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**POLITICS AND ECONOMY: CORPORATIVISM AND
DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN THE FISHERMEN'S
CONFRARIES IN CATALONIA**

English versión from: "DEL CORPORATISMO DIRIGISTA AL PLURALISMO DEMOCRATICO:
las Cofradías de Pescadores en Cataluña

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this work is to reflect upon the corporate nature of the most characteristic organizations in the Catalan productive fishing sector. Specifically we propose to analyse the reasons for the survival in a context of democratic pluralism of such organizations as the Fishermen's Confreries. From outside the sector, the Confreries are frequently accused of being anachronistic, obsolete and antidemocratic; whereas within large sectors of the sector itself, they are considered to be the organizational formula which in both past and present has best dealt with, and best deals with, the organizational needs.

In order to carry out our proposal (analysis we will first give a brief description of the basic characteristics of the Catalan Confreries; then we will proceed to make an analysis of the ideological, political and social dimensions of corporativism, and of how this has been adapted to the specificities of the productive fishing sector. We will conclude by offering an explanatory hypothesis of the reasons for the Confreries' survival at the present time in Catalonia.

GENERAL TRAITS OF THE FISHERMEN'S CONFRERIES IN CATALONIA (SPAIN)

The Fishermen's Confreries are, at present, the most important organizations in the Catalan fishing sector. Formally they are public law organizations which have established an exclusive territorial area of authority, in which they represent the interests of the whole of the fishing sector, as well as acting as organs of consultation and of collaboration with the state administration.

According to current Spanish legislation, a public law /organization is a legal entity constituted by the grouping together of several physical persons with one common goal. This common goal must normally possess the character of a public utility; i.e. a particular convenience for the general welfare, and in our case is the successful management of sea-fishing carried out in Spanish territorial and international waters, a public medium.

The character of public law corporations entails for the Confreries special legal treatment: they can only be constituted or made to disappear by law, or by State administrative disposition; they can only be constituted in places where before none existed; they have their own legal capacity; and they depend directly upon the public administration.

The Confraries, as a consequence of being obliged to group together within the same organization all the people related with the extractive process of fishing, have endowed themselves with a vertical structure in which they represent, at the same time, the seamen, the boat-skippers, the craft-fishing small producers, and the owners of the more industrial types of vessels. This vertical structure, which by definition corresponds to a type of organization that is corporate in character, is opposed to the horizontal or pluralist structure characteristic of trade unions.

The Catalan Confraries are presently / currently governed -as are the rest of the Confraries in the State- by/according to the Central Government Decree of March 11th, 1978. This decree was the juridical instrument that should have made possible the transformation of the Confraries, adapting them to the new democratic order. However, one of the most significant facts of this decree is that, in it, paradoxically, the corporate character was maintained, although the possibility for the existence of free trade unions within the fishing sector, which until then had been prohibited, was created.

Later, the Catalan Confraries also became immersed in the process of autonomic de-centralization. As of September 1987, they depended upon the Government of the Generalitat de Catalonia (the autonomous Catalan government). Since then, the autonomous government has not issued any specific norms for regulating the actions of Confraries. Due to this, the Confraries have in general continued to be run along the lines of the norms applied formerly, which were applicable to the whole of the state.

According to the current norms, the Fishermen's Confraries in Catalonia act as organs of consultation and of collaboration with the State administration) in those subjects which are of general interest to the sector, with respect to both the extractive process and to marketing (Royal Decree 670/1978). Always within their respective exclusive territorial areas, the Confraries carry out their own functions or those delegated to them by the Administration, which are adjusted to the aims formally established in each Confraria's statutes and which may be resumed in the following points:

- to represent, defend and promote the social and economic interests of their associates.
- to use sources of credit (both their own funds and outside sources) in order to facilitate the acquisition of vessels and fishing gears by their associates.
- to promote the construction of houses and flats, buildings and installations for social welfare and health purposes for fishermen and their families? .

- to use the co-operative movement as an instrument through which to reach the objectives of the regulation and protection of the sector.
- to carry out the installation and exploitation of the necessary services which permit the carrying out of the productive process, regulating and controlling the operations of the sale of fish (first sale).

This group of objectives and functions already allows us to discern the corporatist profile of the Confraries. However, as we shall see shortly, the majority of these objectives and functions are currently nothing more than a framework of intentions, since the functions of a social and health-care nature are only exercised in a symbolic manner by certain Confraries; only the functions of a strictly economic and political nature are carried out by all of these.

This aforementioned group of objectives and functions merely bears witness to the historical process of the sector's organizations; first as organizations of a religious nature and concerned with social welfare, later as professional corporations, and finally as free associations, before being transformed into public law corporations.

It may come as no surprise that, in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, the dictatorship imposed over all the fishing sector a kind of organizations which would best fit in with its own nationalist-trade union ideology. It is in this context that we must contemplate the imposition of the Confraries as the only organizational form, linking them obligatorily with vertical trade unionism, as is stated in the "Orden" of 31st March, 1943:

"Article 7). -In this way... the Confraries, as subject to the political line of the movement, under the command of the C.N.S. and the Sindicato Vertical de la Pesca (Vertical Fishing Union)... will give continuity to the seafaring and fishing tradition, {but} united henceforth to the new order of the National Trade Union Revolution."

The welfare functions of the primitive *Gremios* (Guilds), historically had had their *raison d'être* when the incipient States had not as yet developed structures which allowed them to intervene directly in the social and economic life of the sector. It was the *Gremios* that took on, amongst others, the mutual benefit (private health insurance), welfare and charity functions. It was only with the consolidation of the structures of the modern State that these welfare and charity functions were duly assumed by the State.

By imposing upon the Confraries the character of public law, the State institutionalized its intervention in the sector, while at the same time maintaining the welfare and mutual benefit aspects of the earlier organizations; now, however, with political mediation.

At present, the welfare and mutual benefit functions carried out by the Fishermen's Confraries of Catalonia are only residual, when they are not merely testimonial. The State, with specific institutions such as the Instituto Social de la Marina Marine Social Institute) (I.S.M.), gradually took away from the Confraries, in the typical manner of benefactor states, the traditional role of benefit-welfare providers. Due to this, these organizations have now completely left behind this "social" side of their character and have passed on to fulfilling exclusively the functions of an economic and political nature.

The functions of an economic nature, such as providing all necessary installations and auxiliary sub-structural elements for the smooth running of the fishing industry, as well as marketing and administration, are accompanied by important functions of a political nature. These are manifest on two levels: first, in the collaboration between the interests of the State and those of the sector, as well as in the reciprocal representation of the interests of both of these; and secondly, in the solving

of the conflicts which arise within the sector. The Confraries, acting as mediators, play a decisive role in the process of conflict solving.

The majority of the 30 Catalan Confraries have their own auxiliary sub-structures and services, whose purpose it is to facilitate the carrying out of the productive fishing process for the members of the Confraria. This is a question both of installations and of equipment, such as ice-making factories, storehouses, refrigerating chambers, net-drying facilities, weighing scales, boxes, hygiene services, fuel supplies, sales of spare parts, fishing equipment, and general supplies, tannoy systems, etc. (Alegret, 1987). However, the most important auxiliary service which almost all Catalan Confraries offer is within the area of the marketing of the product, by taking on the management of the wholesale vending of the daily catch through the organization of the fish auctions.

In organizing the auctions, the Confraries guarantee the direct producers a certain protection, ensuring each producer's right to participate, and the continuity of demand, a perennial and general problem among fishermen everywhere. In the auctions the daily catches are sold off using the Dutch auction system (where the asking price is gradually lowered until a buyer is found). In this way each productive unit is assured of a sales outlet for his produce, by carrying out the operation under the auspices of the Confraries, which act as mediators between buyers and sellers. It is from this service that the Confraries obtain their financing, since they retain a percentage (which oscillates between 0,5 and 3% of the total monies involved in the operations carried out) from both seller and buyer. The concession of the right to organize the auctions in the quayside fish-markets is awarded by the State.

The power to award these concessions currently resides with the *Generalitat de Catalunya*, and more specifically to the *Direcció General de Ports i Costes* (General Direction of Ports and Coasts), which means that these rights are not reserved exclusively for the Confraries, although currently no exploitation rights for Catalan quayside fish markets are held by any other organizations other than the Confraries.

The final block of tasks carried out by the Confraries are the administrative services related to the economic management of the daily sales, as well as the fiscal obligations that this economic movement generates. It is a question of all the accounting and management work produced by the sales in the auctions, retention for the payment of I.V.A. (VAT), social security premiums, credits, buying of stores and spare parts, materials, etc., which the Confraries normally carry out, acting as management administrators in the interests of each productive unit and of each producer.

CORPORATIONS AND CORPORATIVISM.

The historical dimension of corporativism.

Throughout history, corporativism has taken on different forms. Thus, we can speak of the existence of four types of corporativism: the ancient guilds' corporativism, traditional or anti-revolutionary corporativism, state-controlled fascist-orientated corporativism, and technocratic corporativism or neo-corporativism.

The *ancient guilds' corporativism*, is that which impregnated the system of guilds or corporations until the dawning of the industrial revolution. The dismantling of the corporativist apparatus was begun in Europe parallel to the Industrial Revolution. Le Chapelier's law in 1799 provided the starting point for this process, which did not reach Spain until 1861, with the law of dissolution of the guilds.

Traditional or anti-revolutionary corporativism is that which was born with the Industrial Revolution as a protest against capitalist enterprise. Without doubt the social agent most involved in the expansion

of this anti-revolutionary discourse was the Catholic Church. In the view of Catholicism, the liberal principles of formal equality and of individualism were squashing the individual (Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 1892).

The point of view adopted by the Pope was that both the capitalists and the workers could themselves contribute towards the solving of “The problem of the workers” by creating ordered institutions, which would offer opportune help in cases of necessity and would bring together and unite these two different classes. Leo XIII himself made the specific proposal, in proposing the Arts and Crafts Trades Corporations as the institutions, which could best carry out this work. It must be briefly pointed out here, however, that this proposal places the role of the corporations in opposition to the role of the State, making them reassume the traditional role which they had played in the age of the guilds, but now in order to “water down” the intensity of the class struggle and to “humanize” the savage capitalism of the last century.

However, the most successful re-elaboration of the guild and traditional corporatist propositions was brought about by fascism through state-controlled corporativism. For this ideological and political movement, corporations are institutional instruments, which, under the State’s protection, have as their principal mission to exercise complete, and unitary discipline over the productive forces. Thus, with the advent of fascism the corporations became institutions subordinate to, and organically linked to, the State.

Finally, in current times, we have seen the rise of a new kind of corporativism; namely, *technocratic corporativism or neo-corporativism*, which is the kind of corporativism best adapted to the development of modern societies, through which the right of decision-making is reserved for elites of technicians or of high-ranking civil servants. Neo-corporativism appears as a reformulation of the former principles of State-controlled corporativism although maintaining the same principal objective: to eliminate, if not to avoid, open and violent conflict between the different groups of interests, negotiating the divergences between these different groups, while the State reserves for itself the roles not only of judge, but also that of interested party. In this way the harmonization of interests is transformed into the new ethos of the corporative society (Solé, 1985:14).

The political and ideological dimension of corporativism

In western political tradition corporativism is a *system of representation of professional interests* (Schmitter, 1974), for which reason the totality of the members of a specific sector are organized into a limited number of functionally differentiated and ordered categories. The categories are established through the relative position that each member of the said sector occupies within the productive process. In this way the confluence in one single organization of the interests of “Capital” (economic or business category) and the interests of “Work” (social or labour part) is achieved.

In corporations, the affiliation of members is usually involuntary and non-competitive in nature. Non voluntary since all members linked to the sector acquire that status of corporate members with specific privileges and obligations) only when they become fishermen in activ. Non-competitive because it is the corporation’s own internal structure which is responsible for lessening competition by establishing a system of equal participation in the organs of management with the single aim of representing the interests of the sector in general.

From another political perspective, corporativism is an *institutional form of agreement in the face of the interests of associatively organized groups in the heart of the civil society and in the heart of the decision-making structures of the State* (Schmitter, 1979:9). In this way it is understood that one of the principal characteristics of the corporations is that they must be recognized and authorized by the State,

which is what determines not only their possible existence but also their structure and functioning. The counterbalancing element to such a close, organic link between the corporations and the State structures is normally the awarding by the State to the corporation of the monopoly for representation in the respective sector.

On a strictly ideological level, corporativism has been seen as one of the possible reactions against individualism and competitiveness that are characteristic of the emergence and domination of the capitalist type of social relations of production. At the same time corporativism has been seen as a reaction against social conflicts between classes, which are the inescapable product of this kind of development (Panich, 1979:119). In this way the harmony between classes, and organic unity (social cohesiveness based on differentiation, exchange and thus mutual dependence) become essential for society, which sees the corporativist ideology as the only road by which these things can be achieved.

If corporativism as an ideology has a long tradition, which dates back to the medieval guilds, the modern version of corporativism has its roots in the social and political thought of the mid-nineteenth century. Corporativism is a doctrine that preaches the organization of collectives in associations representative of the interests of professional activities (corporations). The objective of this doctrine is to achieve the neutralization of the conflictive elements, such as competition, on the economic level, the struggle between classes, on the social level, and ideological differentiation, on the political level, through the organic solidarity of the specific interests of each separate group and of the formulas of collaboration which may derive from it. Therefore, for some authors, corporativism in its liberal version must be seen as a system of mediation and intermediation of interests, which is set up as a barrier against pluralism (Schmitter, 1979:9-13).

THE CORPORATE CHARACTER OF THE CATALAN CONFRARIES

Contrary to what is commonly believed, the Fishermen's Confraries, as we have known them for five decades, are not, nor have they been, an organization that has always existed in the Catalan fishing sector. The Confraries became public law corporations only when this was imposed upon them by the dictatorship in 1943. Before this, the fishing sector had had different organizational structures according to each historical period. First, in mediaeval times, the Confraries existed as religious Brotherhoods dedicated to the service of saints, but also, to a certain extent, concerned with welfare. Later the guild corporations, which generally took the name of Guilds of Sailors and Fishermen, were the only type of fishing sector organizations existing from the end of the Middle Ages until their dissolution half way through the nineteenth century. From this time until the beginning of the dictatorial period, a whole series of sectorial organizations developed, such as the Mutualidades (Mutual benefit societies), the Montepíos (charitable funds for dependents, friendly societies), the Pósitos (associations or co-operatives), the Co-operatives, the Ligas (Leagues), the Hermandades (Brotherhoods), the Sociedades Marítimas (Maritime Societies), the Sindicatos (Trade Unions), etc.

The corporativist character of the present Confraries is imposed upon them by the fact that they are public law corporations. For this reason, the Confraries carry out functions of representation, collaboration and mediation of interests on different levels. The principal link of collaboration and representation of the Confraries is that which they establish with the State, becoming, in this way, the institutional organ of consultation and collaboration which the administration has in the fishing sector, in matters such as: the drawing up of the census list of producers and vessels, the compiling of statistics of catches and sales, the awarding of home ports to vessels, the collection of taxes, the control of the marketing process, etc. Furthermore, the Confraries act as the institutional channel

through which the demands and claims of the sector are transmitted to the State administration, generating in this way a political-representative framework which supercedes the strictly local ambit.

The other great area in which the Confraries are fundamental as mediators between the interests of the State and those of the sector is in organizing and regulating access to resources. Each Confraria undertakes the regulation and control of the access to resources for each of the different fleets operating within the territorial limits of their jurisdiction. According to the kind of fleets operating - craft-fishing, trawling, or purse-seiner- each Confraria establishes for each of these fleets the timetable for port entry and exit, the possible close-season periods, and stipulates the complete set of specific norms for the area under its jurisdiction, including the specific zones of fishing activity for each type of fleet in accordance with the geographical, ecological, historical and social peculiarities of each place.

Concerning the function of the Confraries as mediators, the most important factor is that they provide a social and legal arena wherein the majority of the conflicts that arise within the sector can be solved, without having to resort to other institutions. The internal structure of the governing bodies of the Confraries is determined by law, as is the size and composition of their organs of representation, and the electoral process for the occupation of posts within these organizations. These governing bodies and organs of representation are the Junta General (General Committee), the Comisión Permanente or Cabildo (Permanent Commission or Council) and the Patrón Mayor* .

Given the corporate nature of the Confraries, all the entities existing in the sector are obligatorily given representation, without distinction of class. However, within the organs of government and representation a distinction is made between what is denominated the economic part (shipowners/owners of the means of production) and the social part (sailors/those who sell their labour). In this way, the interests of both groups are formally and equally represented in each governing body within the Confraria.

Both the Junta General and the Cabildo are organs which receive an equal representation from both the “economic” and the “social” parts. However, neither the Junta nor the Cabildo act as mediating organs, since they limit themselves to complying with functions of representation and deliberation. In this context the mediating figure *par excellence* is the Patrón Mayor, who acts as a “good man and true” in the solving of the majority of conflicts which arise within the sector, giving in this way continuity to the Mediterranean tradition of the Catalan “prohomens” or French “prohudomies” (literally, “outstanding men or citizens, men of experience and integrity”) (Tempier, 1985).

This formally egalitarian structure of the organs of government and representation is not only a reflection of the corporatist character of these organizations, but also fulfils the ideological function typical of all state-controlled corporatism, which is to disguise the reality of the sector by representing the Confraries as organizations in which internal differences do not exist and where both parts are moved by a common interest. In this sense, the analysis of conflictual dynamics in the sector shows us how ideology acquires an important role, which forces us to make more than merely a strictly structural analysis.

These conflictual dynamics manifest themselves on three levels. First, there is the conflict between capital and workforce. As we have said, an attempt is made to control and direct this conflict through the maintaining of a kind of formally egalitarian representation / participation between the “economic” part and the “social” part. The second level is that which opposes the forms of

* Translator’s note: Literally: Master Skipper. He is the figure of singlemost authority, the real leader of each Confraria. The term comes from the idea that he is now “at the helm” of the Confraria, although the individual in question could formerly have been a seaman, skipper, owner, etc. It does not necessarily mean that he used to be a seafaring man.

organization of industrial and craft production, which, within the Confraries is shown in the opposition between fleets. The third level of conflict is that which is produced between the State administrations (Central Government, Autonomous Community, and recently the EC) and the fishing sector in general, which is seen primarily in problems of regulation and of control of access to resources, marketing and financing policies, restructuring of fleets, fuel prices, subsidies, etc.

As has been previously pointed out, the role of the State has been decisive in relation to the emergence of certain forms of corporativism, and it comes as no surprise therefore that in the fishing sector, on a worldwide scale, the origin of certain corporate-type organizations is to be found precisely in direct State intervention. This is the case of the “Colonias de Pescadores brasileñas” (Leitao, 1986), the “Cooperativas de pesca mexicanas” (Lobato, 1982; Petterson, 1980), the Norwegian Fishermen’s Unions stemming from the Main Agreement of 1964 (Hallenstvedt, 1986), or the Spanish Fishermen’s Confraries themselves, created by decree under the dictatorship in 1943 (Alegret, 1987, 1996a, 1996b).

SOME EXPLANATORY HYPOTHESES OF THE SURVIVAL OF CORPORATIVISM IN THE CATALAN FISHING SECTOR

The first hypothesis we propose in order to explain the survival of the corporatist system in the Catalan fishing sector is based on the specificities of the productive fishing process.

The “public” or “common interest” nature of the marine medium (Gordon, 1954) and consequently of the resources to be exploited, has been one of the elements which historically has pushed the State into intervention in the sector, presenting its intervention as a necessary form of collaboration or co-management (Jentoft, 1989). This has led to the development of a kind of institution that will make possible this intervention, and the organizations that have best adjusted, historically, to these necessities of the State are those of a corporate kind.

The necessary collaboration or co-management between the State and the sector’s organizations has had and still has several justifications. The first and most extensive of these is that which makes reference to the juridical character of maritime space. The history of law shows us how the sea has been considered, since the time of Roman Law, to be common property, justifying the presence of an authority which would protect and regulate this status by investing power in a type of organizations which, organically linked to the State, were the only ones with competence in the area -a different trait from what a corporation is- in order, in this way, to be able to maintain the status of fishing resources as common property.

On the other hand, the premise that the sea is common property also induces one to consider the intervention of the State as a necessary process of the co-management of common interests. The interests of the state in maintaining its “dominium” -not only in an economic sense but also politically and geo-strategically- over the area of the littoral (Luchinni, 1977), and the interests of the producers in maintaining free access to these resources, impeding privatisation of maritime space.

Another of the justifications, which are put forward as arguments in order to establish this necessary co-management between State and producers, is that which concerns the hypothetical predatory nature of the fishermen. Traditionally, fishermen have been considered to act as predators, always willing to exhaust the resources. This image is an attempt to justify the intervention of an agent which regulates the activity as the only way of achieving the necessary balance. This is the position adopted by a large number of the economists devoted to the study of fishing activity and which is resumed perfectly in the phrase “The Tragedy of the Commons”. This is the title of the article

written by Hardin in 1968, and the article that established the basis of what from then onwards would be known as the bio-economic model of management of marine resources. However, this image of the producers as lacking in mechanisms of self-regulation in their productive process, which implicitly justifies State intervention, has been proven erroneous, since historically the communities and/or the organizations of fishermen have developed a set of mechanisms for self-regulation concerning resources (Durrenberger, 1987), with the objective of guaranteeing the survival of these resources.

The final aspect which justifies the necessary co-management between the State and the social agents in the fishing sector is that which concerns the incapability of the sector to exercise direct and exhaustive control over the extractive process. This is due mainly to the spatial-temporal characteristics in which sea fishing is carried out, and is what would explain the necessary delegation of competence by the State to organizations with the aim of ensuring a certain level of regulation of access to resources, of fishing effort, of the growth of the fleets and of the people who dedicate themselves to this productive activity.

In this way, the juridical statute of the sea, the behaviour of the producers, and the complexity of the control of the extractive process, have been the elements that have been used in order to explain and justify the existence of mutual and necessary collaboration between the State and the fishing organizations in the Catalan fishing sector. This collaboration, which has been presented as a necessary form of co-management, has been consolidated into the kind of corporate institutions best suited to each historical period. In other words, it is as if this necessary co-management has created the different forms of corporativism (Giner, 1983:39), and will maintain them, as long as the political and economic conditions and those of capitalist development that generated them still exist. Thus, we can say that corporativism in the Catalan fishing sector exists and will exist as long as the model of capitalist exploitation of the small mercantile production type is maintained (Jaeger, 1972). This model has been predominant up to now in a context of residual economy such as is the fishing of the littoral waters in Catalonia.

Having reached this point it is significant to remind ourselves that within the primary productive sector in Catalonia, the littoral fishing sub-sector is the only one in which a direct intervention on behalf of the State -at present represented by the Autonomous Government- is maintained in the associative life of its members, since the character of Public Law Corporations of the Fishermen's Confraries has not yet been abolished, contrary to what has already happened to the corresponding organizational bodies in the agricultural sector -the "Cámaras Agrarias"- which have already lost this juridical status.

A second explanatory hypothesis of the current survival of the Confraries would be that which concerns the political role which these organizations play within the sector. According to this, the survival of the Confraries would be explained by the role they carry out as mediators or as intermediaries, since they concentrate, in one single representative structure, the generally opposed interests of the diverse collectives (shipowners/seamen, craft-fishing fleet/industrial fleet), and offer the real possibility of self-regulation of conflicts without having to appeal turn to authorities alien to the sector. It is only possible that this happens in this way given the vertical character of these organizations, which *obligatorily must represent all collectives*. This form of representation, characteristic of corporativism as a system of representation of interests and as an ideology, is opposed, by definition, to the horizontal model followed by the trade unions. Therefore, we may state that the corporativism of the Confraries acts formally in opposition to pluralism, as indicated by Schmitter (1974) and Solé (1985). Thus, these corporate organizations become the ideal "locus" in which to seek and find solutions to the conflicts that arise.

On the other hand, this tendency to restrict the search for solutions to within the sector itself would explain the maintaining of this type of representative structures, which, if indeed they are not formally pluralist, do possess mechanisms of mediation which act towards reinforcing the ideology of participation for all the collectives involved. These mechanisms are the figure of the Patrón Mayor, who acts as “good man and true” and mediator *par excellence*, and the *Cabildo* or *Junta* of the Confraria, which are the organs of government and management which try to represent the interests of both capital and workforce, as well as the interests of the diverse fleets. At this point it is necessary to underline the fact that, despite the legal possibility, in a system of democratic pluralism such as the Catalan society of our times, of the existence of other forms of organization which could represent the interests of capital and of workforce, such as the shipowners’ associations and the trade unions respectively, these organizations either do not exist, or where they exist only have a very restricted presence, or only act sporadically, without proposing at any time an alternative to the Confraries. It is precisely in this centripetal tendency of conflictual dynamics to which reference was made earlier where explanations should be sought to the weak implantation of the unions in the sector, above all since these were given authority to coexist with the Confraries in 1978.

CONCLUSIONS

The corporate character which the Catalan Confraries still maintain today must be explained from a double perspective: on one hand, from the perspective of the history of the Catalan fishing sector itself -which is as yet unwritten- which has unfolded in a Mediterranean context, with long and dense organizational experience, but with relative poverty of resources. Thus, the coastal towns have developed, and still maintain, organizational forms in accordance with both these factors. At the same time, however, these two factors have pushed the State into gradually reformulating its intervention, bearing in mind these specificities of the sector. On the other hand, from a political-economic perspective, the organizational dynamics of the Catalan fishing sector have always had to respond to a type of organizational needs special to the type of productive units which do not fit perfectly the capitalist model, which has brought them closer strategically to the State in order to find protection in the face of the progressive attempt to impose social production relationships of the capitalist type.

From both perspectives, the corporatist model of organization has shown itself to be the one that was most adequate for the sector’s heterogeneous set of interests, and we believe that it will continue to be so for as long as the conditions described earlier are maintained.

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