Alternative channels of political influence

So far, we have examined three dimensions of institutional embeddedness separately: in Chapter 12 integration into the welfare state (pension coverage), in Chapter 13 integration into intermediary institutions (union membership) and in Chapter 14 integration into political citizenship (nationality and electoral participation). However, following T. H. Marshall we have argued that these different dimensions all reflect aspects of a common concept – namely citizenship, understood as a means of assuring a degree of economic security independent of market forces. Whether the welfare state, the union movement or parliamentary democracy, the common denominator of these institutions is to confer rights to individuals and, thus, to limit the degree of inequality generated by the labour market (Crouch, 1999: 423). Yet it has been shown in Chapters 12 to 14 that the degree to which different classes are embedded in these institutions varies substantially. Moreover, disadvantage with respect to institutional embeddedness may be cumulative: individuals not covered by the pension system may also be excluded from political citizenship and lack an efficient union at the workplace. In contrast, it appears possible that missing integration with respect to one dimension of citizenship may be compensated by coverage with another dimension of citizenship. Thus, individuals not having the right to vote may possibly make up for the lack of direct political influence by using industrial and social rights. Accordingly, the task of this chapter is to simultaneously explore coverage with political, industrial and social rights.

We will start out by examining the link between political and industrial citizenship. These two dimensions are more intertwined than may appear at first glance. Through the institutionalization of interest coordination between employers’ associations, organized labour and the state, unions have come to play an important role in public policy making in most Western European countries. There is ample evidence that in Germany, Switzerland
and, most clearly so, in Sweden, the neo-corporatist administrative arena has become an alternative channel of political power alongside the traditional parliamentary arena (Crouch, 1993, 1999; Blom-Hansen, 2000). Hence, in Sweden and, to a lesser extent, in Germany and Switzerland, trade unions share directly in the administration of public affairs. On the micro-sociological level, this signifies that foreign workers may possibly compensate for the lack of formal political citizenship through union adherence and industrial codetermination. Accordingly, it has been argued that the distinction between industrial and political rights is problematic as trade unions and work councils have come to constitute important vehicles for participation in politics (Soysal, 1994). The link between industrial participation and political influence is most clearly acknowledged in Austria, where foreign citizens may take part in elections for work councils, but are ineligible for the position of shop steward (Soysal, 1994: 128). Against this background, we wish to examine whether foreign workers succeed in compensating for the lack of formal political citizenship through union adherence.

Labour organizations’ stands towards immigrant workers have undergone various changes during the post-war period. Initially, unions were sceptical towards immigration for fear that an ever increasing labour supply would prevent wages from rising. Yet once the transition from a temporary labour migration system to permanent immigration had become manifest in the 1970s, unions began to adapt to the new situation and try to organize as many foreign workers as possible (Castles, 1986; Penninx and Roosblad, 2000). Among strategies developed were the forced enrolment of immigrant workers at arrival as in Sweden (Knocke, 2000) or the creation of parallel structures for immigrants within the union organization as in Switzerland.

In Figure 15.1, we compare membership rates between national and foreign workers for the three countries for which information about nationality is available. Results show that unionization of foreign workers has met with varying success. Most successful by far has been the Swedish labour movement. Although immigrants are somewhat less likely to be organized than Swedes, differences are small. Almost four out of five foreign workers are union members in Sweden. There is a larger gap in Germany and, above all, Switzerland where foreign workers’ membership rates lie clearly below those of nationals. In these two countries, only 26 (Germany) and 18 per cent (Switzerland) of foreign wage-earners adhere to a trade union or a professional association as compared to 30 and 26 per cent of national wage-earners. Interestingly, gender intervenes as a further substantive factor: while both German and Swiss men are better integrated in unions than their male immigrant colleagues, union density among foreign men is higher than among native women. The lowest share of union members are found in the weakest category on the labour market, female immigrant workers. Hence, in Germany and Switzerland, we find little evidence of industrial citizenship compensating for formal political rights. The discrep-