



“COLLECTIVIZING” SERVICES: A NEW PARADIGMA?

FROM PRACTICES TO STRATEGIES FOR TRADE UNION RENEWAL

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DEFINING THE FIELD (1): WHY TRADE UNIONS SUPPLY SERVICES

❖ Several reasons

- As an expression of their original “service ethos”, derived from mutualistic traditions
- To strengthen workers’ position in the labour market
- As a response to the growing individualization of employment relations (neo-liberalization)
- To increase union membership (and raise funds)
- To extend their range of action and include unorganized workers

DEFINING THE FIELD (2): SERVICE SUPPLY AS “SERVICING” – A STRATEGIC CHOICE

ORGANIZING

(Alinsky 1946; Clowson 2003; Hurd et al. 2013; Simms et al. 2018)

- *To whom*: non-members
- *What*: empowerment, building social movements/coalitions
- *Why*: constructing “collectives” to strengthen union action
- *How*: campaigning
- *Where*: at the workplace



Participative unionism (workers as a “community”)



How to cope with the problem of free-riding?

SERVICING

(Jarley & Fiorito 1990; Boxall & Haynes 1997; Williams 1997)

- *To whom*: members and non-members
- *What*: individual support
- *Why*: giving “selective incentives”
- *How*: service supply
- *Where*: outside the workplace



Supply of individual goods (workers as “consumers/users”)



How to promote active participation?

DEFINING THE FIELD (3): WHY UNION SERVICES ARE WIDESPREAD IN SOME COUNTRIES

❖ Hard to say, depending on several factors

- State traditions in industrial relations
- Degree of development of the trade union movement
- Prevailing model of trade unionism (e.g., “class” union versus “occupational” union)
- Geographical spreading of local union headquarters
- State support to union action
- Degree and extension of employment protection

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS (1): DIFFERENT STRATEGIC APPROACHES

❖ The role of servicing

- BE: extensive supply of services for union members (life-cycle approach)
- DK: extensive supply of services for union members (targeted on occupational groups)
- IT: enlarging service supply through i) existing tools, ii) joint bodies, iii) innovative actions
- ES: limited supply of services (basic services)... due to organizational weakness
- LT: limited supply of services (basic services)... due to historical reasons (post-soviet transition)

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS (2): STRATEGIC CHOICES

❖ Organizational level

- Comprehensive strategic framework (at the country level) vs local political entrepreneurship
- Service supply as the core business vs service supply as a part or a residual/marginal activity
- Services as “gateways” vs synergy between services and other activities

❖ Target groups

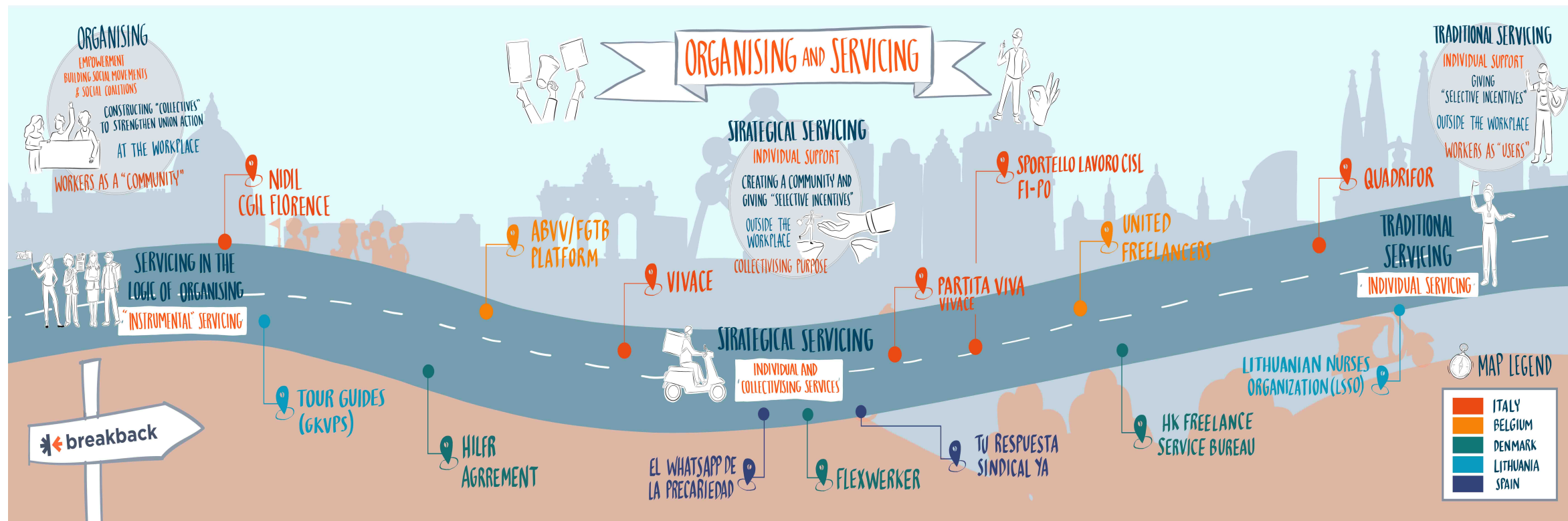
- Defining the meaning of “innovative” services: also, extending the range of union membership
- Self-employed, precarious or platform workers, unemployed persons

❖ Who pays for the services?

- When services are NOT traditional services, you have to be a member and/or pay a fee
- When they are addressed to those hard to reach, they are often free of charge (and do not require membership)

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS (2): STRATEGIC CHOICES

❖ Varieties of servicing



A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS (3): WHAT WORKERS WANT (DEMAND-SIDE)

- ❖ Individual services/protection, also representation, sometimes, collective identity
- ❖ Community-oriented demands do not necessarily imply being available to “mobilize” (volatile membership or membership with no participation/action)

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS (4): WHAT TRADE UNIONS DO (SUPPLY-SIDE)

- ❖ A strategy for legitimization (less for mobilization)
 - How the union is perceived by a specific group of workers (problem of “social identity” of the group)
 - How the group of workers is framed into the organization
- ❖ A strategy for raising membership?
 - Hard to say, but union membership deriving from services seems to be volatile membership
 - LT: professional workers
- ❖ Bridging the gap between trade unions and peripheral workers
- ❖ Organizational issues
 - Institutionalized services vs experimental initiatives (but also synergies between them)

AN OPEN QUESTION

❖ A complex picture: hybridization as the key?

