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Workplace health and safety committees in Romania. The gap between law and reality**

Abstract

In order to increase the workplace health and safety, the EU Directive 89/391/CEE and the Romanian law 319 of 2006 introduced the principle of the balanced participation of the employer and employees in health and safety committees. The findings of the in-depth interviews with members of two committees and employees from two Romanian companies show that the workplace health and safety committees with balanced participation of the employers and employees are organizations that do not respect the letter and the spirit of the EU and the Romanian laws. Moreover, workplace health and safety committees do not fit well with the employees and employers' attitudes, values and knowledge. Thus, based on research findings, some recommendations can be developed so that these committees function according to regulations.

Keywords: workplace health and safety committee; balance participation; in-depth interview.

1. Introduction

Workplace health and safety committees (WHSC) correspond to the EU policies on the awareness and improving the social dialogue on health and safety at work. This issue is one of the most important areas that EU policies address in the field of social protection which concern employment, as well. In this regard, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work has as main objective to make common labour market safer, healthier and more productive. This agency is concerned about raising the awareness on the importance of worker's health and safety at work, about developing a culture of prevention and improving the partnership between employees, employers, governments and EU bodies. These three major goals correspond to the EU Directive 89/391/CEE on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work. This directive "contains general principles concerning the prevention of occupational risks, the protection of safety and health, the elimination of risk and accident factors, the informing, consultation, balanced participation in accordance with national laws and/or practices and training of workers and their representatives, as well as general guidelines for the implementation of the said principles" (Art. 1). As a member state, Romania should respect the *acquis communautaire* and the rules regard-

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ing health and safety at work, as well. In order to fully transpose the *acquis communautaire* in the area of workplace health and safety, in 2006, one year before Romania's accession to the European Union, law 319 of July 4th 2006 on workplace health and safety was passed. Also in 2006, law 307 on fire prevention was passed together with a series of Government Decisions on the employee's workplace health and safety against specific hazards.

Maybe the most important novelty brought by law 319 of 2006 is that it introduces the principle of the balanced participation of the employer and employees in the workplace health and safety-related issues. Actually, article 18 in the law reiterates almost word by word article 11 in the 89/391/CEE directive, which states that employers shall consult workers and / or their representatives regarding safety and health at work. The balanced participation is realized through the WHSC that is an institution with equal numbers of employers and employees' representatives. The members of the WHSC should have a minimum level of training in work safety, that is, they should have graduated at least a science high-school or a technical high-school and a 40-hour training course on workplace health and safety. Therefore, if within the company there are no workers with this kind of training, then, the WHSC cannot exist, even if, according to the law, the presence of this institution is compulsory for companies with more than 50 employees.

The WHSC gathers at least quarterly, and the time dedicated to its activity is clearly specified and is considered as working hours. The WHSC responsibilities are mainly consulting and monitoring, as it does not have decision power. Thus, according to article 67 of the enforcement norms of law 319/2006, the WHSC "analyses", "follows", "proposes", "debates", or "performs checks". The WHSC is a place where the representatives of employees and employers meet and discuss the balance participation issues regarding health and safety at work. Therefore, the WHSC is active and efficient if there is a high level of awareness among employees and employers regarding health and safety at work, employees are active in order to elect their representatives in the committee, and if employers respect the employees' rights to be trained and to participate in the committee activities during the working hours.

The WHSC is not a completely new institution in Romania. The history of WHSC starts during the communist regime, with the "safety technical commissions". But, if in the communist regime, the safety technical commissions were rather focused on identifying technical solutions to solve safety-related issues, in the law 319/2006, the focus moves onto social dialogue between employers and employees in order to assess the situation and propose solutions to the existing workplace health and safety issues.

The involvement of unions in the activity of workplace health and safety committees has decreased in time. The safety technical commission in communism was supposedly supported by the union. Also, it was made up of delegations of mass and popular organizations in the company. The rules of the application of the law 319/2006 solely mention the employees' representatives without referring to unions.

Does this change of perspective, based on the *acquis communautaire*, have an impact in the real world? If we consider Eurostat data, Romania is still one of the EU member states with high level of deadly work accidents and severe work accidents per 100000 employees (Eurostat, 2006). The activity of the WHSC should diminish the number of psychically and physically affected employees within the job. Therefore it is very important to know how the WHSC operates in order to offer solutions to improve its activity. Another question that needs to be answered is what the role of the unions regarding health and safety issues should be. Therefore the paper focuses on the communication between employees, committee and union.

2. Employee participation, trade unions and the committees

Balance participation in the WHSC means that workers' and employers' representatives, in equal number, analyse and propose solution regarding workplace health and security issues. The WHSC is a democratically elected body place where employees' representatives discuss with the employer's representatives any suitable topic from small issues, like the necessity of using crash-helmet, to the big issues, such as long time strategy of the company that has a health and safety dimension. Therefore, the employees may be consulted or they can participate in the decision process, either in what regards minor issues or even in discussing major issues. Carole Pateman (1970), analyzing the relationship between democracy and participation, considers that we can find "full", "partial" or "pseudo" participation, and there is a "depth" and a "width" of this kind of involvement. The intensity of participation of the workforce in decision at all levels of organization is underlined also by Mick Marchington (2005), who talks about "degree", "scope" and "level" of participation. A qualitative distinction regarding the role of the employee in the company decision is stressed by Hyman and Mason (1995) that make a distinction between *employee participation* and *employee involvement*. The first concept refers to "state initiatives which promote the collective rights of employees to be represented in organizational decision-making, or to the consequence of the efforts of employees themselves to establish collective representation in corporate decisions, possibly in the face of the employer resistance" (Hyman & Mason, 1995, p. 21). If employee participation supposes an inconsistent interest between employees and employers, employee involvement refers to practices and policies that emanate from management that provide employees with the opportunity to influence the decision-making on matters that affect them. Therefore, in the Hyman and Mason (1995) point of view, the difference between these two concepts consists in the quality and the quantity of the relationship between employers and employees.

The industrial relationship has been subject to change in the last decades, therefore we can talk about a *transformation* of the employee participation:

"Where participation used to be based on the mutual recognition of a social compromise between two parties with different interests, it has evolved into a participation based on the mutual recognition of the company's needs and aims. Participation is thus no longer constructed as a means for promoting individual or collective wage earners' interests, but as a contribution to the success of the company and of the individual on the premises of the company" (Busck et. al., 2010, p. 286).

Thus we can say that employee participation is when the employer yields the power of decision, voluntary or obliged by law, to employees or their representatives.

The employee influence could be direct, when individual, groups or general meetings take part in decisions, or indirect by (elected) representatives such as WHSC' members. According to the Romanian law 319/2006, employees' representatives in the WHSC are elected for two years by employees among the employees' representatives with specific workplace health and safety responsibilities, namely the employees that have minimum training in the health and safety issues.

Taking into consideration the *acquis communautaire*, the Romanian laws, the literature regarding employees' participation, the first research question of this paper is:

RQ1. How do employees participate in the WHSC?

Except for trade union movements, there is no tradition in Romania of workplace democracy. Thus, one can expect to find a blurry distinction between trade union role in workplace health and safety and employees representatives in the WHSC. As I mentioned, before the law 319/2006, union members were forced by law to be part of the WHSC. Thus a WHSC cannot have any the workers' representative who is a union member.

The role of the unions has changed in the last decades. Researchers stress the fact that we are witnessing the reassessment of the traditional industrial action (Bogg, 2012), which can take place by the decentralization of collective bargaining (Ilsøe, 2012), a process whose broader impact is the change of the welfare state (Trampusch, 2010). The modification in occupational structure and the social composition of the labour force across the world in the last decades has caused difficulty for unions to recruit workers (Watson, 2008, p. 293). Moreover, as Michael Barry and Adrian Wilkinson (2011) stress, the employers' desire for more decentralized and deregulated systems of industrial relations, influenced both the ideologies and the laws. Therefore, in the last years, unions and the employers' associations "became unfashionable as neo-liberal inspired rhetoric came to dominate public policy debates surrounding industrial relations in the 1980s, and as employers sought a range of «flexibilities» as they confronted uncertain and more competitive economic conditions" (Barry & Wilkinson, 2011, p. 155). Chris Howell (2012) has a similar perspective that mentions that nowadays states are becoming more interventionist in restructuring the labour market in the interests of a post-Fordist flexibility.

Beyond occupational structure, social composition of the labour force and the ideologies change, the globalisation and the harsh economical competition create huge pressures on the labour market, because capital can move to another country with a lower-priced labour force. Beyond bigger salaries, high standards regarding workplace health and security issues raise the cost of the labour force. Within the EU, this kind of social dumping is tackled by the *acquis communautaire* that meets the problem only within the community, member states being in the position to deal with the competition with the cheaper labour force from export-oriented East-Asian economies. In the last years, the economic crisis has put a higher pressure on labour force and trade unions have been threatened by the spectre of unemployment and plants moving to other countries.

Beyond the challenges that unions face, the findings of a survey realised in UK show that "where trade unions have an input into health and safety committees and where there are representatives are to be preferred to those where there is no such trade union input or no representatives" (Nichols et al., 2007, p. 211). Similar results were obtained in a research realized by Andrew M. Robinson and Clive Smallman (2013) who emphasize that the WHSCs will become more effective when the union membership is stronger. Employee participation is associated with lower levels of injuries, and the level of participation positively correlates with the extent of trade union membership in the workplace.

The present Romanian laws do not mention any role of the trade unions in the WHSC, but there is not any incompatibility in being a committee member and a union member. The balanced participation of the employees' representations and the employers' representation within the WHSC is a new way of social dialogue that corresponds to a new kind of employee participation. This participation corresponds to a democratic workplace where the union from the legal point of view does not have a role to play. Taking into consideration the weak-

ening of the trade unions and the positive relationship between trade union implication and the decreasing in the number of work injuries we arrive at a second RQ:

RQ2: What is the role of the union in the committee?

The answers to the research questions will be used to offer solutions for the committees to operate better. The employee participation will be analyzed taking into consideration the communication between employees, employees' representatives in the WHSC, employer's representative in the WHSC, and trade union.

3. Methodology

In order to assess the activity of WHSC so as to offer solutions to improve their activity, I carried out two case studies on two Romanian companies operating in petro chemistry. In order to reach this goal, I conducted in-depth interviews with the members of the two WHSC (both employees' and employers' representatives), with employees who are not members of these committees and a top manager of one of the companies, hereunder called company A, an interview which was not recorded at his request. I did not succeed in having an interview with a management representative of company B, as an important event for the company took place, during the time I have conducted the interviews.

Company A is one of the largest Romanian producers of agriculture fertilizers. It was established in 1969, and after the fall of the communist regime a period of ups and downs followed. It was privatized in 1995 and closed down in two periods: September 1997 – June 1999 and November 2006 – September 2008. During communism, the company employed 2500 – 2700 people, and currently less than 800 people are employed. For the nearby town whose population is approximately 50 000 the company is an important source of jobs. Company B is one of the largest companies in south-east Europe specializing in crude oil, liquid oil and petrochemical products handling for import/export and transit. Company B has a long history, operating since 1898 under various names. The company employs more than 1300 people and is situated in one of the largest cities in Romania.

It was difficult to find companies that accept that their WHSCs should be evaluated. In this endeavour I was helped by Romanian trade unions involved in the research project (see the endnote). The two companies from the study are similar from the point of view of size (both are large companies), history (both with a long history, one even older than 100 years) and high risks for the employees and environment (an explosion may destroy the city they operate in). An important difference is that one is a private stock-based company, whilst the other one is state-owned.

As I mentioned, the goals of the interviews with representatives of the two companies were to assess the effectiveness of the WHSC, focusing on the communication between committee members, employees, union, and employer. The ultimate goal is to offer solutions for strengthening the organizational and operational capacity of WHSCs.

Each quotation will be accompanied by the subject's general data: the company he/she works for and his/her role in the company (employee, committee member on behalf of the employees or the employer, committee secretary). If the quotation includes the opinion of the interviewer, he will be expressed as VF and the interviewee as S.

Except for the management representative of Company A, there were no refusals that interviews should be recorded on a tape-recorder. There were moments when some interviewees stated “I’ve already said too much” or “I can’t say”, but they occurred whenever the dialogue was rather open, critical, without trying to smooth reality, as it happened mainly during the interviews with the secretaries of workplace health and safety committees.

4. Findings

WHSCs need to carry out their activity, in the context of the evolution of workplace health and safety, changes in the law, the difficulty to survive in the economic area (especially for company A), the decrease of living standards and the lack of jobs. As it results from the interviews conducted in both companies, WHSCs exist at formal level, but only in company B does the committee act close to the spirit and letter of the law. Some employees’ representatives in the WHSC of the Company A, asked about how they perceived the activity of the committee, answered ‘from the book’ using clichés:

“I find the activity good. It is welcome. Positive” (Company A, employees’ representative in the WHSC no 1).

However, when asked about what he does when he has any proposal regarding important changes in the company with effects on safety, the same WHSC member states that he does not use the committee, but addresses the management directly:

“S: Yes. In this case, I write a report and submit it to the management. And action is taken as regards workplace health and safety.

V.F.: But have you met in the committee recently?

S: Yes, we have. But it was not anything special, it was a discussion to the point” (Company A, employees’ representative in the WHSC no 1).

As it results from the previous quotation, the interviewee has a desirable answer as regards the WHSC meetings, which, according to the law, should take place on a quarterly basis, at least. But since he does not have the answer to a possible question related to the committee meetings, he adds that it was rather a vague discussion, not focused on a clear point. Actually, in company A no meeting took place exclusively on topics related to the activity of the WHSC. The reason is the committee members are very busy and it is difficult for all of them to attend the quarterly meetings:

“It is very difficult to gather the people. You saw that today. Each has a responsibility in an area and it is very difficult... we can never gather them all.” (Company A, secretary in the WHSC).

The WHSC is legally gathered if half plus one are present and decides with at least two thirds of the present members. Therefore, the issue is not that of the all members attending, but their majority.

Moreover, the WHSC was supposed to operate before the publication of law 319 of 2006. The application norms of this law did nothing but clarify specific aspects in the activity of

the committee, as specified in the General safety norms associated to law 90 of 1996. Asked when the WHSC had been set-up, the secretary of the committee in Company A stated that this happened after the appearance of law 319 of 2006.

Finally, we can say that there is a difference as regards the way WHSCs operate in the two companies. In contrast with company A, in company B, the WHSC exists not only formally, because the law requires the establishment of such an institution, but it is active, the committee members debate issues related to workplace health and safety in the meetings they hold on a quarterly basis. A common element of the two companies is the fact that some of the employees are not aware of the committee, let alone their rights and duties to get involved by assessing and making proposals for the improvement of the workplace health and safety status. Most employees interviewed did not know about the WHSC. In order to find out how many know of this committee, a survey should be carried out.

Three conclusions regarding the communication between the employees and the committee resulted from the discussion we had with the interviewees in the two companies. According to the interviews carried out with people in company A, employees should not come up with complaints or proposals to the committee or the company management as they are not to skip hierarchical steps. Secondly, the employees do not have the knowledge required to make proposals aiming at the installation performance. Finally, the employees' requests are perceived by some interviewees as not associated with proposals of solutions and/or assumption of responsibility.

An employer's representative in the WHSC of company A considers that the role of the committee is to mediate the relationship between the employees and the company management. The employees' requests may only refer to work conditions or hygiene materials and not technological aspects, and the hierarchy must be respected "army-style":

"We, too, have some competence levels. An employee cannot just say this is done like that, because he doesn't know. He says what he needs at his level. So you take it in steps. From the level of the technical manager who knows it. Well, you need to do this and that. Or he claims, fights for money to refurbish something worth millions of dollars or Euros. But at shop-floor level, there are issues that may very well be solved not necessarily by the manager, [but] by the shift leader, the line manager, the supervisor like me, and then the technical manager. This is our hierarchy – Army-style." (Company A, employees' representative in the WHSC no 2).

It is natural for some issues requiring fast remediation to be solved at the level of line managers. Solving numerous issues cannot be postponed until the quarterly meeting of the workplace health and safety committee. Such delay could lead to accidents or the interruption of the company activity. But one of the WHSC's duties is to analyze requests formulated by employees as regards working conditions and the way in which appointed people and / or the outsourced service carry out their duties. Also, the WHSC analyses the employees' proposals regarding the prevention of work accidents and occupational illnesses. The employees, regardless of the position in the hierarchy, are entitled to make proposals to improve the workplace health and safety state. Subsequently, the issue is not limited to finding solutions to technical and / or safety problems, but to the employees and management's attitudes towards common accountability and social dialogue on workplace health and safety between the two parties.

The employees' demands are associated with those of the union, which, according to a manager and the committee secretary of company A does nothing but request rights, and do

not develop solutions or assume responsibility for specific decisions. The interviewee in the management of company A (without being tape recorded) associated workplace health and safety committee with something old and with unions' demands. The workplace health and safety committee should not be associated with a no-stake game, in which the employees and their representatives demand and the employers answer their demands. As an employee in company A stated about the open attitude of the management: "I think they, too, want to receive good ideas, so as not to have headaches. Eventually, they may not like having such deficiencies."

Related to the employees' demands, the committee secretary of company A replies ironically:

"S: Let them use the same structure like the one in the union. When it is about the union, they only have rights and no responsibilities.

V.F.: But the committee is something which belongs both to the employer and employees.

S: Yes. And then they show up very quickly. Whenever you ask their opinion, if it's good, it's good, if not, they run away from responsibilities." (Company A, secretary in the WHSC).

Even though questioned about the communication between employees and the WHSC, an employees' representative in company B answers by referring to communication in the hierarchical structure of the company.

"At least from my point of view, communication is excellent between the employees and the plant management and between the plant management and the company management. Whenever we had the opportunity and some managers had the time, we were never turned down regardless of who was managing the company." (Company B, employees' representative in the WHSC no 1).

It is difficult to refer to such communication type when many employees have not yet heard of this institution. Under these circumstances, the employees' proposals addressed to their line manager are related only to their tools or the soap quality.

As for how communication between the employees and committee could be improved, an employees' representative in the WHSC of company B underlines the need to invite some union representatives to the committee meetings, which would increase the number of opinions or information referring to workplace health and safety.

In comparison to involving the employees' representative in the WHSC who, generally, has a management position, involving the main union leaders has the advantage that they are accessible: on the one hand, there is no refrain when one expresses his/her demand or complaint to the superior, and on the other hand, they have more time to deal with such issues:

"Shall I go to the boss!? Maybe he is busy, maybe he is upset, phones ring, problems... And the boss forgets. The numerous duties and responsibilities a boss has in a company like B with a very complex activity... there is this chance to forget." (Company B, employees' representative in the WHSC no 2).

To conclude, I would like to underline that not only the employer or his representative needs to be open to social dialogue and treat issues in a culture of responsibility and prevention, but also, the employee needs to assume these rights and duties. The active and responsible attitude of employees is a *sine qua non* condition in this respect.

Regarding the union involvement in the WHSC, on the one hand, the employees highlighted the fact that whenever there was an issue related to workplace health and safety, they ad-

dress the union representatives, who, in turn presents the issues to supervisors or to the management directly. On the other hand, there is a debate within the companies if the union members should be members of the WHSCs. Following the interview performed with the WHSC secretary in company A, the outcome was that there are dilemmas referring to the relationship between the union and committee, including at the level of the Labour Inspectorate. The same dilemma is experienced by an employer's representative in the WHSC of company A who is a union member and did not wish to be part of the committee (!).

In company B the situation is the opposite. The WHSC secretary considers that the committee should not include union members as they do not meet the specific responsibilities of the WHSC members (for example, they would not show up at meetings and they had to be rescheduled):

"S: We had a union leader a few years ago, but I, for one, did not like the way he got involved. They were too busy doing something else.

VF: Why?

S: I don't know, I was under the impression that they did not support me in my workplace health and safety activity. The employees' representatives have always supported me." (Company B, secretary in the WHSC).

Beyond the importance of the WHSC secretariat in selecting employees' representatives in the committee ("we wanted him to be a representative"), one can notice her dissatisfaction for the presence of union representatives in the committee.

Union members are employees' representatives, as they are elected by the employees to represent their interests. Therefore, their presence in the WHSC would be legitimate, if there are no other ways to select employees' representatives with specific workplace health and safety responsibilities, respectively the employees' representatives in the WHSC. However, we must make a distinction between the role played by the union, which is an employees' institution, and the WHSC, which is a form of social partnership between the employees and employer. We could say that as far as workplace health and safety are concerned, the two institutions may compete. The employees' representatives in the committee (either union members or not) may obtain specific rights in their dialogue with the employer and / or the employer's representatives, rights which can be obtained through union pressure, as well. If the employees' representatives in the WHSC are only union members, then the committee is a place where the union meets the company management.

This problem is even more sensitive as the employees do not use the WHSC, but the union even for solving workplace health and safety-related issues. A member of the committee in company A presents how employees' demands are communicated in the company:

"He [the employee] goes to the union member, complains, the union member addresses me or the plant manager... Of course the union member complains to me and I start telling them [the management] we need this and that. At management level: «Ok, there is no money, wait a bit, I don't-know-what» And there is a fight. That man cannot work there. In this case, I take the employee's side, you know." (Company A, employers' representative in the WHSC no 1).

Therefore we can conclude that unions do not have a clear status in their relationship with the WHSC. Legally, union members can be members of the WHSC, as well; therefore a committee cannot have any representative of the union. But the findings show that unions enjoy notoriety and trust, and employees go to the union to complain or to make proposals regard-

ing the workplace health and safety issues. Therefore in our recommendations we have to consider both the law and the social reality.

5. Discussions

The issue of the efficient activity of the WHSC is situated in the broader framework of the transition of Romanian institutions from the fall of the communist regime to the EU accession. Romanian sociologists have shown particular interest in the radical social changes in this period, focusing, on the one hand, on the external and internal factors which determined these changes and, on the other hand, on the gaps between the new institutions and the Romanian cultural background. This duality between shape and substance, between western values and institutions either borrowed or imposed from the exterior and the Romanian cultural background led to changes that Constantin Schifirneț included in *tendential modernity*. As it results from the name, Romanian modernity is perceived as “a trend, an ideal to reach in the affirmation of their nation”, “which coexists with social structures, institutional forms and the old background” (Schifirneț, 2007, p. 205).

The Romanian WHSCs are institutions operating (or which should operate) as a consequence of the EU *acquis*. Having researched the existence and efficiency of these WHSCs we can draw the conclusion that *de jure* the committees exist in both companies, but *de facto* neither the spirit, nor the letter of the law is respected. The communication with the employees has set-backs. There is no organized, formal manner to take-over proposals and inform employees on the decisions the WHSC makes. The members of the WHSC do not meet in their capacity as members of the committee, but rather as simple employees of the company. In some cases, it is difficult to distinguish between the status of employees' representative in the WHSC and the status of employee in a management position (as are all the WHSC members in the two analyzed institutions). Moreover, employees' representatives in the WHSC were not elected by the employees, as the law stipulates, but they were nominated by the secretary of the WHSC.

We notice that, as far as the activity of the WHSC is concerned, Romania would likely be situated in the world of neglect, as described by Gerda Falkner et al. (2005). These authors give the example of Greece and Portugal which are countries that neglect EU requests as they are late in adopting and implementing European laws. In the case of the southern EU states, the logic of adapting to the EU requirements is not that of cultural correspondence, as happens in northern countries, or following political interest like in Germany, but interests inside the government. These countries are late to adopt European laws and the adoption is “pro forma” (Gerda Falkner et al., 2005, p. 322). Similarly, according to Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier (2005, pp. 224-225), Europeanization within new member states in central and east Europe resided rather in the formal, legal and institutional adoption of EU rules than in the implementation thereof. The approach was not constructive from the institutional point of view and did not lay emphasis on identifying with or corresponding to European values.

In order to improve committee activity, employees and employers should be informed regarding the importance and functioning of the WHSCs. They have to be aware of the fact that balanced participation in the WHSCs is useful for workers' safety and security and for profitability of the company, as well. Moreover, it is necessary to clarify the status of the employ-

ees' representatives in the WHSC which is confused with that of the employee in a management position or the trade union member.

These recommendations are for all types of companies, regardless of the organization culture or the profit they make. Ragnvald Kalleberg (1993, p. 20) speaks of a change in the management culture, from one in which decisions are made at top level to one in which the decision-making process is decentralized. This type of organization culture is a more democratic one, based on horizontal relations, where employees do not say as one of our interviewees: "This is our hierarchy – Army-style". And the employer perceives social partnership to improve the state of workplace health and safety as a source of earning.

Is this desired change possible? Can we improve the activity of the WHSC so that this institution should become a democratic space of the partnership between employers and employees? I consider that this is possible, but the issue is to what extent and how long will take for this wish to become reality. Robert Putnam et al. (1993/2001), after analysing the influence of the negative cultural determinism on the development of southern Italy, states that: "institutional history moves very slowly. As for setting-up institutions (not just the mere drafting of necessary laws), time is measured in decades" (Putnam et al. 1993/2001, p. 207).

This research has its limits as it focuses only on two large companies. Therefore future work in which more companies are studied will add to the analysis of the activity of the WHSCs, especially investigations on small and medium-size companies. The qualitative research can be accompanied by a survey to investigate the employees' attitudes and values regarding the health and safety in work and balance participation in WHSC.

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