

EURO-DEM: Workplace democracy: a European ideal? : discourses and practices about the democratization of work after 1945.

Subproject 4: Workplace democracy – The contradiction between discourses and practices from 1975 to 2000

Objective:

Analyse the **contradiction** between **discourses and concepts** on workplace democracy within the scientific discipline of industrial and labour sociology as well as in trade unions and the **experiences of actors on plant level** in Germany between **1975 and 2000**.

Focus on **automotive industry** (e.g. VW, General Motors/Opel, BMW, Mercedes-Benz)

Single case study on **Germany**

Methodology:

- Literature review (especially SOFI G ttingen, ISF M nchen, WZB Berlin)
- Archive research (e.g. IG Metall dep. automation/company policy, WSI, Hans-B ckler-Foundation)
- Expert interviews with members of works councils and workforce as well as representatives from science and trade unions (oral history)

Thesis:

Despite developments of increased streamlining, outsourcing, deregulation, dissolution of boundaries in the 1980/90s, many influential researchers still adhered to the **idea of automation as a path to human-centred and democratic organisation and design of work**.

The discourse around humanisation of work of the 1970s was continued into the following decades and many developments were analysed from that perspective.

"The realisation of how boring we sociologists are, has kept us preoccupied throughout the project, as well as the surprising insight that there are people who do not care about written words at all – both have been disillusioning but healing insights." Friedrich Wetzl (1982), "Einige Anmerkungen zum Verh ltnis der Industriepsychologie zum Programm 'Humanisierung des Arbeitslebens', in: Soziale Welt, 33 (3/4), Nomos, Pp. 294-302; p. 296.

Following up on that:

- Thinking outside the lines** of scientific tradition is often not well esteemed.
- Academic disciplines remained to themselves mostly and focused on **single perspectives** – even though that is changing nowadays.
- Proximity to the 'real' world**, to subjects of research, to society's issues is often **frowned upon** within academia.



Research questions:

1. What were the key topics and theses of the main academic and trade union-led discourse on workplace democracy during the 1970s until 2000?

- To what extent has the research and action programme Humanisation of Work changed the democratic quality of labour and the scientific discourse?
- Which theoretical perceptions on new production technologies and group work were dominant in the academic discourse?
- What vision was created by science?
- Which institutions and academic positions had the strongest influence on organisations of interest?

2. Which economic and labour policy developments can be observed during that period of time?

- To what extent have the new technologies and concepts been established in the way foreseen by science?
- Which measures of organisational and labour policy restructuring could be observed?
- How did new technologies as well as measures of restructuring affect democratic structures?

3. How can the gaps between discourse and practice be explained?

- How and why did divergent perspectives of science and working world develop?
- How can the different perspectives be brought together?
- What does a favourable institutional framework look like that enables workplace democracy in the working world?
- How can workplace democracy be strengthened and established if there are tensions even in favourable contexts such as the German one? Which role do human actors, politics, trade unions, legal framework etc. play?
- Were there similar gaps between talk and action in other Western European countries such as Sweden, France, or Great Britain?

Talk

Action

Methodological issue?

How can scientists examine the issues that concern actors of the working world **while guaranteeing scientific standards**?

How can scientists capture relevant topics **without adopting the actors' normative positions**?

