to the General Secretariat a new plan in the face of 'rapid technological change'. Two additional factors related to the political stream of the OECD should be highlighted before analysing the contents of the new approach. The first is the state of international politics and the place of the OECD in it. In the second half of the 2010s, the institution led by Angel Gurría had aimed to represent the values of liberalism in the international arena, put under pressure by continuous attacks on multilateralism and the imaginary that the OECD itself incarnate – achieving inclusive growth in a globalised market economy. In this context, the Jobs Strategy represented a chance to strengthen the mandate of the institution by addressing more explicitly the problem of inequality and the breakage of the social contract, situation that had worsened after the financial crisis (McBride and Watson, 2019). In a high-level forum to discuss the new strategy with governments and social partners, OECD Director-General Gurría expressed the previous:

ten years on, the context has radically changed. Since 2007, we have been experiencing the worst financial and economic crisis since the Great Depression. While the jobs gap has finally closed in most OECD countries, it remains large in some... And, at the same time, our economies are undergoing a process of profound structural transformation. Rapid technological change – including through increased digitalization and automation – and the continued expansion of global value chains are providing new opportunities for workers. However, they are also bringing disruption... We are developing a new Jobs Strategy adapted to the future of work (Gurría, 2017)

Secondly, the internal politics of the OECD should be taken into account, especially considering the history of contrasts that has characterised the two units in charge of its labour policy: the Economics Department and DELSA (see Jacobsson and Noaksson, 2010; Mahon,

2011). In the case of the Jobs Strategy of 2018, the Director-General commissioned DELSA to design the strategy, but collaboration with the Economics Department shaped the making of the new approach. Following their conventional positions, the Economics team and governments wanted adaptability, flexibility and growth to play an important part in the recommendations, while DELSA's priority was to stress good quality jobs and well-being. Both were covered by the 2018 Strategy (OECD, 2018a). The differences between the two departments arguably became smaller over time due to the inclusive growth agenda, and because of a renovated consensus in economics linked to that conception of development⁹⁰. Topics such as job quality or collective bargaining had been overlooked by the economics literature until recent years (OECD, 2019g), but the renewal of interest in the field allowed them to approach these problems in the new strategy.

Making the Jobs Strategy of 2018: 'Good jobs for all in a changing world of work'

In December 2018, the new Strategy was launched, in the second high-level policy forum organised around the document. The event⁹¹ was joined by the OECD Directorate, Ministers of Labour and Finance, the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) and Business at OECD (BIAC), among other stakeholders. The flagship report of the strategy -'Good jobs for all in a changing world of work' (OECD, 2018a)- included a large amount of evidence and conceptual reflections on the new approach. It represented a substantive piece of research, touching upon a variety of labour-related issues. Table 14 below offers a general representation of the three OECD strategies and their recommendations.

⁹⁰ Economists lead both the Economics Department and DELSA.

⁹¹ Details can be found on: <https://www.oecd.org/employment/jobs-strategy/launch-events-2018/>

Table 14: Comparison of OECD Jobs Strategies (1994-2018)

Jobs Strategy	1994	2006	2018
Title of the document	The OECD jobs study	Boosting jobs and incomes	Good jobs for all in a changing world of work
Problem addressed	High unemployment	Low labour market participation	Rapid technological change Winner-takes-most economy
Main focus	Adaptation Quantity of jobs	Policy coherence Inclusiveness	Quantity and quality of jobs Inclusiveness
Policy recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Non-inflationary growth - Fiscal consolidation - Working time flexibility - Reassessing minimum wages - Loosening restrictions on dismissals - From passive to active measures - Limit disincentive effects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reducing too-strict legislation - Working time flexibility - Family-friendly arrangements - Facilitating hiring and firing - Decentralisation of collective bargaining - Moderate statutory minimum wage - Lifelong learning schemes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Price stability and fiscal sustainability - Counter-cyclical policies - Promoting job quality creation - Predictable dismissal costs - Working time flexibility - Moderate statutory minimum wage - Lifelong learning schemes - Promoting formalisation - Balancing protection and activation - Inclusive collective bargaining - Anticipating change with stakeholders
Models supported	Liberal	Liberal/Flexicurity	Does not specify

Source: Author, based on OECD (1994, 2006, 2018a)

While the 1994 Study had mainly a quantitative understanding of the jobs market, promoting liberalisation and flexibilisation, the 2006 Strategy added labour market participation and social protection as key aspects to consider. The 2018 version, building on the previous, presented three pillars to assess labour market performance, each of which was considered essential to promote inclusive growth (OECD, 2018, Chapter 3). The addition of jobs quality to the equation (therefore the title of the report) was the main highlight. According to the strategy, the indicators of each pillar were to be compared across OECD countries, evaluating their performance in relation to their peers:

a. *More and better jobs*: referred to the quantity and quality of jobs. The quantitative dimension was measured by employment and unemployment rates, incorporating labour underutilisation. The qualitative aspect considered earnings quality, labour market insecurity, and quality of work environment.

b. *Labour market inclusiveness*: involved “distribution of opportunities and outcomes across individuals” (OECD, 2018, p. 47). In terms of indicators, it was estimated by the poverty rates, gender income gap and the employment gap for disadvantaged workers.

c. *Resilience and adaptability*: the capacity of labour markets and institutions to resist to economic shocks. Resilience was measured by the unemployment decline when the gross

domestic product decreases, whereas adaptability considered labour productivity growth and the wage-productivity link; the distribution of skills in adults and youths, and; the rate of non-standard workers.

The question of jobs quality was linked in the report to a rather pessimistic understanding of the current distribution of gains in the OECD economies. The decoupling of the productivity-wages relationship; market concentration and the rise of digital ‘superstar firms’; the declining income labour share, all of these aspects were part of the ‘winner-takes-most’ dynamics that characterised such countries according to the secretariat’s diagnosis. The polarisation of jobs and the threats posed by new technologies were part of the analysis too (see OECD, 2018, Chapter 2 and 11).

The OECD social partners: the role of TUAC and BIAC in the new strategy

A key dimension that purportedly I have left aside in the analysis so far is the involvement of the OECD social partners in the mentioned initiatives. Since 1962, a year after the creation of the OECD, the TUAC and the BIAC gained a consultative role in the institution, certainly resembling the ILO tripartite principles in light of the Keynesian class compromise, but in this case without decision-making faculties (Woodward, 2008). Both associations give voice to a large variety of actors –TUAC⁹² has over 66 million members from 59 unions in 31 OECD members, while BIAC⁹³ represents more than 7 million companies of different industries and sizes. Until the 2000s their positions were rather clear: as a locus for international class conflict, they represented opposite views on social and labour policy, being BIAC a pro-market agent advocating for greater flexibility and skills development, and TUAC a more defensive actor, aiming to retain social protection measures inherited from the pre-neoliberal period (Farnsworth, 2005). The literature on them has remained silent in the last decade, which explains the relevance of bringing them into the picture in the study of the future of work agenda. First, in 2017 both labour and business were presented with the framework developed by the OECD secretariat and were consulted about it – particularly in the space that joins these three counterparts, the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee (ELSAC), in its 130th session (OECD, 2017).

Trade unions at the OECD had expressed in 2017 that they expected the Strategy to offer “a better balance between flexibility, stability and security” (TUAC, 2017). The focus, according to them, should not only be on the future of ‘work’, but also on the ‘future of the firm’: how to govern companies adequately, allowing them to create wealth and, at the same time, improve workers’ capacities and well-being. The key message, further developed in another statement, was that business models should adapt to existing regulations “and not the other

⁹² Apart from collaborating in OECD-sponsored projects, TUAC plays a broader part in global labour governance. As explained in a corporate brochure from the organisation, “TUAC cooperates with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), with which it co-ordinates trade union inputs to the G20 and G7 processes, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS). On sector specific issues, TUAC works with the Global Union Federations (GUFs) and is a member of the Council of Global Unions” (TUAC, 2018, p. 2).

⁹³ BIAC also engages with key actors in global governance to advance their ideas and interests. For example, they hold annual consultations with ambassadors in the OECD; participate in ministerial meetings, and in B20 and G20 high-level events. BIAC often collaborates with other international business associations such as the ICC or the IOE (BIAC, 2020).

way around” (TUAC, 2018a, p. 1). Instead of leaving behind labour standards, TUAC advanced an argument against what business associations and agencies such as the WB (2019b) had suggested: that, since work and employment were in transformation, national institutions should let companies be adaptable for technological change. In other words:

A de-regulation logic must be opposed, such as the “Uber scenario”: first breaking the rules to gain market power, then lobbying for eliminating the rules” (TUAC, 2018a, p. 1)

With that agenda in mind, unions at OECD participated in the making of the new Strategy from a consultative perspective, giving inputs but not altering the document itself given their mandate in the institution. Their reception of the final version was mixed: first, they recognised the effort made from the OECD to strike a balance between flexibility and job stability, and the emphasis put on inequality and job quality⁹⁴ (TUAC, 2018a). However, other areas were considered to reproduce the ‘old flexibility narrative’: for instance, support for minimum wages and sector-level collective bargaining was conditioned to several limitations (Janssen, 2019). TUAC arguably expected a more determinate positioning, since at some points the dualities that shaped the OECD way of thinking were ambiguous – for example, according to TUAC, non-standard employment was both condemned and shown as ‘desirable’ insofar it promoted labour market participation (TUAC, 2018a)

Business at OECD, on its part, presented the opposite narrative on the future of work. David Barnes, Vice-Chair at BIAC, declared in March 2018 that “jobs very much depend on encouraging innovation and investment”, and that “innovation policies and human capital (including skills and education) are the top structural reform priorities for business” (Barnes, 2018, p. 1-2). With an argument that echoed the WB position in this debate, Barnes held:

We must not regulate against change. Without the growth and productivity of new technology we simply won’t create enough new jobs and fully realize the benefits for society. We should protect the worker, and not the job or the past (Barnes, 2018: 3)

Avoiding over-regulation, preparing the workforce and promoting entrepreneurship were the main aspects of the BIAC discourse. With respect to the 2018 Jobs Strategy, BIAC welcomed its commitment to job creation, though they did not take position on the addition of job quality and a deeper concept of inclusiveness in the framework. In their statement for the launch of the mentioned Strategy, in December 2018, Business at OECD (2018) stressed elements that were not the main focus in it, advocating for ideas that had been somehow excluded from its aims: a strong defense of lifelong learning programmes; of social protection measures that cover “all forms of work”; a loose support of social dialogue “in helping navigate the change” (BIAC, 2018, p. 2-3). The BIAC argument for leaving behind the distinction between ‘standard’ and ‘non-standard’ employment was naturally at odds with the TUAC position described above, although both parties had some consensus about the importance of skills development and adaptability⁹⁵. The fundamental fact in terms of OECD governance was that, despite their differences, the social partners were not supposed to find an agreement or bring their positions closer to

⁹⁴ The impression in DELSA was, nonetheless, that unions had received the framework in a largely positive fashion, as per one interview for this study.

⁹⁵ Interview with OECD official in Paris.

each other. The partners were in open conflict, but since they could not really make decisions on the OECD approach or agenda, this confrontation did not have the political implications that it would have, for example, in the ILO and its tripartite structure.

The problem stream: the future of work for the OECD

The perspective of the OECD on the changing world of work was developed in parallel to the aforementioned 2018 Jobs Strategy, expressed in research papers and publications from other initiatives as well. The strategy had provided a framework to track labour market performance, certainly offering a deep analysis of trends to that regard, but other documents were as central as the previous in terms of framing. For instance, the OECD Employment Outlook 2019 ‘The future of work’ positioned the institution’s approach in the international debate. Many other studies made from 2016 to 2020 by the Economics Department and DELSA offered additional arguments in terms of evidence and concepts, which I will study in the following sections. At the same time, it is relevant to take into account the *Going Digital* report from 2019, the result of an organisation-wide initiative on the structural transformation of the economy due to digitalisation (OECD, 2019d). The body of research produced by the institution on technological change and jobs was extensive, more than in any other international agency. Regardless, the ideas put forward by such publications can be organised following the framework from the Jobs Strategy of 2018, thus distinguishing between arguments on job quantity, quality, and inclusiveness.

i) Job quantity: digitalisation and the automation of work

The future landscape depicted by the OECD had the ‘digital transformation’ at its core: the societal consequences of the digitisation of processes, now led by machines (OECD, 2019a). Innovations associated to it came from the ‘data revolution’ and investments in intangible capital, like software or data processing. The OECD narrative was not very different from the mainstream perspectives on these transformations: the idea that digitalisation offered a productivity boost applicable to a wide range of activities, lowering production costs of intangible goods and services, easing access to knowledge and information, and changing the organisation of economic activities through prediction mechanisms (OECD, 2018b). In terms of the labour market, the digital transformation was understood to have a ‘creative destruction’ potential, given the changes in occupations and jobs demand it could create – I will come back to this conception, shared with the ILO and the WB, in the next chapter. It was maintained that this process had contributed decisively to job creation in member countries – in OECD economies “highly digital-intensive sectors contributed 42 per cent or 16 million jobs” to the total job gains between 2006 and 2016 (OECD, 2019d: 87). In combination with the potential gains from higher productivity, the expansion of industries and the creation of new markets could boost employment creation.

At the same time, the destructive component of technology was being linked in OECD studies to automation. The role of the OECD in this international debate was crucial. The initial concerns about the number of jobs at risk of being automated away –taking predictions from Frey and Osborne (2013) about a 47 per cent only in the United States- were addressed by an important DELSA study (Arntz et al., 2016) that proposed a different model to measure such risk, focused on tasks and not occupations. Utilizing data from the OECD Survey of Adult Skills,

their publications affirmed that only 14 per cent of jobs in OECD economies presented a high risk of automation, while a 32 per cent could suffer substantive changes in terms of tasks (Nedelkoska and Quintini, 2018). Although technology did not seem to have a negative impact on job quantity, the need for adaptation and promoting new skills sets with more digital and creative contents was a key part of OECD narrative (OECD, 2019h).

ii) Inclusiveness: polarisation, inequality and labour market monopsony

The inclusiveness dimension of the future of work was interpreted in OECD studies in relation to two trends: the polarisation of the jobs structure, and labour market monopsony. The emphasis put in the latter aspect distanced the OECD framing from the WWB's, less concerned about distributive issues. To deal with these aspects, the reports delineated a scenario where workers had seen their conditions and wages affected in recent decades. Sharing the diagnosis made by labour economists in the past decade (Autor, 2015; Goos, 2013), the 2017 Employment Outlook affirmed that routine-biased technological change was reducing the share of middle-skilled jobs, which had declined for the 1995-2015 period in every industry (OECD, 2017c). The interaction between de-industrialisation and new technologies was at the basis of this trend. The 2017 Employment Outlook also suggested that there was a positive correlation between employment protection legislation and higher polarisation, hypothesizing that protections "induce firms to use technology to replace workers" (OECD, 2017b, p. 94). This supply-side argument that the 2018 Jobs Strategy dropped, nevertheless, giving equity and the institutions of work a more predominant role. In fact, leaving that perspective behind, the 2019 Employment Outlook reinterpreted the polarisation trend focusing on its effects for workers' income disparities. The conclusions were that, although middle-skilled employment was decreasing, middle-paid jobs were not (OECD, 2019b, p. 106). The larger share of high-skilled occupations had not derived in more high-paid employment, but on the creation of new jobs with wages closer to the median.

Technology had not only affected middle-skilled jobs. It had favoured a 'winner-takes-most' logic, with the predominance of 'superstar firms' and the decrease in automation costs:

The substitution of capital for labour in response to declines in relative investment prices is particularly pronounced in industries with a predominance of high routine tasks. The labour share decline at the technological frontier mainly reflects the entry of capital-intensive firms with low labour shares into the frontier rather than a decline in incumbent frontier firms, suggesting that thus far "winner-takes-most" dynamics are mainly explained by technological dynamism rather than anti-competitive forces (OECD, 2018c: 49)

According to the OECD, there was a link then between the decline of the labour share in the product of member countries and technological development. The share had fallen "by around 3.5 percentage points between 1995 and 2013, from around 71.5 per cent to 68 per cent" (OECD, 2018c: 49), and one of the main causes of that trend was, as the quote above indicates, 'technological dynamism', for example in the form of automation innovations.

In parallel to technological change, another key trend examined by the OECD (2019g: 151) was the expansion of labour market monopsony – defined as "a situation in which employers' power as buyer of labour services is not compensated by sufficient workers' bargaining power, and workers have low or no outside options". Certainly following a 'market failure'

argument, as Grimshaw (2020) notes, the OECD expressed concern about the implications of monopsony, partly due to their novel focus on job quality and inclusiveness. Evidence from several OECD economies –among them, United States and United Kingdom- was showing signs of monopsony, associated to lower elasticity of labour supply. The consequences were lower wages, a larger “wedge between pay and productivity”, and higher decision-making capacity in the hand of employers (OECD, 2019g: 151–2). The measures supported to counter this panorama and increase the labour share in DELSA’s 2019 Employment Outlook were to strengthen minimum wages and collective bargaining systems. However, the same year the Economics Department published a paper that stated exactly the opposite:

A tightening of employment protection or an increase in minimum wages exerts downward pressure on the labour share, suggesting that in the medium term the substitution of capital for labour in response to higher labour costs outweighs the upward effect through higher wages (Pak and Schwellnus, 2019: 6)

The previous shows that, although the OECD could move to a position more concerned about equity, there were sectors in the organisation that still defended the pro-market imaginary the institution’s official discourse was trying to leave behind.

iii) Job quality: platforms, digital management and ‘human-centred values’

Another key topic in the OECD understanding of emerging trends in work and employment had to do with digital platforms and labour management technologies. Their position, once again, was based on the framework of the 2018 Jobs Strategy, as well as on the organisation’s stance on digitalisation and artificial intelligence. Concerning platform work, the OECD (2018a) had recognised that, as other forms of non-standard employment, platforms could provide adaptability to the jobs market, easing frictions and transitions, but at the cost of potentially affecting jobs quantity and quality. One OECD book about online platforms (2019b) affirmed that the latter created jobs in local and foreign markets as well as reduced employment in industries that have been disrupted by them –e.g. transportation, hotels or advertising. From an international perspective, extending labour markets to other countries and regions, furthermore, could spark a new ‘race to the bottom’ due to increased competition with markets with lower wage levels (OECD, 2019b: 155).

On the other hand, when it comes to platform labour, the reports maintained that it would usually take place in a normative ‘grey area’ where workers were excluded from basic protections and regulations⁹⁶ (OECD, 2019b). In other terms,

online outsourcing and “gig” work does not always clearly fall under the purview of traditional employment laws, many of which are still premised on the model of a full-time, open-ended contract with a single employer. Therefore, in many countries outsourcing and gig workers (often called “own-account workers”) cannot unionise, engage in collective bargaining or benefit from minimum wage regulations (OECD, 2019b: 42)

⁹⁶ In the launch of the OECD Employment Outlook 2019 at the ILO headquarters in Geneva, which I could attend to, ILO labour lawyers criticised the notion of the ‘grey zone’ since, in legal terms, workers are either covered or not from employment regulations, there is no in-between position. The OECD researchers –economists primarily- insisted in this metaphor due to its rhetorical value more than because of its technical consistency.

Despite being a relatively small portion of the workforce –near 2 per cent in Europe and 1 per cent in America by 2019-, platform work seemed to be indicative of a broader trend towards non-standard employment and the widespread use of digital monitoring techniques at work. With respect to the latter, the OECD showed concerns about current forms of ‘digital Taylorism’, a work regime in which the employment relation is mediated by opaque assessment mechanisms and wage-setting algorithms that are prone to create collusion and one-sided decisions (OECD, 2019g). In that sense, the OECD had given technology and industrial relations a much more relevant place than in the WB approach, echoing the ILO (2019h) human-centred agenda at least on this point. There was an interest also in surveillance at work and its potential effects on well-being:

By facilitating closer monitoring of workers, new technologies may reduce workers’ autonomy and increase the risk of job strain (OECD, 2019g: 52)

To that respect, the OECD initiative on artificial intelligence, developed in parallel to their future of work agenda, defended ‘human-centred values’: since the inner logic of algorithms could become too dense or complex to be understood, the OECD (2019c) held that ‘black-box systems’ should be subject to human rights and serve for inclusive and sustainable development. Black-box systems could lead to informational asymmetries, algorithmic bias and potential breaches to personal data protections, all of which justified institutional responses to avoid future disruptions.

The policy stream: preparing the workforce and addressing power imbalances at work

i) Adapting skills systems and lifelong learning

The first set of recommendations given by the OECD to face the future of jobs had to do with education and skills. Both dimensions had been a central focus for the OECD in recent decades. Several initiatives –the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Survey of Adult Skills, and the *Education at a glance* reports had positioned the OECD in the field, making them a major player in global education policy (OECD, 2017d; Rizvi and Lingard, 2009). The emphasis put on the skills dimension in the context of the future of work agenda should not surprise. Already in 2014, the OECD had promoted a stronger focus on information and communication technology skills in their countries, urgently needed in sectors with an intense use of the internet (OECD, 2014b). However, the key output propelled by the future of work agenda was the remaking of the institution’s Skills Strategy. The first one –published in 2012- recommended countries to invest in higher education and make access to quality education more equitable. The need to revise it came from the recognition that several macro-trends (globalisation, demographic change, migration, but most importantly digitalisation) had to be at the centre of a new framework, more up-to-date with the tone of the international discussion.

The OECD Skills Strategy 2019 ‘Skills to shape a better future’ (OECD, 2019h) proposed to rethink education systems under the idea of lifelong learning: in each life stage, individuals should be able to access to training and renew their capacities. Two aspects characterised the policy proposals given by the organisation to that regard. First, in a context of rapid changes

in the labour market, the Strategy and related reports held that students and adults should be equipped with non-routine abilities that were harder to replace by technology:

The new sets of skills required to thrive in the workplace and in modern societies are transversal skills such as complex problem solving, critical thinking, teamwork, resilience and adaptability, which demand teachers of high calibre (OECD, 2019h: 18)

Empowering people with the mix of skills needed to succeed in a digital world of work, including by improving education and training systems throughout the life cycle, facilitating job-to-job transitions and ensuring adequate social protection, is essential (OECD, 2019d: 86)

Furthermore, digital technologies opened opportunities for workers to acquire new skills, for example through open online courses; therefore, governments should modify accreditation policies to make them valuable in the jobs market (OECD, 2019d: 91). The OECD Science and Technology Outlook of 2018 suggested also that employers should incorporate these tools, taking advantage of the dramatic decrease they could bring in the cost of on-the-job training (OECD, 2018d: 54).

Secondly, the OECD (2019h) argued that public systems should abandon the idea that learning finishes after higher education. Given the expansion of low-quality institutions and the pace with which acquired skills became outdated, countries should consider the establishment of training systems for adults, anticipating future skills demand, which should be funded by governments, employers and workers. The Skills Strategy supported corporatist examples (e.g. Germany's 'Alliance for Initial and Further Education') from OECD countries, promoting involvement from different actors:

To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of skills policies, as well as to ensure more equitable skills outcomes, stakeholders must also be able to influence skills policy. These stakeholders include students, education institutions, trade unions, business associations, the unemployed, those employed in non-standard work, small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), etc. (OECD, 2019h: 175)

In relation to this, the importance of the governance of skills systems in the OECD approach marks a difference in comparison to the WB, who paid attention mostly to business' demand (World Bank, 2019b: 70ff.).

ii) Social protection for non-standard workers and platform workers

The future of work agenda did not only prompt a change in the OECD labour and skills policy, as I have shown so far, but also in their approach to social protection. In the Ministerial Meeting on Social Policy from May 2018, government ministers agreed on the structural effects of globalisation and technological development on society, arguing that these two factors were "reshaping the world of work and the relationship between workers, employers and social protection systems" (OECD, 2018e: 3). The sense of urgency presented in their statement, extensive to other OECD studies dealing with this question, was clear:

social protection systems need to be modernised to provide flexible solutions and support to all workers including the self-employed and those with non-standard contracts. We recognize

that workers who move between jobs, occupations, contracts and countries need portability of their benefits for which they have contributed (OECD, 2018e: 4)

The premise was the following: a changing world of work required of adaptability in the labour market through a social policy strategy that could combine flexibility and protection for all types of workers. Interestingly, the reports were reluctant to identify this approach with a given framework – for example, with the flexicurity model, but the latter had obvious similarities with the OECD perspective this time around⁹⁷. In any case, the reasons and the evidence behind the organisation’s views on the future of social policy were strictly referred to the situation of the labour markets in OECD countries. The trend that was at the basis was the increasing share of non-standard employment in many of them⁹⁸, as a result of firms looking for cheaper production mechanisms and shifting risks “from employers onto workers” (OECD, 2018a: 263). Even though the majority of jobs in the OECD were “standard, full-time, open-ended”, the policy puzzle to resolve was how to extend social protection to new forms of employment (OECD, 2019g: 27). The objective, therefore, was not to make the latter disappear: in this rationale, non-standard jobs offered adaptability for companies, as well as time arrangements that made a balance between work and private life more feasible.

The solution offered by the OECD was not to establish a new protection system that left behind the traditional model, but to extend certain rights to non-standard workers and make them portable, not dependent on their employment situation. The OECD proposed then to reinforce the institutions of work by expanding them to the ‘new’ world of work, instead of dismantling them (as in World Bank, 2019b). Take minimum wages. While a WB white paper argued that they had to become flexible, adjustable according to the situation of the economy (Packard et al., 2019), the Employment Outlook of 2019 held that minimum wage legislation and “collectively negotiated wage floors” should include the self-employed, especially when they have been misclassified as such (OECD, 2019d, p. 146). Whether the WB, on the other hand, supported a universal basic income (Gentilini et al., 2020), the OECD described it as regressive, and as a threat for already-existing benefits and systems (OECD, 2017a). The organisation’s discourse on social policy did not propose a radical renovation, but rather the inclusion of sub-groups excluded from protection due to their employment status⁹⁹.

Portability referred to the capacity to transfer rights or benefits from one job to another, without affecting their outcome. The idea was that employers could dismiss workers without affecting their access to social protection. An eloquent example of this principle can be found in establishing individual learning accounts. This type of measure was paradigmatically

⁹⁷ The word ‘flexicurity’ was not mentioned even once in the quite extensive reports that contain the organisation’s policy strategy – the Employment Outlook 2019 and the Jobs Strategy of 2018.

⁹⁸ “Firms are constantly trying to find new business models and ways of producing goods and services more cheaply. In some cases, this has resulted in an increased use of non-standard employment arrangements, outsourcing, and a shift of the costs, risks and responsibilities from employers onto workers. Technology has further promoted this trend by facilitating the outsourcing not only of jobs, but also of individual tasks” (OECD, 2018a, p. 263).

⁹⁹ Following that logic, the 2019 Employment Outlook (OECD, 2019f, p. 295) held that “a pursuit of generic policy prescriptions, such as a universal basic income or an exclusive reliance on last-resort safety nets, may be counter-productive as it can distract attention from positive reform steps that countries can take in the context of existing social protection strategies”.

implemented in France ('Compte Personnel de Formation'), about which the OECD expressed support, particularly about

their ability to make training rights "portable" from one job or employment status to another. Training rights are tied to the individual and no longer to a specific job or employer. In this sense, they represent an interesting tool in a world of work where careers are becoming more fragmented for many workers (OECD, 2019e: 1)

Another recommendation given in the reports had to do with platform labour and other forms of dependent or independent self-employment – the 'grey zone' mentioned above. The OECD aligned its position with the G20 principles for 'promoting decent work in the platform economy', which the OECD itself along with the ILO had helped to elaborate in the 2018 summit (G20, 2018). Apart from the protection deficit that workers had in such working regimes, for the OECD there was a lack of basic definitions in the employment relationship in the grey zone. Each party's rights and responsibilities were, therefore, unclear: "for some of the emerging forms of work, it is not even clear what the status of workers is, who the employer is and what rules should apply to them" (OECD, 2019d: 95). The suggestion given by the OECD was basically to tackle misclassification of false self-employment, in the case of platform work, and the clear identification of the employer (OECD, 2019f, 2019c, 2019a). Correct classification –with a revision of administrative employment categorisations and an empowerment of labour inspection institutions, would be a first step to include new forms of work into basic regulations, e.g. guarantying statutory minimum wages or collective bargaining rights for workers in digital platforms.

iii) The place of collective bargaining in the new world of work

The final point I can mention in relation to the OECD policy recommendations is the role of collective bargaining in the future of work. I have mentioned that, in terms of social policy, the message was that education systems should be updated; protection measures ought to be extended to new forms of employment; misclassified workers and employers must be re-categorised to formalize their relationship. None of these proposals was addressing, however, the power imbalance between employers and workers, a key part of the OECD problem-definition on labour market monopsony. Collective bargaining was a fundamental dimension in the challenges identified by the organisation, as a means to increase the share and decision-making power of labour:

On average across OECD countries, trade union density almost halved during the past 30 years, falling from 30% in 1985 to 17% in 2016... The number of workers covered by collective bargaining has tended to decline in tandem with trade union density in countries predominantly characterized by firm-level bargaining... On average across OECD countries, it decreased from 45% in 1985 to 32% in 2016... All in all, the weakening of labor relations in many OECD countries has put collective bargaining systems under strong pressure (OECD, 2018a: 144)

If we compare their position on this theme in the 2006 Jobs Strategy and that of 2018, there was a substantial change in the message. In the first, the OECD (2006) supported both coordinated and uncoordinated sectoral collective bargaining, depending on the model followed by a country: the Anglo-Saxon or the Nordic one. For instance, in uncoordinated systems firms were supposed to be able "to opt-out from sectoral agreements" if they could

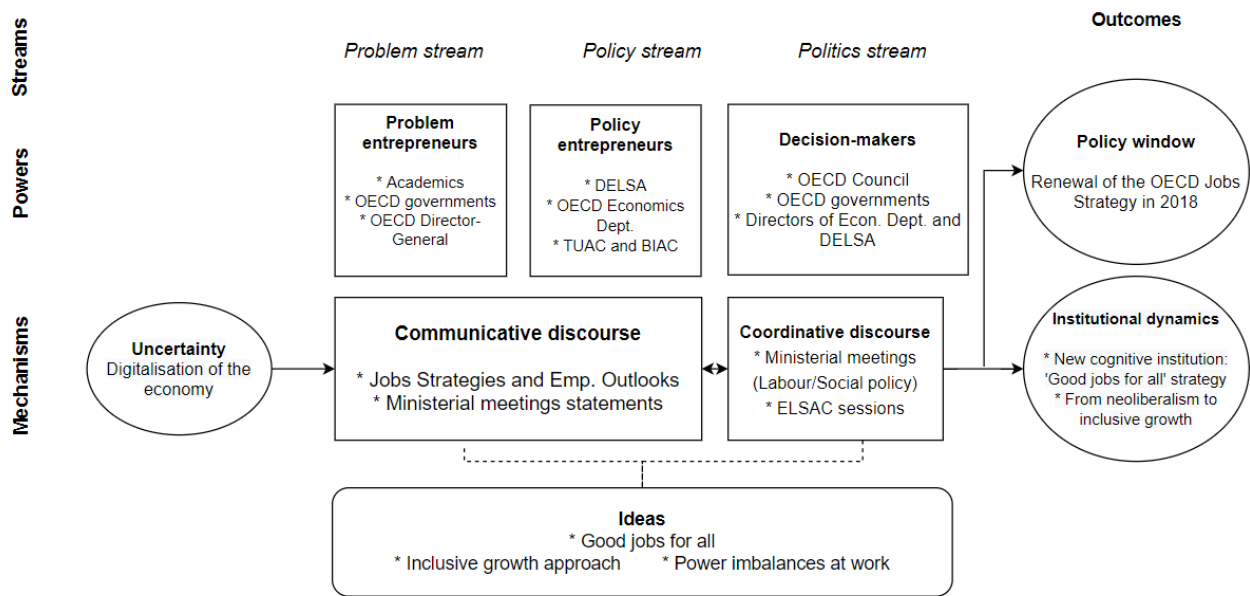
affect their demand for labour (OECD, 2006a, p. 22). Social dialogue was, then, subordinated the demand for jobs and to companies' decision.

The OECD Jobs Strategy of 2018 presented a slightly different scenario. Given the importance of flexibility and adaptability to macroeconomic conditions, the existence of 'organised decentralisation' and the possibility to opt-out for companies, was still part of the recommendations (OECD, 2018a: 103). It could be seen as a remainder of the OECD 'old flexibility narrative', as unions pointed out (Janssen, 2019; TUAC, 2018a), but it is relevant to focus on the more ground-breaking aspects of the new approach. They can be summarised in two points, explained in depth in the book *Negotiating our way up: collective bargaining in changing world of work* (OECD, 2019e). In first place, in the context of the future of work agenda, the OECD recommended countries to establish sectoral bargaining systems, justified by evidence that showed "higher employment and lower unemployment" (OECD, 2019f: 17), as well as higher wage inequality in countries with predominance of firm-level systems. The second policy proposal was to grant collective bargaining rights "to workers in the 'grey zone' and to self-employed workers" to counter "unbalanced power relationships", which "may not only be desirable for fairness consideration, but also for efficiency reasons" (OECD, 2019e, p. 238). Possible alternatives in that line included the strengthening unions of the dependent self-employed; organizing workers from small and medium companies; identifying temporary work agencies as an employer to negotiate with, among other options.

Ideational change at the OECD: streams and institutional dynamics

The OECD's future of work agenda, as I did above in relation to the WB case, can also be outlined in terms of the analytical model proposed in chapter 1 (Figure 10). I have explained that in the mid-2010s the OECD secretariat and member states started expressing concerns about the implications of the digitalisation for the world of work. The uncertainty derived from that process in the world economy, as well as the importance of inclusiveness and equity in the organisation's recent development strategy, led the OECD to focus its social agenda on the problems of the future of work. The main policy entrepreneurs in that sense were DELSA and the Economics Department, who agreed on the relevance of inclusiveness, leaving aside their recent history of ideological divergence. OECD partners were, to be sure, a key part of this process: on the one hand, Ministerial Meetings stressed the need to remake the institution's policy framework in light of technological change. On the other, the social partners (TUAC and BIAC) played a consultative role in the process in ELSAC meetings. The making of a new Jobs Strategy was the key outcome at the OECD, representing a new cognitive institution to assess national labour markets. Additionally, a series of Employment Outlooks and other studies expanded the range of themes covered by the institution's discourse. These publications contained a series of policy recommendations that indicated a broader transition from an orthodox perspective towards an inclusive growth approach much more concerned about power imbalances at work.

Figure 10: The future of work and the OECD: streams and institutional dynamics



Source: Author

The OECD study presented a different path. The Strategy was the result of the collaboration between DELSA and the Economics Department – the first represents a more progressive position on social affairs, while the second follows a more orthodox liberal view. This interaction between the two introduced an element of diversity in the document’s approach, given the different dimensions that are relevant for each Department. Their perspectives have been getting closer over time, but the Economics Department showed a more vivid interest in adaptability, flexibility and the quantitative dimension of jobs, while DELSA researchers aimed to focus the document on jobs quality and inequalities¹⁰⁰. The result was that both approaches were included in the Jobs Strategy, exhibiting a more multidimensional framework on labour market performance. The OECD also has social partners that have a permanent participation in the institution’s projects. The Strategy collected interests and ideas from business and labour, presenting a balanced approach to labour issues in that sense. We mentioned before the example of collective bargaining: unions wanted a stronger emphasis on social dialogue in the Strategy and the OECD conceded that, but also introducing ideas that gave firms room for manoeuvre according to the situation of the economy. The WB studies aim to be more ‘autonomous’, while the OECD is a more politicised knowledge institution, responding to a large variety of stakeholders. These differences in the production of ideas and the internal dynamics of these organisations may explain why, with relevant points in common, they had particular ways of addressing the same issues.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have studied the trajectories of the WB and the OECD in relation to social and labour policy in the late 2010s. Descriptions about a ‘new’ or ‘changing’ world of work in these organisations justified a shift in their ideas, grounded on their broader inclusive growth

¹⁰⁰ Interview with OECD researcher in Paris.

initiatives and the support of their internal political actors. In the context of this agenda, both experienced different forms of ideational change, leaving behind the neoliberal prescriptions supported in the 1990s by these organisations. The next decade, seen from the present, appeared as a transition period in which they softened such perspective, renewing an emphasis on inclusiveness and some forms of social protection. In the Bank, the promotion of conditional cash transfers, a social protection floor and human capital formation marked that transition; in the OECD, it was shaped by the 2006 Jobs Strategy, aimed to balance flexibility and workers' protection, pushing for activation policies that incorporated excluded groups in the labour market. The future of work debate represented a third moment in that trajectory. If both institutions had represented until recently the 'liberal' position in global labour policy, focusing on the economic dimensions of globalisation from a supply-side framework (O'Brien, 2014a), what similarities and differences have they shown in this context? In the next chapter, I will reflect about the distinction between the 'social' and the 'economic' positions in global social policy after the future of work agenda.

For now, I can highlight some comparative aspects considering these two cases. First, the similarities. They shared the idea that technologies can only be adopted as long as companies have flexible arrangements with their workforce, without opposing to the introduction of labour-saving innovations, as long as they increased productivity. Technology was thus considered a productive force that must be embraced by production systems, but workers should have a protection net that reduced the impact of redundancy, supporting their income levels and reskilling them to make individuals employable again. Such nets would involve the institutionalisation of novel forms of entitlement, for example related to a basic income or to learning accounts, opening a spectrum for innovation in social policy. There was consensus about the universal character that such entitlements should possess, given the widespread effects that technology could have in terms of occupations and industries. Additionally, a central problem for both organisations was the low coverage of social protection: in the WB, it was associated to the persistence of informality in the developing world, whereas in the OECD it was linked to the rise in non-standard or new forms of employment in richer countries. Despite the obvious differences between the contexts they alluded to, they agreed on the need to integrate excluded sections of the workforce into the social protection system, although through different institutional arrangements. In summary, the message for governments in both cases was similar: prepare workers equipping them with the correct skills; make social benefits accessible and portable for non-standard workers; let firms reap the productive benefits of new intelligent technologies.

They certainly shared a common goal: promoting economic growth via social inclusion. However, differences start to appear when we consider the dissimilarities in their conception of inclusiveness. I propose that these actors embodied *two different meanings of inclusiveness*: the WB is focused on *inclusion in the labour market and the social protection system*, through the creation of productive employment and progressive universalism in social policy. On the other hand, the OECD promoted *inclusion in the labour market, labour legislation and in social dialogue at work*. The WB rationale was still influenced by neo-classical labour economics, understanding work primarily as a commodity and as a key source of income for individual actors (Machin, 2006). The problems the WB addressed were specifically about future changes in the demand for labour due to automation; the possible income loss derived from that, and the policy alternatives that could re-introduce workers in

the functioning of the market. On the contrary, the OECD adopted a perspective implicitly inspired by the political-economy concept of work, that framed it not only as a commodity, but also as a field of conflict between workers and employers, on the one hand, and as a dimension where individual well-being is at stake, on the other (see Spencer, 2009).

Chapter 6: The Schumpeterian consensus in global labour governance. Implications of the future of work agenda

Introduction

The previous chapters have studied in detail the development of the future of work agenda in global governance, demonstrating how the 2010s exhibited a substantial shift in the focus of international actors with regards to work and employment. In recent decades policy debates had been concerned about financial crises in advanced and developing economies, with the associated consequences of 'structural adjustment' especially in the latter; at the same time, the globalisation of the economy had forced multilateral agencies to recalibrate their social policy frameworks, either paying attention to the needs of expanding markets or the social implications of world interconnectedness. The globalisation of finance and productive systems had been considered until recently the 'key feature' of a changing world of work, insomuch that they were the primary concern in global labour governance, as Hendrickx and colleagues (2016) have remarked. Hence, the ILO set up the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation in 2001, publishing a report years later that interpreted transformations in global supply chains and trade (ILO, 2004). The change had been nothing less than spectacular when in the mid-2010s international observers started to turn their look towards technological change. Thus, with a very different scenario in mind, the ILO created the Global Commission on the Future of Work in 2017, whose ideas I have already analysed in this study.

Themes such as robotics, artificial intelligence, digital apps or algorithms became trendy and a real preoccupation for policy makers in, I would say, unexpected fashion. If one had told that this was going to be the case to a participant of the 2001 ILO Commission, she would have shown nothing but disbelief, as those topics would just appear in science fiction, not in OECD ministerial meetings or IMF-World Bank spring events precisely. The reference to the globalisation agenda should not only let us see the element of novelty that surrounded the work of international bodies on the future of jobs, but it also should be considered the scenario where global labour governance, as a concept in the social sciences, was born (see Hassel, 2008; Meardi and Marginson, 2014). My hypothesis for this chapter is that scholars have made sense of worldwide agendas and actors in labour policy with categories that applied to the globalisation literature, but have started to lose meaning in the context of the so-called fourth industrial revolution. More explicitly, I am referring to the division between economic and social dimensions in global governance, with which scholars for decades have studied emerging agendas and orientations in social policy at that level (Deacon, 2007a; Kaasch and Martens, 2015; Münch, 2016; O'Brien, 2014a; Stoll, 2018).

In this chapter, I will demonstrate that such distinction was eroded and undermined by the future of work agenda, in which the ILO, OECD and WB converged around a single policy paradigm the social investment approach-, thus leaving behind the sharp contrast between neoliberal and social democrat positions in global social governance. Drawing upon the results I have exposed in previous chapters, the chapter starts recounting the patterns of institutional and ideational change experienced by multilateral agencies in the context of the future of work agenda. It then analyses the literature about positions and paradigms in global social policy, which, as I mentioned, has so far been structured by the separation between economic

and social dimensions. The argument has been that international financial institutions (WB/IMF) and the OECD have focused on the first, while UN organisations such as the ILO or the UNDP have concentrated their policy approaches on the second.

The following sections indicate, with evidence from statements and publications from such agencies, the global convergence towards a common conception of social development –the ‘Schumpeterian consensus’, as I call it here- and the same policy paradigm – social investment for inclusive growth. The emergence of a new transnational policy consensus rested on the idea that global social policy should adapt the labour force and the institutions of work to exploit the creative potential of intelligent technologies, at the same time protecting societies from their destructive capacity. The cases of this study –the ILO, WB and OECD- agreed on that basic proposition, though focused their agendas on different aspects of the ‘social’ element of this paradigm. There was divergence within the same paradigm, in relation to policy instruments and definitions of what risks should be prioritised, but the chapter is largely concentrated on the consensus dimension, since it is the most novel with respect to the literature. It concludes with a reflection on the new map of positions and ideas in global labour policy after this agenda.

[a. The trajectories of international organisations and the global governance system in the future of work agenda](#)

Explaining patterns of institutional and ideational change

The recent trajectory followed by the ILO, the OECD and the WB in terms of social and labour policy has been shaped by the institutional context of each organisation, their specific governance mechanisms and interests projected on this agenda. The latter has opened policy windows in the three cases, but with a different meaning and outcome. It is important to recall my research findings, in order to ask about the implications of these institutional processes for global governance. In chapter 4, I explained that the ILO Future of Work Initiative (2015-2019) was organised in the context of its centenary as an institution, and its specific aim was to develop a position about the megatrends that had been identified by observers as the most transformative for the coming decades, most noticeably technological change associated to digitalisation and computerisation (ILO, 2017a; International Labour Office, 2015). There were two mechanisms involved in the evolution of this process: a Commission and a Declaration – both had been utilised in the ‘social dimensions of globalisation’ agenda at the ILO (Maupain, 2009); at the same time, several actors intended to influence the outcome of the initiative, exercising ideational power in different forms.

The first was the creation of a Global Commission on the Future of Work, which was expected to elaborate an original ILO framework on this theme (ILO, 2019h). The second was the elaboration of the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (ILO, 2019b). The ILO institutional process involved the adoption of a ‘human-centred approach’ to technological change, one that was fiercely disputed by the social partners in the Centenary Conference of 2019. The political stream changed radically the policy alternatives proposed by the Global Commission –e.g. a universal labour guarantee, living wages or an international system to regulate platforms. The Declaration, instead, was much less focused on workers’ rights than on the functional requirements of business, thus urging countries to create an enabling

environment for growth and technological innovation, as well as the investment in skills and lifelong learning programmes (ILO, 2019b). The political motivations for this reorientation were found in the strategies of employers at the ILO, who undermined the propositions of labour and the Commission with support from right-wing governments in the 2019 Centenary Conference, where the human-centred framework was consolidated in the Declaration, closer to a human-capital conception than to the capabilities approach that initially inspired the Future of Work Initiative (see ILO, 2019c).

Whilst the ILO trajectory was largely determined by the political stream, the case of the OECD exhibited a significantly different scenario. A short reference to the institutional context of the OECD will let me describe a clearer narrative of this case, linked to the discussion from the chapter 5. The organisation had been considered a promoter of neoliberalism in global governance until recently, in particular due to its role in education policy (Rizvi and Lingard, 2009) and the orthodox liberalism defended by the Jobs Strategy from 1996 (Armingeon, 2004; Casey, 2004; McBride et al., 2007; OECD, 1996). The incorporation of labour market inclusion and activation in their policy repertoire with the 2006 Jobs Strategy (Jacobsson and Noaksson, 2010; OECD, 2006) did position the institution slightly further from that orthodox perspective. In the aftermath of the Great Recession, the OECD initially recommended member states to display counter-cyclical measures, including prolonging unemployment benefits, but “as markets began to normalize, the OECD advocated a return to orthodoxy” (McBride and Merolli, 2013: 313). The emphasis on fiscal consolidation and austerity had been established as a policy consensus in the European Union and the international financial institutions (Blyth, 2015; Burton, 2016; Cohen et al., 2015), and the OECD certainly became part of that broad trend in global governance. A plausible explanation was that the advocacy of ‘inclusive liberalism’, as Mahon (2011) called it, by the OECD’s DELSA in the 2000s had not necessarily permeated the ideas of the Economics Department, apparently held by the same neoliberal premises from previous decades.

The scenario changed in 2016, when labour ministers and the OECD secretariat agreed to make a new strategy for work and employment regulation (OECD, 2016). That same year, international politics was shocked by the election of Donald Trump in the United States, marking the beginning of an era of populist leaders with a clear message against multilateralism (Copelovitch and Pevehouse, 2019). The OECD took the role of defender of the liberal order by strengthening its inclusive growth agenda, remaking its approach to social and labour policy to tackle the same inequalities that had spurred far-right populism in the first place (Deeming and Smyth, 2018). The elaboration of the 2018 Jobs Strategy showed a new consensus between the Economics Department and DELSA, in terms of their incorporation of job quality and resilience into the OECD framework to assess countries’ labour market performance (OECD, 2018a). It was a strategy explicitly made for a ‘changing world of work’ shaped by technological innovations. It decisively supported flexible security strategies to increase adaptability, but with an emphasis on income security and inequality reduction through centralised collective bargaining and new regulations for non-standard employment (OECD, 2019f, 2019g). The influence of the inclusive growth approach was noticeable, representing an ideational shift led by the problem stream and the redefinition of the meaning of labour market performance.

Institutional change at the WB, we have seen, had similar characteristics compared to the OECD. The Bank was, and for many still is, the prime example of a neoliberal position in global social governance. The structural adjustments programmes from the 1980s, supporting developing countries in crisis with attached liberalising conditions, were a key instrument for the international expansion of the neoliberal doctrine since then (Midgley, 2013; Murphy, 2014; Peck, 2010; Stein, 2014). In the WB perspective –as in the case of the IMF as well (O’Brien, 2014a)-, the institutions of work were considered distortionary for wages, leading to a lack of adaptability and increasing inefficiencies in the allocation of labour (Stein, 2008). The consistency between these premises and those of neoliberal thinkers were obvious: for the latter, prices are the main signals to determine market behaviours and, therefore, any factor that threatens to alter them represents a source of inefficiency (see Friedman, 1962; and especially Hayek, 2017). The WB displayed a pro-poor agenda to respond to its critics between the 1990s and 2000s (Cammack, 2003), supporting conditional cash transfers (Clemens and Kremer, 2016), good governance adjustments (Woods, 2006) and eventually, a social protection floor agreed with the ILO (Deacon, 2013a).

As the OECD had did in the same period, the 2000s saw the Bank moving towards a variant of inclusive liberalism (Porter and Craig, 2004) concerned about equality of opportunities and access to social services. The inclusive component was understood in relation to activation policies, as well as tackling inequalities in terms of social opportunities, and was considered a key element for a sustainable globalisation (Zoellick, 2007). The inclusive growth agenda at the WB had started precisely in the 2000s, and represented the background of its conception of the future of work. Politics was not as relevant as in the other two cases of this study. The WB approach was rather sustained on ideas widely shared by mainstream economists about technological change –e.g. the polarising effects of automation (Maloney and Molina, 2016; World Bank, 2016b). Also, there was an ideational continuity with previous World Development Reports, which were considered the safe ground in which policy makers at the Bank should build on, as explained by an interviewee¹⁰¹. The result of this framing process implied a relevant change in the WB ideas about social and labour policy, despite the mentioned continuities. The support of a flexicurity model for the Global South, balancing the goals of adaptability for technological adoption with universal social protection, signified a sea change for the institution. Its policy responses had a component of rigidity –e.g. the Human Capital Project (World Bank, 2018d) rests on ideas defended for the organisation for decades- and an element of disruption, for example in the promotion of a progressively universal ¹⁰²basic income (Gentilini et al., 2020) or social dialogue through a ‘pentapartite’ framework that includes the self-employed and non-standard workers (Packard et al., 2019).

Did global labour governance ‘work’ this time?

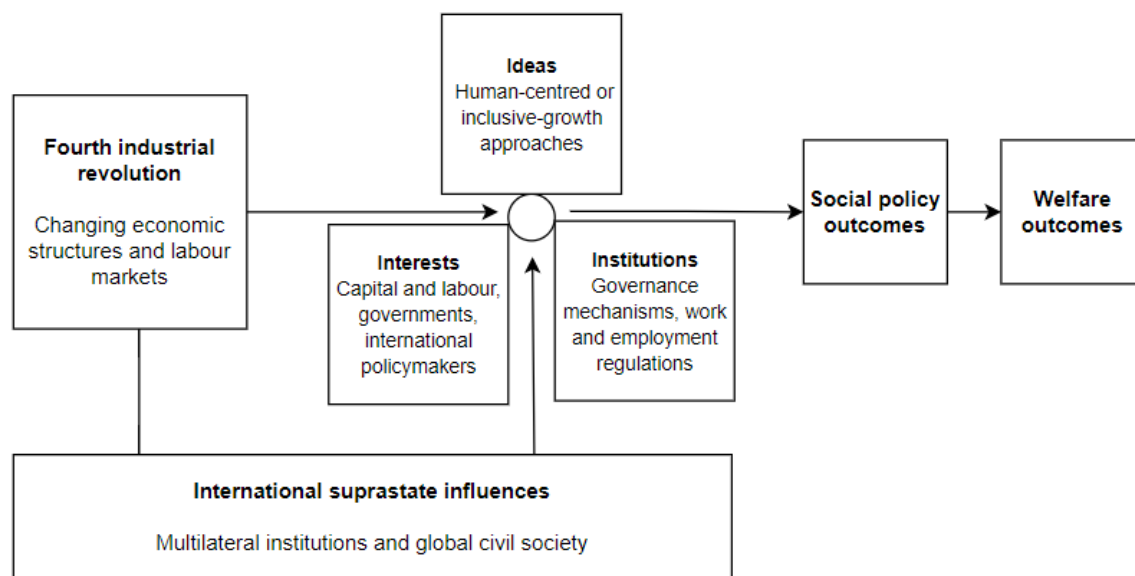
A first observation that can be drawn from the individual trajectory of these organisations in terms of social and labour policy, and responding to the main question of this research, is that

¹⁰¹ Interview with WB researcher that participated in the WDR 2016 and 2019, as well as in the making of the Protecting All strategy, in Washington DC.

¹⁰² As explained in the previous chapter, the Bank’s progressive universalism meant that minimum guarantees (income or social services) should be expanded from the less advantaged groups to the middle class and the more privileged ones, with universality as an ultimate goal to give protection to everyone in the changing world of work.

there were various responses to the same problems identified in the fourth industrial revolution. We have seen in previous chapters that the premises of problem-definition were shared by most international agencies and observers: the future of work is about technology; it implies new risks and could widen already worrying social and economic inequalities. Major players in the field –multilateral agencies; civil society; experts- proposed specific policy solutions, and the combination of particular governance structures and interests in them meant that they often differed in relation to the political goals implied in such solutions. The model of social policy making below (Figure 11) indicates the diversity of factors involved, summarising the trajectory explained in the previous section. It can be said that there was effectively a response to a new challenge, not in a binding manner since global governance, in strict terms, is a loose group of actors and their mechanisms to direct the behaviour of other public and private actors (Avant et al., 2012). From a functional viewpoint, the analyst could say ‘the system worked’, as Drezner (2014) complacently argued in relation to the role of international economic governance in the Global Recession, as governments and multilateral bodies ‘effectively’ contained the earthquake.

Figure 11: A model of global policy-making on the future of work agenda in the 2010s



Source: Author, inspired by model of social policy-making by Ian Gough (2008)

Was the system as ‘efficient’ in the future of work agenda? As far as welfare outcomes are concerned, there is no way to know: the latter case possesses the extraordinary characteristic –perhaps paralleled by climate change in that regard- that digital transformations have not fully displayed their destructive potential yet. Robotisation, platforms and algorithmic management are, we know, spreading (Prettner and Bloom, 2020; Sharp, 2018), but there is not enough information to judge whether policy responses have been effective yet in delivering welfare results. In all truth, the role of global labour governance is not to determine what countries must do or not, but to manage problems in a polycentric, decentralised manner (Hassel, 2008; Meardi and Marginson, 2014); therefore, if the system ‘works’, it is

through a diverse range of governance methods and ideational approaches. There is no single independent variable with which this effectiveness can be measured. A more interesting question that can indeed be answered, representing a constructivist counterpoint to the functional approach to global problems, is the following: how has this agenda changed global labour governance? Instead of looking at this system as a machine-like device that generates answers when necessary, the constructivist lens asks about the reproduction of its structure (Maturana and Varela, 1987), or more clearly, about the positions that compose the system and their contribution to the whole.

b. The erosion of the divide between economic and social dimensions in global labour policy

A history of antagonism and accommodation

The question about the implications of this agenda for global governance is different from the one concerning the trajectory of the international organisations in relation to it. The scope should now look at the variety of positions and their relationships. The notion of ‘position’ is here understood in relation to discourse, based on a constructivist framework (Burr, 1995, 2015): when actors communicate they occupy a certain discourse position, meaning that they ‘talk from’ from a certain place, be it a discipline, a theory or a normative stance. The very act of engaging in communication or in coordinative interactions implies an exercise of ‘positioning’ (Davies and Harré, 1990) by which the identity of an actor takes form, creating or reinforcing a given perspective in a new scenario. In other words, studying discourse from this angle involves mapping positions and describing how participants understand their own place in the discussion. Now, in relation to this research, it must be noted that debates in global social governance have not always been restricted to the technical aspects of the policy dimension, but they have actually been a “war of positions” (Deacon, 2007a: 172) in which actors have defended their ideological or ideational perspectives at all costs, often in high-level meetings or flagship reports.

For decades, the literature has recognised that this ‘war’ in social affairs at the international level has been structured by two positions. The division between ‘economic’ and ‘social’ institutions has been a useful narrative to make sense of convergence and divergence in international policy spheres. Bob Deacon (1997: 72ff), in a seminal book for global social policy studies, affirmed in the 1990s that the globalisation debate expressed a sharp separation of both dimensions: the WB/IMF had become active advocates of a pro-market approach to social and labour regulations, while institutions in the UN system “stood out as the counterweight to the otherwise laissez-faire, free trade antisocial orientation of the Bank and the Fund”. The UNICEF *Adjustment with a human face* report from 1987, highlighting the catastrophic implications of liberalisation for poverty in children (Jolly, 1991), or the elaboration of the ILO *Core labour standards* to enforce minimum norms for an increasingly integrated economy (Alston, 2004; Bakvis and McCoy, 2008), unarguably followed that logic of contraposition. There are several forms of looking at this divide: for instance, a neo-Gramscian view would remark the geopolitical and class-related interests at stake, defended by a hegemonic bloc led by multinationals, the IFIs and the OECD (Bieler, 2001). Contrastingly, a functionalist approach would suggest that world society needs of institutions that generate

economic coordination and others that provide legitimacy to the global economy (e.g. Münch, 2016).

The functional perspective seems to assign a specific and fixed role for different institutions in global governance, hiding the fact that the organisational mandates of international agencies evolve over time, same as their agendas (Béland and Orenstein, 2013). The ideational approach to international institutions is much better suited to understand the dynamic side of positioning, in that sense. A central concept here is the notion of policy paradigms, representing the principles and ideas defended by groups of policy-makers, specifying a determined set of responses to given problems (Hall, 1993). In Hall's version of the concept, paradigms are often resistant to change, and programmes based on them might change their instruments before being discarded as illegitimate or inefficient. Paradigms are substituted by others when anomalies mount: issues that cannot be either understood or managed through a dominant paradigm pile up and push for ideational change, either incrementally or in abrupt fashion (Béland and Cox, 2010; Berman, 2013b; Winnicott, 2011). In global studies, there has been an adaptation of the term to comprehend the spread of 'transnational policy paradigms', defined by sociologist Sarah Babb as:

a policy model specifying both a set of instruments and a set of goals to be pursued using these instruments, which is legitimated through expert knowledge and which is adopted by two or more governments (2013: 272)

International organisations are crucial in giving conceptual grounds to transnational paradigms, as well as transferring them at the national level – e.g. the WB was the main transfer agent of the wave of pensions privatisation after the 1980s, thus spreading a new paradigm in the field (Orenstein, 2009). The two positions mentioned above have been linked, in that line, to specific models of social policy making: on the one hand, the literature has understood the 'economic' institutions (IFIs, OECD, WTO) as neoliberal actors, to the extent they have embraced since the 1980s a set of orthodox policy reforms –privatisation of social services, autonomy of central banks, flexible labour markets, trade openness (Harvey, 2007). Competitiveness and economic growth are the key state objectives in this paradigm (Cerny, 2010). On the other, the 'social' flank has embraced several paradigms: in terms of economic decision-making, institutions such as the ILO are commonly associated to Keynesianism – supporting an active role of the state in the economy, with a redistributive and pro-employment orientation (Peet and Hartwick, 2015)- and to the human development paradigm promoted by UN agencies (Midgley, 2013; Nussbaum, 2011).

Whereas the economic has frequently been conceived from a utilitarian, growth-centred approach, Naila Kabeer (2015) has noted that in the international development community the meaning of the social has been far less clear. Indeed, depending on the organisation or the agenda that is considered, this dimension has been related to the defence of human rights in global governance debates; to welfare issues on an individual scale (deficits in well-being, economic opportunities or access to social protection), and; to inequalities in a collective sense (based on institutional dynamics or social categories). These three understandings have become places from which the economic orientations have been criticised in global governance, and they are as important in the future of work case, as I suggest in the last section of the chapter.

Another important element to take into account is the fact that the mentioned divide has not only been recognised by scholars, but officials in multilateral institutions often reproduce this discourse, especially to legitimise their own approach and define their organisational self-identity. The literature here has been emphatic to show the previous, and my interviews with researchers and high-level personnel from different institutions confirms the same idea. For example, in the OECD, the orthodox position was commonly sustained on neoclassical economics and the predominance of evidence-based policy-making in the eyes of their officials (Marcussen and Trondal, 2011). An interviewee from DELSA at the OECD suggested that their approach to the future of work had the advantage of being informed by the latest evidence in labour economics, versus the ideologically laden approach of the ILO.

The WB has built a similar self-definition undervaluing the ILO, particularly because the Bank is oriented to developing economies with high levels of labour informality, i.e. countries that are not subject to international labour standards as such (Di Ruggiero et al., 2014). An interviewee also emphasised that the WB conception of the future of jobs was primarily based on recent evidence, for example about labour market polarisation or the actual risks of automation. Reproducing this binary notion of both ‘sides’ of global social policy, one of my ILO interviewees the ILO summarised with precision how these organisations look at themselves and to other agencies in the other side of the policy spectrum (Table 15). It is reasonable to think that WB staff would partly agree with this categorisation, as an indicator of the consensus that shapes not only the academic literature on international organisations, but also the self-identity of their staff.

Table 15: The divide between economic and social institutions according to an ILO official

Dimension	International Labour Organization (ILO)	World Bank (WB)
Main policy goal	Dignity	Efficiency
Governance	Tripartism	Expertise
Source of power	Ideological	Economic
Policy-makers	Diversity in disciplines	Economists
Influence	Orientating countries	Imposing policies
Outputs	Policy orientation	Technical assistance

Source: Author, based on interview with ILO official (May 2019). Terms in original transcript

Beyond the logic of antagonism: the legacy of the future of work agenda

Coming back to the future of work agenda, one of the research questions that I proposed in chapter 1 had to do with how it had transformed or reinforced positions in global labour policy. This field has been largely structured by the antagonism between the IFIs and the ILO, as O’Brien (2014a) remarks, and less often by accommodation. In other words, this divide was expressed through the dichotomy between flexible work arrangements –facilitating

companies' capacity to define employment relations- and labour protections for dismissal, unemployment and other risks (Anner and Caraway, 2010). It is common to see analyses of new trends or events in the global economy that are interpreted with this binary distinction as their main analytical device, particularly to study convergence and divergence between the two 'discourse factions' in global social governance (Münch, 2016). The emphasis on their differences is frequent, but works about their commonalities and agreements have also been relevant. An example can be found in the literature about the adoption of core labour standards in IFIs conditionality policies (Blanton et al., 2015) or policy convergence between international institutions around the idea of universal social protection (Deacon, 2013b; Zelenev, 2015).

Scholars have, in the same fashion, made sense of the future of work agenda with the same dichotomy in mind, and that is precisely the notion that I would like to criticise as it ignores the fundamental change that has brought all the mentioned organisations to the same basic policy paradigm (social investment), which I will prove in the next section. What is more, since the literature I am referring to has come from industrial relations scholars more than from economists, they have commonly shown support of the ILO approach and have pointed the OECD and WB initiatives as an extension of their long-lasting neoliberal affinities¹⁰³. Along those lines, Grimshaw (2020), reviewing flagship reports on the future of work from international institutions in 2019, argued that the ILO –actually the Global Commission, that was external to the ILO- was concerned about the implication of technological innovations for inequalities, while the WB had followed its conventional orthodox views with some concessions. Anner and colleagues (2019) held that the WB approach undermined the institutions of work, while McBride and Watson (2019) suggested that the OECD Jobs Strategy of 2018 had substantive elements of the old flexibility narrative. What these accounts cannot recognise, because they insist in reproducing the divide between economic and social dimensions in the future of work debates, is that these positions were crucially transformed from within, because of two actors that, for different reasons, provoked move towards a common paradigm in global governance. That is the focus of the next section.

The previous analyses have an element of truth, but they show fundamental theoretical flaws that do not let them interpret change in terms of positions, but only highlight path-dependence. First, they conceive international organisations as *unitary entities* that represent a single perspective or follow homogeneous interests. For that reason, they cannot recognise internal conflicts, disagreements or the coexistence of disputed goals at the heart of organisations. My study of the ILO indicates that there is no single 'ILO perspective': the secretariat, governments, business and labour have their particular agendas, and any exhaustive analysis should regard policy-making at the ILO as the result of interactions between these internal factions. The same occurs with the OECD: analytical and political divisions between different research units have critically shaped outcomes in social and

¹⁰³ A possible interpretation of this trend can be found in the fact that several industrial relations scholars involved in this debate have institutional links with the ILO, making them more prone to take their side. For instance, Grimshaw (2020), who wrote a relevant piece on the future of work and international organisations, was the director of the Research Department at the ILO. Likewise, the most vocal paper criticising the WB approach was co-authored by an ILO official (Anner et al., 2019), which was celebrated internally in the organisation as per one of my interviewees. In other terms, the literature that has maintained the opposition ILO-IFIs alive comes to a certain extent from these organisations themselves, reinforcing their organisational self-identities.

labour policy, and there is no reference to this in the mentioned studies. Second, scholars have allocated positions and paradigms (e.g. neoliberalism or social democracy) to particular actors in global social policy regarding them as *unitary positions*, thus ignoring fundamental differences between IFI, for example, or between UN agencies. A slightly more refined analysis, nonetheless, reveals essential disagreements between actors within the same faction – for example, between the IMF and the Bank on social policy in the last decade (Güven, 2018). A more dynamic scope, that can recognise internal differences in organisations and positions, is necessary in consequence, to make sense of complexity instead of ignoring it.

The Trojan horses of global social policy: the disintegration of polar positions due to international business and the OECD's ideational change

The evolution of the future of work agenda has exposed the inadequacy of a simple logic of antagonism between two homogenous sides. We need a new logic to make sense of that process, focusing on an emerging structure in global social governance. Political antagonism, as analysed by contemporary post-structuralist thinkers (Laclau, 2014; Marchart, 2018), assumes the existence of two exclusive beings that cancel each other out, having thus a primarily negative relationship. It is what I will call 'simple antagonism'. However, a dialectical approach to such an opposition reveals that the two entities have contradictions within themselves – they are opposed by 'complex antagonism' – leading to crossed alliances and agreements between them. It is not only the primary conflict between two positions, but also their inner contradictions what might have explanatory potential in political analysis. In my perspective, in the 2010s, two actors undermined the simple opposition between economic and social institutions in the context of the future of jobs agenda, thus pushing both fractions to a common denominator that did not exist until then – a new transnational policy paradigm.

On the social side, the ILO had a 'Trojan horse' represented by the Employers Group, who were much closer in ideational and ideological terms to the WB than to the ILO Office. In chapter 4 I showed that the IOE explicitly supported in this agenda a deregulatory approach to technological change, focusing on the responsibility of individuals to keep up with technological change and become an 'adaptable workforce' (ILO and IOE, 2019). Employers effectively transformed the 'human-centred approach' made by the ILO Global Commission for the Future of Work and the 'social' ideas that it promoted - using technological change to increase individuals' capabilities, respecting workers' rights and creating new entitlements (ILO, 2019g). The Centenary Declaration, furthermore, truncated key aspects of the human-centred approach, reducing them to principles that were already part of the organisation's discourse –e.g. universal social protection- or translating them into 'economic' concepts –e.g. from capabilities to capacities (ILO, 2019b). On that economic dimension, the Declaration showed a new emphasis on skills development systems, historically supported by employers but not as central for the ILO discourse (Cherry, 2020; Hoehtker, 2019), highlighting as well the importance of an enabling environment for business.

The ILO, in that sense, did not show a particular preference for either the social or the economic dimensions. Furthermore, it was not only employers who supported an reorientation towards growth and employment creation in the organisation: also

governments expressed similar pro-business policy ideas, as the regional declarations of Africa (ILO, 2019a) or the Americas (ILO, 2018e) clearly revealed. The Employers Group had been using their veto power over the ILO Office and the Workers Group in instances prior to the ILO Future of Work Initiative –in the opposition of 2012 about the right to strike (La Hovary, 2013), and discussion about regulations of global supply chains in 2016 (Thomas and Turnbull, 2018). However, it was just in the context of the future of work agenda that this actor –with the support of governments- decided to move from an obstructionist stance to promote ideational change, questioning the priority of social justice in the ILO official discourse. At the same time, as confirmed by one of my interviewees from the IOE, employers felt fully represented in this agenda by the WB publications – and therefore, in my view, employers could even be considered a WB living inside the ILO, defending a deregulatory approach to social and labour policy from within.

The second Trojan horse, this time jeopardising the economic position associated to the neoliberal paradigm, was the OECD. I have explained in other chapters of this study that this organisation since the 1990s moved away from the orthodox economic arguments it then supported; the literature has shown as well the transition towards an inclusive approach that has aimed to reconcile economic and social objectives (Mahon, 2011, 2019). In the future of work agenda, the OECD completed such departure from the position it once occupied alongside the IFIs. The OECD's new place in global social governance was demonstrated by the close nexus it built with the ILO in the future of work agenda, leading to a partnership called the 'Global Deal for Decent Work and Inclusive Growth', published in 2018 (ILO and OECD, 2018). The Global Deal was founded by the two organisations under a common international agenda for the future, centred on strengthening social dialogue. In relation to emergent labour trends, these two institutions agreed that "social dialogue and sound industrial relations will be vital to deal with these challenges, seize the opportunities created by digitalisation and manage transition in a changing world of work" (ILO and OECD, 2018: 11). The affinity between the ideas of the two organisations were well expressed by the director of the ILO Research Department, in the launch of the OECD Employment Outlook 2019 'The future of Work' in Geneva, when he mentioned that, to his surprise, such report could have easily been the main output for the Global Commission organised by the ILO¹⁰⁴.

The Global Deal set a series of good practices expected to be followed by signatory countries and organisations. It was joined by around 25 governments and a large number of international trade unions, business associations and non-governmental bodies like Oxfam¹⁰⁵. It operated like a global policy network (Stone, 2008) that offered guidelines for partners to voluntarily collaborate in initiatives related to social dialogue and collective bargaining, also acting as a knowledge base to share experiences and recommendations in that line. The main output was a flagship report published every other year (see Figure 12 below). These reports were prepared by departments from both institutions – in 2018 it exposed the principles of the Deal and in 2020 it was about a ILO/OECD response to the pandemic centred on social collaboration and lifelong learning (ILO and OECD, 2018, 2020). Tellingly, the IOE was absent from the Global Deal, showing its separation from the ILO Office discourse. This partnership not only reflects that the OECD moved closer to the social pole in global governance, but also

¹⁰⁴ I had the chance to be at the launch of that OECD report in Geneva in December 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Details about the Global Deal (objectives, partners and publications) can be found on: <https://www.theglobaldeal.com/>

that the ILO oriented its international strategy towards inclusive growth and the functional requirements of technological change –e.g. through the emphasis on skills development. On the other hand, it was paralleled by a series of collaborations between these agencies in G20 events, where researchers collaborate to make policy documents that influence in labour ministers’ meetings (L20)¹⁰⁶.

Figure 12: Reports of the ILO-OECD ‘Global Deal for Decent Work and Inclusive Growth’ (2018-20)



Source: ILO and OECD (2018, 2020)

c. The Schumpeterian consensus or the new logic of global social governance

A new consensus in global social governance to face the fourth industrial revolution

Having explained the policy trajectories and the sources of convergence between international organisations, we can now look at the emergence of a transnational paradigm that I have announced in previous pages. From the emergent mechanisation of work in 18th century Britain to the information and telecommunications revolution, every phase of technological change in the past has been embedded in a specific ‘techno-economic paradigm’ that has defined business practices, organisational models and the role of states in the economy (Dosi et al., 2005). These paradigms have established principles that usually become common sense over time, notions of what is expectable and desirable from public and private actors. Similar notions in the literature point to the same phenomenon. Regulation theorists have understood this imbrication of organisational practices and economic development through the notion of ‘accumulation regimes’ (Boyer, 2011) –e.g. Fordism or Toyotism. Policy scholars have pointed to the link between industrial transformations and specific ‘models’ of welfare, created as a response to emerging risks from new economic structures. In that line, the concepts of industrialism (Flora and Alber, 1981) and post-industrialism (Bell, 1968; Esping-Andersen, 1999; Pierson, 1998) pointed both to an

¹⁰⁶ As per an ILO high-level official interviewed at the headquarters in Geneva.

era of economic development and to a range of institutions created at the heart of each transformation, partly to exploit their potential and partly to tackle their disruptive implications.

What was the new organisational and institutional paradigm that crystallised the essence of the fourth industrial revolution in the 2010s? In chapter 3, I made reference to the innovations associated to this process –robotics, artificial intelligence, data analytics, digital apps-, and how they allowed the institutionalisation of new business practices –automation, algorithmic management, digital surveillance, and so on. Management consultancies put forward what I called the ‘rhetoric of preparedness’: the notion that companies must adjust their frameworks in order to jump on the train of technological progress (see Sturdy and Morgan, 2018). Urging private actors to incorporate this new model of digitalised business, accounting firms and futurists created a profitable industry around the adoption of intelligent technologies. My argument here is that, in parallel to those trends in the world of management, international organisations played a similar role but in relation to the role of the state in the digital transformation, promoting a new model of social and labour policy for the future of work. They did so with significant differences in terms of policy proposals, to be sure, but with a common agreement about *the new place of the welfare state as a catalyser of technological change*. There was an new ‘consensus’, meaning a transnational support for an institutional model expressed in policy strategies of multilateral agencies and governments.

The concept of consensus here is presented as it has been utilised in international political economy to denote the convergence of actors around certain development paradigms, as in the ‘Washington consensus’ (Williamson, 2008) or the ‘Beijing consensus’ (Turin, 2010). However, in this case I am not referring to industrial and macroeconomic policy, but to social and labour market regulations on a global level. The new model that became a transnational policy paradigm in the 2010s can be called the ‘Schumpeterian consensus’, which was fundamentally inspired by ideas, not by geopolitical interests as the ones I have just mentioned. The essence of this paradigm relies on two ideas. The first refers to the conception of economic and technological development, shared by the three cases of this study –ILO, OECD and WB- and by other international actors described below. Such conception is grounded on Schumpeter’s idea of ‘creative destruction’. Secondly, in the past decade the divide between economic and social positions on labour market policy was overcome by a wide support of ‘investing in people’ in the context of a changing world of work. The social investment approach and the flexicurity model, as an extension of the Schumpeterian consensus, became part of this transnational policy paradigm, being promoted by the various actors of global labour governance: multilateral agencies, international experts and civil society organisations.

A shared conception of development as ‘creative destruction’

The idea of creative destruction was popularised by Schumpeter in his *Capitalism, socialism and democracy* (1994 [1943]), representing capitalist development as a force that continuously grows at the expense of already existing economic and institutional forms¹⁰⁷. In

¹⁰⁷ The author offers an example of this logic on the transformation of European feudal societies during the first industrial revolution, and the subsequent emergence of socialism: “In breaking down the pre-capitalist framework of society, capitalism thus broke not only barriers that impeded its progress but also flying buttresses

this view, innovation –expressed in the creation of new markets, organisational methods or productive techniques- is constantly disrupting the economy, altering the general equilibrium taken for granted by neoclassical economics (Screpanti and Zamagni, 2005; Vaggi and Groenewegen, 2003). The logic of creative destruction is considered to be the core feature of capitalism, unravelling as an ‘organic process’ (Schumpeter, 1994: 84), thus inciting a succession of economic cycles linked to technological innovations . Against the Keynesian paradigm that defends an active role of the state in managing cycles and market disequilibrium, the Schumpeterian approach views “crises as a necessary evil, needed to stimulate the very vitality of capitalism” (Roncaglia, 2005: 416). This can be seen as a *laissez-faire* argument that was not precisely the view shared by actors in global governance in the 2010s; instead, they were more influenced by Neo-Schumpeterianism, a moderated version of the original argument.

For this perspective, state institutions and regulations are necessary to keep the creative potential of economic and technological change, but they should not curtail growth and innovation in any case. As Neo-Schumpeterian economists argue, “only a narrow corridor exists for a prolific development of socio-economic systems”, having uncontrolled growth on one side and downside regulation on the other (Hanusch and Pyka, 2007: 287). In terms of the future of work agenda, global governance recurrently addressed the fourth industrial revolution in terms of creative destruction, arguing for a new institutional model designed to exploit the positive ‘spillovers’ of that process. There were explicit signs of a common narrative on the digital transformation and its risks:

- The unintended consequences created by past waves of technological change trigger societal learning processes... which have been described by Schumpeter as a process of creative destruction (Nübler, 2016 from ILO)
- A process of creative destruction is under way, whereby certain tasks are either taken over by robots or offshored, and other, new ones, are created (OECD, 2019g: 14)
- Technological progress makes the jobs challenge more complex... The speed of these changes appears to be accelerating, intensifying creative destruction and the pace of labor market changes (World Bank, 2016b: 130)
- Transformative digital technologies are likely to generate positive spillovers... These impacts may be destructive when a digital technology replaces human labour (Sorgner, 2019: 1 from UNIDO)
- Joseph Schumpeter’s creative destruction – the process through which a new economic structure replaces the old one – is unfolding on a global scale (WTO, 2017: 14)
- We are talking about innovations and creative destructions that relinquish the old and make way for new to sustain the growth engine (Raju, 2016 from WEF)
- Technological advances offer prospects for higher productivity and stronger growth, but also bring with them risks of increased income polarization and a need to deal with the difficulties of adjustment (IMF, 2018: 6)

Apart from the shared notion of creative destruction, I will argue in the next sections that international agencies expressed convergent ideas about the role of the state and, more specifically, social and labour policy. The differences between international actors were more

that prevented its collapse... the capitalist process in much the same way in which it destroyed the institutional framework of feudal society also undermines its own” (Schumpeter, 1994: 139).

related to the *policy instruments* promoted by them than to the *paradigm* – Schumpeterianism- they used to make sense of this process.

The reasons for this convergence are both ideational and ideological. In relation to the former, it was noticeable that in practice researchers from these agencies tended to rely on ideas from the same international experts – a handful of mainstream labour economists from America and Europe¹⁰⁸. Textbook labour economics frames technological change in terms of creative destruction (e.g. Cahuc and Zylberberg, 2004), and the future of work debate in economics was substantially centred on this idea, on patterns of job creation and destruction associated to new technologies (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014; Frey and Osborne, 2013; Neufeind et al., 2018). A second factor that might explain the predominance of this ambivalent narrative had to do with the exclusion of ideologically radical positions that pointed exclusively to the creative or the destructive potential of these developments. For one, perspectives that interpreted digital innovations only in terms of ‘opportunities’ – a common discourse in international accounting firms (for instance Deloitte, 2017; Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2014)- were not really successful in international organisations. The threat posed by technological change, for example through the automation of work, would sound too loud in the international discourse to be ignored. On the other hand, positions focused on the destructive side were not considered seriously either. Arguments against the intensifying exploitation related to this wave of technologies, as in the World Federation Trade Union’s (2019) view, or predictions of a systemic crisis of capitalism associated to the displacement of human labour (Collins, 2013; Mann, 2013) remained unheard in that sense.

The role of the state in the future of work: the globalisation of the ‘Schumpeterian investment state’

International organisations stayed somewhere in the middle between a strict economic conception of the process that understands new risks as a ‘necessary evil’, and an approach concerned about its social implications, willing to restrain the spread of certain disruptive technologies. An example of the first view would be the defence of digital platforms made by international business, highlighting their contribution to job creation (IOE, 2017); a sample of the second can be found in calls for a ‘robot tax’ to constrained automation and redistributed their profitability at the same time (Freeman, 2015). In other words, neither Hayek and unbounded markets, nor Polanyi and embedded economies took the lead. Instead, the policy paradigm followed by the ILO, OECD, WB, and other relevant private organisations –the WEF in Davos, the IOE and the ITUC- was the social investment approach. The latter has often be understood in this context as a third way alternative between the orthodox neoliberal position and the social democratic perspectives that try to humanise global capitalism (Morel et al., 2011) – the spread of a third-way approach certainly reflects my previous point about the exclusion of orthodox perspectives in this consensus. The literature agrees that social investment had been an extended idea in the European Union since the Lisbon Strategy of 2000 (Cantillon, 2011; Jenson, 2017b; Kvist, 2013). However, my argument is that it had not become yet a *transnational policy paradigm* advocated by global actors to guide welfare reform in advanced and developing economies alike, not until the future of work agenda.

¹⁰⁸ As suggested by interviewees from the WTO, the OECD and the ILO, all of them working in research positions.

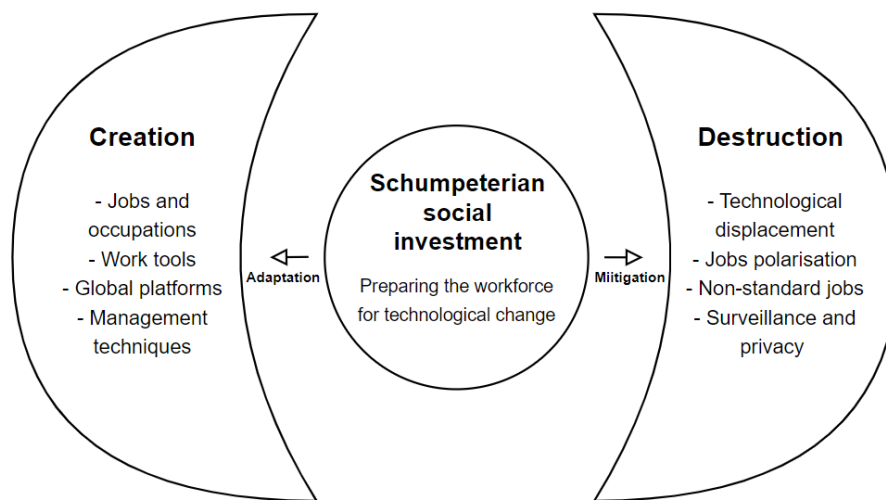
It is crucial at this point to have a clear idea of the theoretical core of this approach, which has been formulated in contrast with other welfare approaches in European social policy. The social investment paradigm, first, rests on a fundamental assumption about the productive value of social policy, against views that oppose efficiency and equity, which were particularly dominant before the 2000s (Morel et al., 2011). Second, the ‘investment’ dimension does not necessarily focus on social returns in the sense of neoclassical economics, as measurable outcomes (Nolan, 2013). The result of investing tends to be understood not only in relation to growth but also in a broader sense, emphasising aspects such as well-being, equity or social cohesion. A third element is a focus on enabling transitions, both in relation to life events (e.g. school-work) and various domains of social life (e.g. work-family), mainly under the assumption that economic productivity and opportunities are determined over the life course (Esping-Andersen, 2005). Fourth, derived from the previous point, the investment paradigm is associated the flexicurity model in social policy, i.e. the promotion of flexible arrangements in the labour market with social protection and activation measures for individual workers (Auer, 2010). This strategy would, in principle, reconcile the imperative of adaptation from business and the need for support in transitions and new risks (Greve, 2014). Thus, the social investment paradigm typically stipulates the following set of policies:

(1) easing the ‘flow’ of contemporary labour- market and life-course transitions; (2) raising and upkeeping the quality of the ‘stock’ of human capital and capabilities; and (3) maintaining strong minimum-income universal safety net ‘buffers’ for micro-level income protection and macro-economic stabilization (Hemerijck, 2018: 816–7)

The fifth feature, and maybe the most relevant for this study, is the fact that as a policy paradigm it does not have a defined group of advocates –that is, an interest group or party that supports it by default. This is why in the past decade scholars have suggested that it was a paradigm in need for mobilisation (Morel et al., 2012) and that it required a new political or economic crisis to gain influence in high politics (Hemerijck, 2015).

As I have suggested, the future of work agenda offered a most needed juncture to generate the rise of social investment in global governance, now imbricated with Schumpeterianism. The identification of a new set of risks associated to intelligent technologies, as well as the consensus about the negative implications of increasing inequalities after the Great Recession (Grimshaw, 2020), certainly catalysed this paradigm change, took forward precisely by the agencies I have studied in this research. Politically speaking, the key issue at stake in this shift had to do with the *role of the state* in a changing world of work. In a scenario of creative destruction, the Schumpeterian state “tries to promote permanent innovation and flexibility in relatively open economies” (Jessop, 2018: 354). The previous chapters have showed that the shared narrative in global governance in the 2010s was that the state had to *invest in people* to prepare them for the future, *adapting* social and labour policy to let out the creative side of the fourth industrial revolution –generating jobs and new tools of work and management, while creating a global talent pool through digital platforms. At the same time, the state was expected to invest in *mitigating* the new set of risks attached to this wave of innovations, namely technological unemployment due to automation, the polarisation of the jobs market, the rise in non-standard forms of employment and the spread of monitoring mechanisms and data analytics at work (Figure 13).

Figure 13: The Schumpeterian consensus in global governance: creative destruction and social investment



Source: Author

The Schumpeterian social investment state should not be confused with a similar notion developed in the literature: the Schumpeterian ‘workfare’ state, proposed in Britain by Bob Jessop to describe the turn from a Keynesian model oriented by internal demand and full employment towards a disciplinary, supply-side framework centred on the competitiveness of the economy. In the British experience under New Labour, the social investment state was understood as an ‘enabler’ (Giddens, 1998), emphasising the need to transition from passive social and employment security to an active welfare regime that would reduce ‘dependency’ (Lister, 2010). Granted, these arguments were also resonant in global social policy: social investment, especially in the 2000s, was associated to the rise of ‘inclusive liberalism’, and later in the 2010s was translated into investments in human capital and childcare in countries all over the world (see, for a review, Garritzmann et al., 2017). In international agencies, this third-way perspective was expressed in the OECD in support for active labour market policies and social benefits insofar they would not disincentive work (Mahon, 2011); in the WB it was translated into the promotion of poverty reduction strategies through conditional cash transfers (Porter and Craig, 2004; von Gliszczynski, 2015). Jane Jenson (2017a) has rightly suggested that the OECD and the WB presented two versions of the same approach, one for the Global North and another for the Global South, but they shared the same emphasis on the disciplinary role of the state and the advocacy of investing in children.

The ‘Schumpeterian investment state’ is fundamentally different from the workfare state (Table 16). First, it does not follow different policy prescriptions depending on the level of development of a given economy: it presents itself as a truly globalised state model, as universally applicable in a context of worldwide industrial transformation – and therefore, it has allowed actors to touch upon common issues, beyond the traditional distinction between agencies for the Global North and those for the South. The ILO national dialogues (2017b) and regional declarations on the future of work (ILO, 2015, 2016d, 2018e, 2019a) indicated, however, the limitations of such an one-size-fits-all approach, exposing many Southern

countries are concerned about the all-too-common problems of informality or internet access, not precisely about robots or algorithms.

Table 16: Models of Schumpeterian state in global social policy: two meanings of ‘investing in people’

Model	Schumpeterian workfare state	Schumpeterian investment state
Economic goal	Competitiveness in a knowledge-based economy	Adaptability in a changing world of work
Normative goal	Compensating losers from global market economy	Mitigating unequal implications of new technologies
Underlying processes	Post-industrialism Globalisation	Fourth industrial revolution Digitalisation
Type of activation	Disciplinary	Reskilling
Inclusiveness	Market participation	Universal social protection
Policies	Work-family balance Investing in children Make work pay Conditional cash transfers	Flexible security Investing in digital skills Decoupling benefits from employment Social dialogue
Approach to global social policy	Inclusive liberalism	Inclusive growth Human-centred

Source: Author, inspired by Jenson (2017a) and Jessop (2000)

Regardless, the adoption of a new state form was often depicted as an absolute requirement for technological change to take place, and not only by international agencies but also by renowned scholars:

Digitization and platformization require profound rethinking of 21st century welfare provision... requires to be structurally supported by a coordinated political response which must be transversal between different institutional arenas: labour market, skills development and welfare (Eichhorst et al., 2020: 28)

Markets alone cannot achieve the economic and societal transformation that will shape the new jobs and the nature of work people will aspire in the future... Managing the process of technological, social and economic transformation to shape the future of jobs requires a comprehensive strategy which involves the forging of a new social consensus on the way forward (Nübler, 2020: 200)

Second, whether the workfare state presented difficulties to integrate economic and normative objectives –as expressed in the institutional divide derived from the globalisation debate-, the Schumpeterian investment state has an explicit focus on both adaptability and mitigation, now in relation to technological change. The strategies promoted in that line are associated to reskilling, universality in social protection and providing benefits independent from employment status – I will be explain these in a moment. The third difference with respect to the Schumpeterian workfare state is the absence in the investment paradigm of the disciplinary objective that was so crucial in the former. Colin Crouch has pointed precisely

to this dissimilarity, stressing that activation is paramount in both models¹⁰⁹, but based on two separate strategies to approach it:

“the agenda of the social investment state includes active labour market policy, not in the sense of ‘workfare’, i.e., bullying unemployed people to take any job available, but in providing training and help with job search, perhaps with removal costs” (Crouch, 2013: 89)

Finally, the workfare and the investment perspectives have had different expressions in global social policy, the first being linked to inclusive liberalism, as I have mentioned, and the second to the human-centred and inclusive-growth approaches, which I have described thoroughly in previous chapters.

An additional distinction must be made in relation to contemporary scholarship on the politics of technological change. The Schumpeterian investment state that I am describing is a notion that goes against two trends that expanded in the 2010s. The first is the deregulatory approach to big tech companies, that authors have recently called ‘techfare’ (Bhagat and Phillips, 2021). States have been understood to provide ‘welfare’ for technological juggernauts like digital advertising companies, platforms or software producers basically by avoiding larger taxations on them, or monitoring their practices through new norms. Companies of this kind, of course, have payed significant amount to receive this ‘techfare’, for example through lobbying legislators (Culpepper and Thelen, 2020). The type of state I am describing is not compatible with techfare, insofar it opposes to a laissez-faire position on business practices that might affect workers and social cohesion –e.g. surveillance or false self-employment in on-site platform work. Secondly, the Schumpeterian investment state does not follow the ‘new spirit of digital capitalism’ advocated by Silicon Valley and tech entrepreneurs, as described by Nachtwey and Seidl (Nachtwey and Seidl, 2020). This ‘spirit’ frames technological innovations as a solution for social problems, therefore, it is at odds with Schumpeter’s idea of creative destruction, which highlights the troublesome side of innovation.

d. Policy expressions of the Schumpeterian consensus and varieties of social investment

Global problems and policy orientations derived from the future of work agenda

The Schumpeterian consensus not only rested on a shared conception of development and the role of the state in welfare provision, but also on noticeable similarities in the problem-definition aspect of the future of work agenda. The last chapters have demonstrated that, although the issues associated to emerging technologies were not always the same across the case studies, they certainly pointed to the same institutional dimensions that seemed to be in crisis, unable to respond adequately to the fourth industrial revolution. Broadly speaking, the areas in social and labour policy that were subject to scrutiny were social protection systems, the workforce’s skills, and social dialogue. Each of them would lead to the generation of new global agendas derived from the framing on the future of jobs. While those areas were

¹⁰⁹ Giulano Bonoli (2010) has suggested that this two types of activation have been understood differently in the literature: ‘negative’ or ‘liberal’ activation utilises benefits to push individuals into the labour market, while ‘positive’ or ‘Nordic’ activation provides skills and improves the workforce instead. This points precisely to the distinction between a workfare versus a social investment state.

represented as problematic, there was an implicit idea in the international discourse at the same time that *business is the agent of innovation*, not the state or workers' organisations. Profoundly inspired by Schumpeter's development concept centred on entrepreneurship, this notion implied that the policy-making should adapt the mentioned dimensions to let companies innovate without major frictions or impediments. Alternative proposals of a 'entrepreneurial state' (Mazzucato, 2018a) that could plan industrial development through digital innovations, or plainly forbidding technologies that would affect workers or public life (Freeman, 2015; P V. Moore, Akhtar, et al., 2018) were not considered as plausible by the Schumpeterian consensus.

The first area to be reformed according to international organisations were social security systems. Proposals in this direction, given the diversity of institutional arrangements in welfare models across countries (Abu Sharkh and Gough, 2010; Arts and Gelissen, 2002; Holliday, 2000; Pribble, 2011; Ratigan, 2017), were general and abstract principles, more than specific reform strategies. The ILO and the WB, despite their history of divergence to that regard (Stoll, 2018), in the late 2010s embraced universality and flexible security as the pillars of their social policy strategies for the future of work. I have mentioned already that in the past decade the ILO succeeded in spreading support on the idea of universal protection floors in global governance, WB included (Collombat, 2014; Deacon, 2013b; Zelenev, 2015), therefore universality was already on the table when the future of work agenda emerged. In any case, it was a relevant principle to argue for reform, given the severe coverage gaps that still existed in the Global South – leaving three quarters of the world population inadequately protected against basic risks (ILO, 2016c). Most crucially for this research, the factor that was univocally pointed as the cause of such state of affairs was *employment relations*: the rise in non-standard employment¹¹⁰ in the developed world, and the persistence of high informality rates in the South (ILO, 2017a; OECD, 2018b; Packard et al., 2019).

The previous diagnosis led international observers to criticise the 'traditional' or 'standard' employment relationship –which assumed the predominance of one-job careers and full-time, open-ended contracts-, as well as the subordination of social benefits to it. Instead of opposing to flexibilisation trends, now related to the digitalisation of the economy, multilateral agencies assumed that *the future of work was going to be flexible*, and therefore the institutional model had to be changed to accommodate it:

Changes in labour markets, including not only technological advances but also other developments such as the widespread participation of women in paid employment, merit reflection on whether the institutions created for an industrial age – when lifetime employment with a single employer was the expectation – need to be adapted for the twenty-first century (ILO, 2018c: 1)

Traditional provisions of social protection based on steady wage employment, clear definitions of employers and employees, and a fixed point of retirement are becoming increasingly obsolete. In developing countries, where informality is the norm, this model has been largely aspirational... Technology is changing how people work and the terms under which they work. Instead of the once standard long-term contracts, digital technologies are giving rise to more short-term work, often via online work platforms (World Bank, 2019b: 113)

¹¹⁰ Usually related to temporary or part-time employment, agency work, and jobs in the gig economy (International Labour Office, 2016a).

“Underlying these debates is a fear that the standard, full-time and dependent employment relationship is under pressure and that, in the future, many individuals will be working in “flexible” work arrangements with little employment and social protection, few benefits and rights, and limited access to training” (OECD, 2019g: 133)

The most evident implications of this shared ‘fears’ about the standard model of employment were the abandoning of the policy solutions advocated in the previous agenda in global labour policy about globalisation centred on precariousness and jobs formalisation, as described in the chapter 3 (see also Bernardis, 2017; Bhargava, 2006). In a word, the standardisation of work was not a primary goal anymore. On the opposite, the alternative explicitly supported by the OECD and the WB was the investment in flexicurity, which protects individual workers through universal benefits, not jobs (Keune and Serrano, 2014). In this view, employers should not be subject to conventional restrictions to hire and fire –e.g. employment protections or severance pay-, in order to let them rapidly adapt to business cycles and technological change:

Getting the basic business environment right for firms to invest and hire workers and reducing market failures hindering startups can similarly help capture the gains of technological change. The policy principle should not be to protect jobs that are becoming outdated and unproductive due to technological change but to protect people (as the Danish flexicurity approach to labor market exemplifies) (World Bank, 2018c: 3)

Policies need to strike the right balance between employment flexibility and stability. The challenge is to ensure that resources can be reallocated to more productive uses while providing a level of employment stability that fosters learning and innovation in the workplace (OECD, 2018a: 15)

The ILO did not explicitly supported detaching benefits from employment and the establishment non-contributory universal schemes for that purpose -being the main reason in the institution to oppose to a potential universal basic income that would benefit all citizens regardless of their job situation (Ortiz et al., 2018). However, the ILO narrative had the same focus as in other agencies about the need to manage transitions in an increasingly flexible world of work, alongside basic, universal access to social services and income security:

As the world of work undergoes profound and extensive changes, the effectiveness of future labour market institutions will depend on how they facilitate the myriad transitions and cushion the risks that workers will experience throughout their working lives... Regardless of the nature and origin of the risks, the best tool for smoothing labour market transitions is to have a workforce prepared for a full range of life contingencies (ILO, 2018c: 2)

The last point from the quote above leads us to the second policy pathway derived from the future of work agenda in global governance: the generalised support for educational reform to prepare youths and adults for rapidly changing labour markets. Investment in a lifelong conception of education, particularly a change from knowledge-centred learning towards the transmission of adaptable soft skills, became the mainstream position in international debates in the 2010s (Aoun, 2017; Mezied, 2016; Penpraser, 2018; Wilson, 2013). That decade, in a word, saw increasing support for subordinating educational institutions to labour

markets. The position of international actors was univocal in that sense: global think tanks advocated for a ‘reskilling revolution’ (World Economic Forum, 2018), or arguing that governments should “help workers develop skills best suited for the automation age”, focusing on “developing agility, resilience, and flexibility” (McKinsey Global Institute, 2017a: 18–9). Critical scholars resisted to that ‘educational fix’ (Peters et al., 2019), i.e. the idea that disruptions caused by technological innovations could be mitigated primarily through reforming this field, adapting its functioning for the needs of the private sector. Others pointed to the reductionism of an exclusively economic notion of education: “such narratives are built on a synthesis of neoclassical theories of human-capital investment and endogenous growth that now animate education policy and rhetoric” (Means, 2018: 139).

I have described in the last chapter how such theories informed in a substantial manner the OECD 2019 Skills Strategy and the WB Human Capital Project; the ILO Centenary Declaration showed a similar focus:

The ILO must direct its efforts to... pay particular attention to ensuring that education and training systems are responsive to labour market needs, taking into account the evolution of work (ILO, 2019b: 3)

Skills are an essential ingredient for human progress. As our societies and economies are increasingly shaped by new technologies and trends, getting skills policies right becomes even more critical for ensuring well-being and promoting growth that is inclusive and sustainable (OECD, 2019h: 3)

By improving their skills, health, knowledge, and resilience—their human capital—people can be more productive, flexible, and innovative. Investments in human capital have become more and more important as the nature of work has evolved in response to rapid technological change (World Bank, 2018d: 2)

Finally, a third agenda that must be mentioned had to do with social dialogue. There was a shared impression in the international community about a ‘broken’ social contract (ILO, 2016c; World Bank, 2019b), related to the fading influence of unions and the widening of the wage-productivity gap (OECD, 2018a). The truth is that, despite the pervasiveness of that discourse, global business and labour did not show the same level of commitment for class compromise. International business associations pushed for liberalising the institutions of work, as well as investment in skills development for an ‘adaptable workforce’ (BIAC, 2018; ILO and IOE, 2019; IOE, 2017). Global trade unions supported, on the contrary, the institution of new entitlements to let workers transition safely to a more flexible labour market (ITUC, 2017b), while focusing on the implications of new technologies for jobs quality (TUAC, 2018a). These contrasting strategies did not lead to joint initiatives, with the noticeable exception of the ILO Centenary Declaration that was approved by the social partners in 2019, but –this must be reminded- through several political disputes and clashes between them.

Three meanings of the ‘social’: varieties of social investment in global governance

Even though the cases I have analysed present a common paradigm on social and labour policy, with a shared definition of the problems of the future, the expectable differences between such agencies had to do with the policy instruments and the emphasis given to

certain issues. There was an agreement, I mentioned, about the importance of social investment to prepare people and companies for the ‘changing nature of work’. However, the meaning the ‘social’ element was not the same for each international actor; this leads us to the fundamental indeterminacy of this paradigm and its imperative of ‘investing in people’. I have explained before in this chapter, with the help of Kabeer (2015), that in the past the ‘social’ dimensions in global governance have been understood with reference to three levels: the human, the individual and the collective. The idea I want to put forward is that differences between major players in global labour policy in the late 2010s can be understood if we consider that the ILO, the OECD and the WB typically focused on a different ‘social’ dimension of the future of work: its human, individual and collective consequences. This meant that their advocacy for investing in the social had different policy implications, according to the way in which such notion was used in their discourse - Table 17 below unpacks more in detail this argument.

Table 17: Varieties of social investment in global governance as positions within the Schumpeterian consensus

Dimension	International Labour Organization (ILO)	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)	World Bank (WB)
Meaning of the social	Human	Collective	Individual
Key document	‘Work for a brighter future: Global Commission report’ (2019)	‘OECD Jobs Strategy: Good jobs for all in a changing world of work’ (2018)	‘World Development Report: The changing nature of work’ (2019)
Conceptual approach	Human-centred	Inclusive-growth	Inclusive-growth
Normative horizon	Decent work	Social cohesion	Equality of opportunities
Main source of conflict	Human versus machine	Capital versus labour	Technology versus education
Supported strategy	Investing in workers’ capabilities and social dialogue	Invest in employment and social protection	Invest in human capital and lifelong learning

Source: Author

The ‘varieties of social investment’ in global governance depicted above are ideal types (in the sense of Weber, 1949), i.e. the three actors supported the other’s perspectives, but with a distinct emphasis depending on their institutional mandate and agenda. The ILO position in Table 17 refers to the ‘human-centred’ agenda developed by ILO Office and the Global Commission for the Future of Work¹¹¹ (ILO, 2019g). Unlike other agencies, the ILO secretariat in that report highlighted the need to add a human component to automated production

¹¹¹ In other words, it does not allude to the approach from the ILO Centenary Declaration (ILO, 2019b) with its emphasis on skills development and the positive role of employers – closer to the WB understanding of the social in relation to individual capacities and entrepreneurship.

systems and decision-making mechanisms at work, proposing new rights to mediate the human-machine interaction (e.g. privacy rights or a universal labour guarantee). In this formulation, tripartite dialogue was the key dimension to invest in, especially in terms of developing a ‘human-in-command’ approach to algorithmic management (International Labour Office, 2019c). In that sense, the capital-labour relationship is seen as a resource to channel technological development, not as the main source of conflict of the future, thus going against the ILO’s traditional assumption on the conflictive nature of class relations (see Deacon, 2015).

The OECD, unexpectedly considering its recent history, took the position occupied by the ILO in past decades as the agency in global governance most concerned about economic inequality its implications. Issues like the increase of non-standard employment, the gap between productivity growth and wages, or labour market monopsony were central in the OECD framing of the future of work (OECD, 2018a, 2018b, 2019c, 2019g). These are collective dimensions: the functioning of the market and the institutions of work, which have a direct impact on the distribution of gains in society. Examples of that standpoint can be found in the OECD recommendations about platform work –correcting false self-employment through appropriate categorisation (OECD, 2019b)- and collective bargaining –promoting centralised systems to counter employers’ power (OECD, 2019f)-, which I have described thoroughly in the last chapter. The WB, lastly, focused on the social dimensions of the future of work in terms of individual challenges, both referred to workers and employers. Following a metaphor popularised in the economics literature about the ‘race between education and technology’ (Goldin and Katz, 2009), the Bank argued that countries were not building enough human capital, i.e. receiving enough access to education or health, thus eroding their future productivity as workers (World Bank, 2017, 2018d). In both developing and advanced economies, technology was also understood to change skills profiles, creating shortages for companies and justifying investment in adult learning from them and the public sector (World Bank, 2019b). Even though, as I have said before, this emphasis on skills was present in all international actors in the future of work agenda, it became *the* central focus of the WB.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the new logic of global labour policy, related to the emergence of a transnational policy paradigm –the Schumpeterian consensus. This approach conceptualises social and labour policy as an instrument for technological change and inclusive growth, focusing on adapting institutions and economic actors to the fourth industrial revolution, while mitigating the new set of risks associated to it. From a historical perspective, the generalised convergence in global governance around this paradigm has broken the logic of antagonism that divided institutions around economic concerns, on one side, and social dimensions, on the other. The scenario after the future of work agenda was instead divided between three substantive positions within the same social investment paradigm, presenting different emphases but centred on the same type of problems. I characterised the process that led to these developments in relation to two ‘Trojan horses’ that changed from within the two factions mentioned above. This has led to an unlikely partnership between the ILO and the OECD. The WB, on its part, has promoted ideas that would be considered radical by those two organisations –e.g. pentapartism or a basic income-, indicating how the lines that demarked these agencies’ positions in global governance blurred in the 2010s.

Conclusions of the study

Summary of the argument and contributions to the literature

This thesis has studied the development of the future of work agenda in global governance in the 2010s. It started with a general question about the engagement of the most influential international organisations in the field of global labour policy with this agenda – the ILO, the OECD and the WB. My research strategy consisted in a qualitative analysis of documents produced by these agencies in the context of this international agenda, consisting in statements, proceedings from high-level meetings, empirical studies and policy briefs. Such documents represented the way in which international agencies made sense of the future of work, determining the labour issues they found in technological change, as well as the policy solutions and new concepts they elaborated to tackle them. In parallel, I conducted interviews with officials and researchers from these organisations, gaining insights on the processes that characterised this agenda in the past decade. Based on the analysis of documents and interviews, I examined the multiple streams involved in each of these multilateral agencies (problems, policies and politics) in relation to their agendas on the future of work, looking at the same time how the latter incited institutional changes in each of them. I will now refer to the different stages of the study and how each of them contributed differently to the academic literature on global labour policy and the future of work.

The thesis began with the elaboration of a theoretical framework that combined elements from discursive institutionalism and multiple streams analysis to make sense of policy agendas. For this purpose, I recognised the value of MSA as a heuristic model to interpret the factors that influence the evolution of agendas. However, I also identified an explanatory deficit in this framework as it did not specify the causes behind the joining of the three streams. Therefore, I introduced discursive institutionalism and innovated through an original conception of the MSA framework. My argument was that the three streams are expressed through discourse –problems and policies are communicated through publications or statements, while politics takes place in coordinative spaces where actors interact and negotiate. From this reinterpretation of the framework, I chose to study multiple streams focusing on three mechanisms: uncertainty (that opens a policy window), communication (that exposes ideas) and coordination (that makes decisions on institutional courses of action). Additionally, from an agential point of view, my approach emphasised the role of powers, highlighting the role of entrepreneurs and decision-makers in influencing each of the streams. The resulting framework demonstrated to be useful for analysing institutional agendas and the dynamics derived from them –innovations, reforms or continuity.

The main research question asked about the ‘engagement’ of these institutions with the mentioned agenda as I argued that, before they focused on it, the future of work had already become a global social problem in the media, the academia and in international policy circuits. In that sense, chapter 3 started the empirical inquiry of the thesis by examining how the future of work was elevated as a global issue. I did so from a constructivist approach that focused on the main claims that structured the international discourse on the future of jobs, and the debates they generated in the academia, business consultancies and global think tanks. My analysis showed that the ‘future of work’ as a global issue was constructed primarily in relation to technological change, with a particular focus on the automation of jobs and the

implications of platform labour, digital surveillance and other innovations for social inequalities.

The contribution of the chapter, on the one hand, was to propose a constructivist reading of this agenda, in contrast to realist accounts that saw predictions about the future as existing trends. On the contrary, I demonstrated that key 'facts' in the debate about structural transformations in the world economy had been actually created by specific actors, leaving alternative framings aside at the same time. On the other hand, since global social policy studies are heavily focused on multilateral agencies (Deacon, 2007a; Kaasch and Martens, 2015; Niemann et al., 2021), my analysis highlighted the importance of other type of actors in global social governance –e.g. epistemic communities or think tanks- in defining global issues and, therefore, channelling social policy debates towards specific dimensions and not others. In this case, the relevance of the World Economic Forum (Schwab, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2017a), of academic researchers (e.g. Frey and Osborne, 2017) or futurists (e.g. Ford, 2015) in defining the terms of the discussion could not be overlooked.

Having examined the key aspects of the international debate on the future of jobs, in chapter 4 I turned my attention to the ILO case, which was marked by its Future of Work Initiative (2015-2019) in the context of the institution's centenary. The engagement of the ILO with the future of work agenda was similar to the involvement it had with the globalisation debates in the 2000s. The initiative included the formation of a Global Commission for the Future of Work, which defined the pillars of the novel 'human-centred approach'. My analysis scrutinised the multiple streams involved in the creation of this approach: the political disputes between the social partners; the positioning from regional blocs; the technical efforts from the ILO secretariat to promote new labour policies to address the issues of the future. The result was that the Global Commission's framework, supported by labour, failed to inform the ILO's tripartite instances. The chapter demonstrates that the original human-centred agenda –aimed to make technological change compatible with social justice and decent work- faced serious resistance from employers and right-wing governments at the ILO. Henceforth, the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work from 2019 presented a different approach, one closer to human capital formation than to human-centred values.

In relation to the literature, this chapter challenged the idea that this approach was a 'countermovement' (Novitz, 2020) or a novel focus on inequalities at the ILO (Grimshaw, 2020). Instead, while this agenda presented a policy window for institutionalising a new normative and cognitive framework for the future, it was redirected towards a pro-business discourse that was alien to the ILO previous to this agenda. The political implications of the later were that business gained substantial ideational power at the ILO. Whereas scholars have understood business at the ILO as a 'brake' for the Office's and labour's initiatives (Rodgers et al., 2009; Thomas and Turnbull, 2020), I showed conversely that they can play an active role in defining and orienting new policy approaches. The policy consequences were basically that key problems on technological innovations that were in need of new international regulations according to the ILO Office –e.g. work in digital platforms (Berg et al., 2018; ILO, 2017a)- were not addressed in the Centenary Declaration, reflecting the lack of consensus in the tripartite partners about them.

In chapter 5, the thesis presented a similar analysis of the WB and the OECD. I argued at first that these two institutions could be assessed in parallel, given their similarities. Their recent history had been marked by an orthodox liberal approach to labour regulation, but it had also been increasingly shaped by their recent inclusive growth agendas. Their trajectories were also determined by prevailing ideas in the economics profession. The chapter showed that economists at the WB set this topic in its agenda. My analysis of the WB case revealed that this institution had effectively experienced a significant policy shift in the context of the future of work agenda, towards an inclusive-growth perspective on social and labour policy. Scholarly analyses of these developments had been either partial, being made when the agenda was just starting (Mahon, 2019), or politicised, criticising the WB reports (Anner et al., 2019; Grimshaw, 2020). My empirically-driven study, in that sense, filled a gap in the literature. The World Development Reports (World Bank, 2016b, 2019b) and other documents described a future characterised by flexible labour markets, where workers needed of universal protections to avoid new risks. The WB 'Protecting all' strategy (Packard et al., 2019) and the Human Capital Project (World Bank, 2018d) reflected an institutional commitment with social investment, under the principles of flexible security. The ideational shift experienced in the WB had not been noticed as such by scholars, and this is a substantial contribution of the chapter.

The OECD case also presented signs of a relevant change in the institution's discourse. The inclusive growth notion, embraced decisively by the OECD Council in the mid-2010s, and the challenge to the liberal order posed by far-right populism internationally, made this institution has a stronger focus on inequality and social cohesion. The future of work agenda represented a policy window to update their Jobs Strategy, as well as its social policy and skills frameworks, in line with its renovated interest for inclusiveness. The chapter indicated the specific role of governments in OECD policy-making, being restricted to agenda-setting processes. The OECD secretariat was responsible for renewing the organisation's ideas through a novel convergence between DELSA and the Economics Department – who, until recently, scholars understood to be nonmatching actors at the OECD (Mahon, 2013; McBride and Merolli, 2013). The secretariat elaborated the 2018 Jobs Strategy 'Good jobs for all in a changing world of work', as well as influential reports on emerging labour trends linked to technological change, with the collaboration of the OECD social partners. The novel inclusive-growth approach to social and labour policy gave the institutions of work (collective bargaining, minimum wages, employment relations) a prominent role, representing a departure from the original orthodox narrative that characterised the previous Jobs Strategies. Scholars stressed that the new approach was still marked by neoliberalism, focusing exclusively on the 2018 Jobs Strategy (Janssen, 2019; McBride and Watson, 2019). My chapter, based on a deeper engagement with the large variety of documents and meetings that shaped this agenda, indicated the contrary, highlighting the ideational changes that the future of work was causing at the OECD.

In chapter 6 I analysed what I called the 'Schumpeterian consensus' and the new logic of global labour policy after the future of work agenda. It contains what I consider the main conceptual contribution of this study, given that it is not referred to specific actors or approaches, but to the very structure of global social policy. From previous paragraphs, it may be inferred that the implications of the future of work agenda for international organisations had not been dimensioned properly by the literature. This chapter indicates that argument

but now more decisively. The strong hypothesis I defended was that the conventional distinction between social and economic actors in global governance –ones privileging social justice and human development, and others focusing on growth and competitiveness- had been broken by the future of work agenda. I proposed that it was necessary to pass from ‘simple antagonism’ –focused on such binary divide- to ‘complex antagonism’, seeing that in international organisations there are inner conflicts that generate changes in their policy perspectives. In that line, I held that two ‘Trojan horses’ had undermined both positions: employers at the ILO had forced the institution to take a pro-business, more liberal turn, while the OECD had clearly abandoned its affinity for a deregulatory, pro-austerity position, thus leaving the position typically occupied by IFIs. The divide had been undermined from within, setting the ground for new positioning.

A wider consensus in global governance took place in the 2010s –not only between international agencies, but also in the academic sphere- on two ideas. The first was a conception of economic development as creative destruction, and an understanding of technology both as a productive factor and as a new source of risks. The second was the notion that the state had to mediate between both forces, thus adapting the workforce and institutions for technological development, while mitigating the problems they posed for economic actors. I called this transnational policy paradigm the ‘Schumpeterian consensus’, which was crucially linked to a social investment perspective in terms of policy ideas. The key message was that governments had to ‘invest in people’, but the actual meaning of that phrase varied according to each international actor. For the ILO’s human-centred approach – the one made by the Global Commission-, countries had to invest in people’s capabilities and in a human-in-command relation with technology (ILO, 2019h). For the OECD, the key was to invest in social dialogue and labour institutions to promote cohesion and counter increasing inequalities in the world of work (OECD, 2019g). For the WB, in turn, the main goal was to invest in human capital, thus increasing the productive potential of individuals and their capacity to adapt to the changing nature of work (World Bank, 2019b). These different arguments represented three ‘varieties of social investment’ within the global Schumpeterian consensus, one focused on the human, other on the social, and the third on individuals. Such a comparative analysis of emerging paradigms and changing positions in social and labour policy in global governance signified a relevant empirical and theoretical contribution to the field.

Limitations of the study

There are several aspects that could have been turned out differently, perhaps with positive results for this research. The limitations I have identified have to do with the timing of the study; its methodological strategy and; the case studies I have chosen. Firstly, the timing represented a drawback in the evolution of the project, given that I was studying an ongoing agenda at the time of analysing documents and conducting interviews (between 2018 and 2019). Since new developments were constantly appearing in relation to the international agencies I focused on, this forced a continuous reinterpretation of the data. The future of work agenda as such just ended past year, therefore it is likely that in the near future emerging processes in such organisations will change the meaning of my analysis here. For that reason, I am very cautious about suggesting that the institutional dynamics I have described are in any sense definitive: I have held in the thesis that international institutions

are adaptable (Béland and Orenstein, 2013), and therefore it is expectable to see substantial reconfigurations in light of new policy challenges.

A methodological limitation, prompted by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, was that I had initially planned to do extensive fieldwork at the OECD in Paris and the WB in Washington, DC. The idea was to stay for some weeks to navigate these institutions, as I did in the ILO case, and interview more people than I finally did from different units within them, gaining more first-hand insights about the fine points of the future of work agenda. The beginning of the pandemic forced me to re-evaluate my strategy, since travelling abroad was not permitted. Finally it consisted in selecting specific informants that played a crucial role in the development of the strategies and key documents of the WB and the OECD. The result was that, in the end, I got enough material from their publications and a reduced, but very informative number of online interviews. In any case, a deeper engagement with such agencies could have made the empirical analyses even more detailed and informed. I tried to coordinate more interviews from them through the Internet, but since the pandemic was occupying most of the time of my potential WB and OECD informants, I received some rejections and seemed forced to desist.

A third element that I can highlight was that I could have included additional organisations in the study. I mentioned in chapter 1 that other UN agencies were focusing part of their work on technological change and digital transformations, but I did not consider –at least from my outsider perspective- that they were going through an institutional change that deserved to be studied in detail. Perhaps that assumption was not totally based on evidence. Another type of actors that could have been added, and that indeed had a deep engagement with the future of work agenda, were Global Unions and other international business associations (different from the ILO and OECD social partners, which I indeed covered here). I have shown especially in chapter 4 that business and labour organisations were focused in the 2010s on the same type of debates regarding the employment consequences of new technologies. A study about this agenda in international and regional confederations, would have been an excellent contribution to the literature; nonetheless, it is an area that I could not cover for reasons of time and space. This takes me to the next and last point of the thesis.

Possibilities for future research

Having described my findings and limitations, I consider that further research on global labour governance could go mainly in two directions. The first of them is related to the policy transfer mechanisms the ILO, OECD and WB will display to make countries implement the recommendations these agencies developed in their future of work agendas. This research problem is intimately linked to the governance mechanisms that each of them possess, which I described in the first chapter. The WB ideas might well inspire decision-makers in national states, for example through the participation of the latter in policy-networks from the Human Capital Project. The most direct transfer method the WB has, nevertheless, is attaching policy reforms in their financial conditions. In that sense, it will be interesting to see whether the WB uses its mechanisms of financial pressure to spread their new policy frameworks. At the same time, the OECD utilises naming-and-shaming means to influence countries, evaluating countries through its frameworks on different policy fields. The effectiveness of the OECD in terms of the diffusion of its 2018 Jobs Strategy remains to be studied in detail. Lastly, the ILO

normally exercises pressure through Recommendations and Conventions, but in this agenda it generated a policy framework (the human-centred approach) and a Declaration instead. The capacity of the ILO to persuade member states to follow such guides for the future will also be a matter of further studies.

A second direction for future research has to do with the policy responses of these agencies with respect to the coronavirus pandemic. As we know, this global event has caused an immense shock in work and employment virtually everywhere. Therefore, it is expectable that the major players in global labour policy have engaged with its effects in terms of discourse – publishing reports and guidelines; organising meetings and strategies. The future of work agenda is the previous event they addressed, and therefore it would be logical to assume that the social policy frameworks that were developed in that context influenced the response given by these actors to the pandemic. In the next decade, I am certain that students of labour affairs and global institutions will examine the continuity of both agendas (future of work and coronavirus pandemic) to assess if the new scenario posed by the COVID-19 crisis forced a re-elaboration of social policy ideas in the most relevant actors of the field.

Annexes

Annex 1: Documents analysed from the ILO, OECD and WB respective future of work agendas (2013-2020)

A. Documents and statements produced by the ILO Office in the context of the Future of Work Initiative, including reports from the social partners, analysed for this study:

Author	Report	Year	Type of document
Goos, M	How the world of work is changing. A review of evidence	2013	Study
ILO & ACT-EMP	ILO Symposium for employers on the future of work		Proceedings
Wezel, K	Green shoots in the labour market. A cornucopia of social experiments		Study
ILO	The future of work centenary initiative	2015	Proceedings
Meda	The future of work: the meaning and value of work in Europe	2016	Study
Nubler	New technologies. A jobless future or a golden age of creation		Study
ILO	ASEAN in transformation. The future of jobs at risk of automation		Study
ILO	Social contract and the future of work		Brief
ILO	Building an inclusive future with decent work. Towards sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific		Report
Berg, J	Income security in the on-demand economy. Findings and policy lessons from a survey of crowdworkers		Study
Walwei, U	Digitalization and structural labour market problems. The case of Germany		Study
ILO	A challenging future for the employment relationship		Brief
ILO	The future of labour supply. Demographics, migration, unpaid labour		Brief
Ryder, G	Statement ILO-EESC Conference on the future of work		Statement
ILO	Technological changes and work in the future		Brief
ILO	Inception report for the Global Commission of the Future of Work		Report
Kucera, D	New automation technologies and job creation and destruction dynamics		2017
ILO	Gender dimensions of employment trends and future of work	Report	
Jayne, T et al	The future of work in African agriculture: trends and drivers of change	Study	
Salazar J	The future of work, employment and skills in Latin America and the Caribbean	Study	
ILO & Eurofond	Working anytime, anywhere. The effects on the world of work	Report	
ILO	Cooperation in a changing world of work. Towards a cooperative future	Brief	
ILO	The future of work we want. A global dialogue	Proceedings	
IOE	Understanding the future of work	Report	
ITUC	ITUC 2017 Global Poll	Report	
ITUC	The future of work	Report	
Balliester, T & Elsheikhi, A	The future of work. A literature review	2018	Study
Weber, E	Setting out for digital social security		Study
De Stefano, V	"Negotiating the algorithm": automation, artificial intelligence and labour protection		Study
ILO	Back to the Future. Challenges and opportunities for the future of work addressed in ILO sectoral meetings since 2010		Report

Author	Report	Year	Type of document
Chacaltana, J et al	New technologies and the transition to formality: the trend towards e-formality		Study
ILO	The impact of technology on the quality and quantity of jobs		Brief
Behrendt, C & Nguyen, Q A	Innovative approaches for ensuring universal social protection for the future of work		Study
ILO	Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work		Brief
ILO	Individuals, work and society		Brief
Ryder, G	Statement at the Annual Meeting of the WB and the IMF on the future of work		Statement
ILO	Job quality in the platform economy		Brief
ILO	New directions for the governance of work		Brief
ILO	New business models for inclusive growth		Brief
ILO	Skills policies and systems for a future workforce		Brief
ILO	Managing transitions over the life cycle		Brief
Montt, G et al	The future of work in a changing natural environment. Climate change, degradation and sustainability		Study
Carbonero, F et al	Robots worldwide. The impact of automation on employment and trade		Study
ILO	ILO expresses concern about World Bank report on future of work		Statement
ILO	Global Commission on Future of Work - Five things you need to know		Statement
Ortiz, I et al	Universal Basic Income proposals in light of ILO standards		Study
Moore, P	The threat of physical and psychosocial violence and harassment in digitalized work		Study
Ernst, E et al	The economics of artificial intelligence. Implications for the future of work		Study
ILO	Global value chains for an inclusive and sustainable future		Brief
ILO	Work for a brighter future. Global Commission of the future of work		Report
ILO	A quantum leap on gender equality for the future of work	Report	
Ryder, G	Correctly valuing the work of the future	Brief	
Ryder, G	Statement at the Annual Meeting of the WB and the IMF	Statement	
ILO	Skills for a greener future	Brief	
ILO	Lifelong learning: concepts, issues and actions	Report	
ILO & IOE	Changing business and opportunities for employers' and business organizations	Report	

Source: Author

B. Documents reflecting the perspectives and proposals made by governments at the ILO on the future of work:

Author	Title	Year	Type of document
ILO	The Bali Declaration. 16th Asia and the Pacific and Arab States regional meeting	2016	Statement
ILO	National dialogues on the future of work	2017	
ILO	The Istanbul Initiative for the centenary. Tenth European regional meeting		
ILO	Panama Declaration for the ILO centenary. The future of work in the Americas	2018	
ILO	Abidjan Declaration. Advancing social justice: shaping the future of work in Africa	2019	

Source: Author

C. Documents produced at the OECD referring to the future of work:

Year of publication	Author	Title	Type of document
2016	OECD	OECD Labour and Employment ministerial statement. Building more resilient and inclusive labour markets	Statement
	OECD	Automation and independent work in a digital economy	Policy brief
	OECD	The future of work policy forum. Issues paper	Statement
	Arntz, M et al	The risk of automation for jobs in OECD countries: a comparative analysis	Working paper
	Berger T et al	Structural transformation in the OECD. Digitalisation, de-industrialisation and the future of work	Working paper
	De Backer K et al	Reshoring: myth or reality?	Working paper
	Scarpetta, S	What future for work?	Article
2017	OECD	Basic income as a policy option	Policy brief
	OECD	OECD work on education and skills	Policy brief
	OECD	OECD Employment Outlook 2017	Book
	OECD	Future of work and skills	Policy brief
	OECD	Going digital: the future of work for women	Policy brief
	OECD	Draft reports on computers and the future of skills demand	Report
	OECD	Draft Summary Record: 130th Session of the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee (ELSAC)	Proceedings
	Breemersch, K et al	Labour market polarisation in advanced countries	Working paper
	Gurria, A	Opening remarks by OECD Secretary-General. High-Level Policy Forum on the New OECD Jobs Strategy	Statement
2018	OECD	Good jobs for all in a changing world of work. The OECD Jobs Strategy	Book
	OECD	Job creation and local economic development 2018: preparing for the future of work	Book
	OECD-ILO	Building Trust in a Changing World of Work. The Global Deal for Decent Work and Inclusive Growth Flagship Report 2018	Report
	OECD	Social Policy for Shared Prosperity: Embracing the Future. Statement of the 2018 OECD Ministerial Meeting on Social Policy	Statement
	OECD	OECD Science, Technology and Innovation Outlook 2018	Book
	OECD	OECD Employment Outlook 2018	Book
	OECD	Achieving inclusive growth in the face of digital transformation and the future of work. OECD report to G20 Finance Ministers	Report
	Andrews et al	Digital technology diffusion: a matter of capabilities, incentives or both?	Working paper
	De Backer K et al	Industrial robotics and the global organisation of production	Working paper
	Grundke, R et al	Which skills for the digital era? Returns to skills analysis	Working paper
Nedelkolska, L et al	Automation, skills use and training	Working paper	
2019	OECD	2019 Ministerial Council Statement. Harnessing Digital Transition for Sustainable Development: Opportunities and Challenges	Statement
	OECD	OECD Employment Outlook 2019. The future of work	Book
	OECD	OECD Skills Strategy 2019. Skills to shape a better future	Book

Year of publication	Author	Title	Type of document
	OECD	Negotiating our way up. Collective bargaining in a changing world of work	Book
	OECD	Individual Learning Accounts: Design is key for success	Policy brief
	OECD	An introduction to online platforms and their role in the digital transformation	Book
	OECD	Artificial intelligence in society	Book
	OECD	Going digital: shaping policies, improving lives	Book
	Gurria, A	Setting course for a human-centred AI	Statement
	Milanez, A	Taxation and the future of work	Working paper
	Salvatori, A et al	Job polarisation and the middle class	Working paper
2020	OECD	OECD Employment Outlook 2020. Worker security and the covid-19 crisis	Book
	OECD	OECD.AI Policy Observatory. A platform to share and shape AI policies	Report
	Crivellaro et al	Going national: implementing the OECD Jobs Strategy	Working paper
	Gurria, A	Global Deal Conference. Social dialogue for a better future of work. Opening remarks	Statement
	Pak, M et al	Implementing the OECD jobs strategy	Working paper
	Soto, D	Technology and the future of work in emerging economies: what is different?	Working paper

Source: Author

D. Documents produced at the WB referring to the future of work:

Year of publication	Author	Title	Type of document
2015	Eden, M et al	On the welfare implications of automation	Working paper
2016	WB	World Development Report 2016: Digital dividends	Book
	Maloney, W et al	Are automation and trade polarizing country labor markets too?	Working paper
	Cunningham W et al	Employer voices, employer demands, and implications for public skills development policy	Working paper
2017	Cunningham W et al	Vietnam's future jobs. Leveraging mega-trends for greater prosperity	Report
	WB	The future of work requires more, not less technology in developing countries	Brief
2018	WB	The Human Capital Project	Report
	WB	The future of work: race with –not against- the machine	Brief
	WB	Framing the future of work	Brief
	WB	Consultation for World Development Report 2019	Website
	WB	A multiplicity of skills is needed to succeed	Brief
	Kim J	The human capital gap. Getting governments to invest in people	Statement
	Kraay, A	Methodology for a World Bank Human Capital Index	Working paper
2019	WB	World Development Report 2019: The changing nature of work	Book

Year of publication	Author	Title	Type of document
	WB	Human Capital Project: year 1 progress report	Report
	WB	WB Africa Human Capital Plan	Report
	Artuc, E et al	Does automation in rich countries hurt developing ones? Evidence from the U.S. and Mexico	Working paper
	Choi, J	The future of work in Africa	Book
	Djankov, S et al	The changing nature of work	Paper
	Packard, T et al	Protecting all. Risk sharing for a diverse and diversifying world of work	Book
2020	WB	World Development Report 2020: Trading for development in the age of global value chains	Book
	WB	Jobs diagnostics: a step-by-step guide	Brief
	WB	Adapting jobs policies and programs in the face of accelerated technological change	Brief
	WB	Africa Human Capital Plan. Progress report, year one	Report
	Christiansen L et al	The future of work in agriculture - some reflections	Working paper
	Gentilini, U et al	Exploring universal basic income. A guide to navigating concepts, evidence, and practices	Book

Source: Author

Annex 2: Consent form for interviews¹¹²

A. Information about the research project

Research project title

Research investigator

About the project

In the context of a _____, this research examines the response that the global governance system has given to the emergence of the fourth industrial revolution. In that line, multilateral agencies have played an active role in organising initiatives and publishing reports to frame the future of work. The study examines the ideas and policy proposals that these organisations have put forward in the international policy debate, also looking at the internal processes that they have experienced to incorporate the future of jobs into their agendas. Therefore, it compares different approaches and initiatives led by multilateral actors in the last years, with a special focus on the International Labour Organization and the International Financial Institutions.

The project involves the analysis of reports and publications sponsored by such organisations, as well as interviews with researchers and officials related to them. The purpose of this interview is, thus, to delve into the agenda-setting process led by each institution concerning the future of work.

B. Interview consent form

Research participant's name: _____

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. You have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken from _____ require that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed and how the information contained in their interview will be used.

Would you sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- the interview will not be recorded. The interviewer will take notes during the conversation, which content is going to be accessed only by _____, the research investigator
- any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymised so that your name and professional position cannot be identified
- the actual notes will be deleted once the research project is finished (2021)
- any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval
- You will receive no payment for your participation. The data will not be used for commercial purposes.

C. Quotation agreement

With regards to being quoted, please initial next to any of the statements that you agree with:

<input type="checkbox"/>	I agree to be quoted directly.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I agree that, when quoted, my name or professional position appears in the publication

¹¹² Contact information and references to names or institutions have been erased for the sake of anonymity.

Part of the content of your interview may be used;

- In academic papers, policy papers or news articles
- Spoken presentations related to this research project
- In an archive of the project as noted above

By signing this form:

1. I confirm that I am voluntarily taking part in this project.
2. I agree with the usage of the interview content described above
3. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Participant's name

Participant's signature

Date

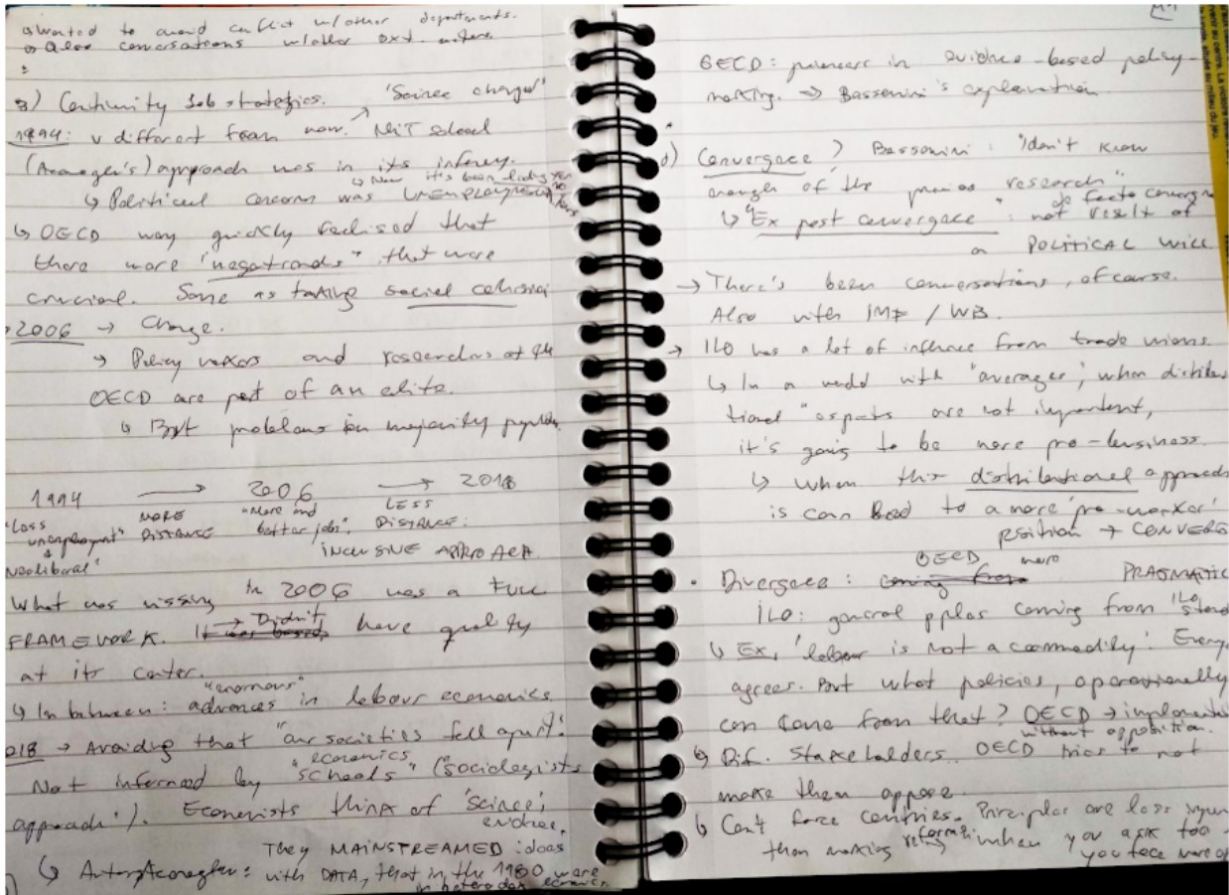
Researcher's signature

Date

Annex 3: Example of notes taken in interviews

This is a capture of my notebook for the interviews of the study, with comments and quotations from an OECD official. I took notes in all my conversations with personnel from international organisations for this study, sometimes paraphrasing, sometimes translating the exact lines or concepts expressed by my interviewees.

Notes from an interview taken by the researcher



Source: Author

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