



## WHY TAKE THE “HIGH ROAD” OF INNOVATION? Work-Oriented Innovation Strategies in Europe

**WORK-IN-NET Background Paper**

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### WORK-IN-NET

Labour and innovation: Work-oriented innovations – a key to better employment, cohesion and competitiveness in a knowledge-intensive society



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## 1 Introduction

The report *Why take the "High Road" of Innovation? - Background of Work-Oriented Innovation Strategies in Europe* is a description of core elements of work-oriented innovation strategies. It deals with some preconditions of the multinational project *Labour and innovation: Work-oriented innovations – a key to better employment, cohesion and competitiveness in a knowledge-intensive society (WORK-IN-NET or WIN)*, part of the ERA-NET scheme under the 6th Research Framework Programme aiming at further integrating national research funding activities in a European context. National and regional protagonists of workplace development programmes in Europe are engaged in building up institutional linkages between still fragmented national and regional activities. Thus, the *WIN actor configuration* tries to deepen the high road (European Work & Technology Consortium 1997, 10) strategy from humanisation of work efforts via designing of work and technology according to human needs and strengths to sustainable and innovative regional networks preferably to be combined with positive employment effects. This development path of European working life research and action programmes is part of a work-oriented innovation strategy.

Therefore, *WORK-IN-NET* aims at engaging the fragmented national activities in the field of work-oriented innovation issues to develop joint activities. These transnational activities shall be based on a *European research perspective* thereby making a substantial contribution to the implementation of the objectives of the Lisbon European Council to become *the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*.

## **2 Objectives, driving forces and resources of WORK-IN-NET**

The overall objective of spreading work-oriented innovations in Europe as an alternative to cost-cutting strategies only will be successful if regional and national protagonists will succeed in institutional cooperation between different countries.

### **2.1 Making an impact for high road development paths in Europe**

The guiding idea of WIN aims finally at spreading work-oriented innovations thus contributing to better and more employment, sustainable growth and social cohesion in Europe. In a political sense, this approach being quite in the tradition of the European Work Organisation Network (EWON) refers alike to the objectives of a European Social Model, the European Employment Strategy and the Lisbon process, however, from a point of view of balancing, reconciling and integrating market challenges and social needs. That means shifting the strategic interests to the organisation of work in competing companies to bridge the gap between management's striving for high profits and shareholder value on the one hand and employees' struggling for improved income or at least for maintaining living standards.

To a certain degree, the social partners neglect that improving working conditions, enlarging the scope of decision and design opportunities on the shop-floor and replacing working time by learning arrangements stimulates production and service quality, innovative potentials and labour productivity. This refers to the central rationale of WIN which is directed towards fostering general awareness and specific knowledge of working life issues being widely underestimated elements of sustainable development. *Thus, developing work does pay.*

But, this message has been communicated by experts for more than three decades without being recognised by key decision-makers as a matter of high priority. We have to discuss and answer the question why the wider diffusion of this rationale still is blocked. Otherwise there is a risk that we are "preaching to the converted" (Brödner/Latniak 2003, 202).

### **2.2 Institutional cooperation and transnational WIN missions**

The transnational WIN missions are engaged in identifying, developing and implementing *core elements of a European work-oriented innovation strategy*. This shall be accomplished especially with respect to the three main thematic WIN subjects and their historic and structural interrelationships:

- human resource management for improving the quality of working life, the innovative potential of employees and labour productivity,
- corporate social cultures for implementing innovative work organisations in an increasing knowledge-intensive economy,
- broad development coalitions for building up sustainable regional and national innovation systems with job-creating and positive cohesion effects.

It is of major importance for establishing such comprehensive innovation strategies that it takes place in an institutional context where a *dynamic balance between stakeholders (European Commission 1995)*, employees and employers, social partners including a broad range of civil, social and public protagonists has to be established. Furthermore, the regional and national programme-makers linked to WORK-IN-NET function as a *learning network of innovators (Freeman 1992)* which widens the research-based perspectives of work-oriented innovation approaches in Europe.

### **2.3 The process-oriented project structure as an essential resource base**

The experience of more than one decade of European networking of different protagonists and promoters for developing and disseminating modern work organisations gives strong arguments for the need of at least initial impulses from European institutions. These are engaged in funding alternative strategies which can balance the increasing challenges of social, environmental and economic sustainability. Under the umbrella of the ERA-NET scheme targeting process-driven project structures from the phases of systematic exchange of information and elaborated cooperation strategies to the implementation of joint activities and furthermore transnational activities transgressing the project's lifetime, WORK-IN-NET has built up a challenging network structure and management frame which guaranteed the horizontal cooperation of the partners in the respective work packages as well as the vertical workflow of their specific tasks.

Thus, the general objective of creating an *internal European research market on work-oriented innovations* will be implemented by a broad range of instruments for the improvement of sustainable work-life and innovation competence.

Additional management capacities for achieving a sufficient involvement of national and regional players for the European WIN case are needed. The aim of this background analysis is to strengthen further project integration by outlining innovative working life development policies in Europe and their framework conditions (chapter 2), developing a European profile for innovation-driven productivity growth (chapter 3) and reflecting on economic and political challenges to this strategy (chapter 4).

### **3 National work policies in Europe and their framework conditions**

According to the application conditions of the ERA-NET scheme the WIN project has already triggered a process of joint strategy which itself shall exert an increasing influence on national programme developments. In spite of their differences and strong institutional particularities, the *evaluation and benchmarking of national developments* indicate similarities of framework conditions in some countries which may serve as starting points for synergetic activities. They may be characterised by institutionalised systems of regulations, traditions of social dialogue and well established support systems. Such favourable frames for workplace development strategies will be discussed after a presentation of selected subjects of the state of the art in the partner countries and of some EU initiatives.

#### **3.1 The state of the art in WIN partner countries and the initiatives of the Commission**

The North-South and West-East divide of work development policies in Europe is well-known since the very beginning of national programmes and regional activities. Since the 1970s, activities have been developing especially in Northern and some Western countries. Their objectives are converging in establishing broader regional networks and national development coalitions. Moreover, there are very promising national newcomers of workplace innovation activities, but on the contrary there are stagnating, declining or even lacking activities in most other countries. These divergent developments are reflected in restrictive promotion activities in the EU during the past years. This overall controversial state of the art has been confirmed by empirical studies of the European Foundation investigating the diffusion of new forms of work.

### **3.1.1 Big differences between national work and development policies in Europe**

Science and technology policies and programmes are far more on the public agenda in Europe than the promotion of work-oriented innovations which in most cases have been pushed forward by rather limited groups of dedicated social scientists and trade unionists, enlightened managers and public policy-makers. Therefore from a European point of view, national and regional initiatives have ever been fragmented. In addition to the North-South and West-East divide, most of these activities except in Sweden and Norway (nowadays even in Finland) have been rather modest in terms of their financial budgets, particularly compared to technology research and development programmes.

There are rather unevenly developed and distributed workplace development activities with national differences in social values and policy frames, industrial structures and relations (Brödner/Latniak 2003; Business Decisions Limited 2000; Gustavsen/Finne/Oscarsson 2001, 101-114):

- successive national programmes in Norway since the 1960s and expanding activities in Finland since 1996 both of which combine improving working conditions and enterprise development with broadened innovation approaches;
- outstanding company activities and public programmes in Sweden which have been split up since the 1990s and successive activities in Germany strongly reduced during the past decade;
- less research and more transfer activities in France, the Netherlands and Switzerland, to a smaller degree in Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg and the UK, but at present no ongoing national research programmes;
- newly emerging, but still very limited activities in Austria and Italy initiated by national or regional governments;
- a remarkable policy shift to workplace innovations in Ireland;
- not yet established activities in Spain, Portugal and Malta or in the Eastern countries Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and the Baltic States with the exception of some impulses in Greece and Poland.

### **3.1.2 A short comparison of selected workplace development activities**

The first benchmarking exercise in the framework of the WIN project dealing with the project partners represents an important selection of programmes and practices in the European context. Not strengths and weaknesses were in the fore but the intention to learn from good cases and to raise them to the European policy agenda. The reference to Naschold's (1993) best practice model for workplace development strategies served as a reflexive starting point although context of and challenges for workplace development programmes have changed remarkably (chapter 4). These differences do not impair the benchmarking exercise following Naschold's generic principles which are presented in a slightly modified way: international orientation, national policy context, programme and project participation, scientific infrastructure, horizontal networking and resource input.

Naschold's international comparisons taken up in Scandinavia contributed to an increasing *international orientation* of Norwegian and Swedish work life research, less of their Finnish and German counterparts, while the regional partners of Emilia Romagna and especially of North-Rhine-Westphalia responding directly to the development deeds of companies are strongly embedded in their local social configurations. Here as in programmes elsewhere, funded projects need a written approval and participatory commitment by the competent works council or local union branches. Accordingly, the *policy context* of the explicit workplace development programmes is mainly dominated by the system of industrial relations and labour market policies with the exception of the Swedish partners caused by the refrain of the employers' associations from relatively strong tripartite commitments in former times.

According to the long tradition of social cooperation in Nordic countries there is to be found a *high participation on the workplace level* generating an explicit process orientation which methodically has been transformed into democratic dialogue procedures transforming consultants, experts and researchers to change agents and process facilitators. But, this implies a methodological loss of design objectives and project contents. The how of change becomes more important than the what. Herewith, problems of inadequate control mechanisms of project progress originated which shall be avoided by method development projects in the Finnish TYKES programme. They had played an important role in the national German development strategies which distinguished by their technology bias going hand in hand with expert-led design orientations. Therefore, Naschold has already pleaded for the middle course of a flexible mixture of process and design approaches which his international comparisons attributed to the Japanese success story until the early 1990s.

An advanced *scientific infrastructure* has gained on high importance with the emerging knowledge society. There have been mushrooming research and technology, transfer and innovation centres supplemented by education and training facilities, development agencies and consultant companies which altogether become integral elements in workplace development processes. Problem solutions are generated more through interactions of stakeholders and dialogue procedures bottom-up than by linear top-down knowledge reception and implementation. Thus, researchers as well as consultants converging partially in their daily demands transform themselves into facilitators of innovative change processes. The buzzwords of learning programmes and learning networks as well as life-long learning at work or working as permanent learning process reflect the increasing share of knowledge circulation in innovative work design turning workplace development programmes like the running Norwegian programme Value Creation 2010 into kinds of virtual universities.

The interaction approach of dialogue-driven learning processes has been successively setting *horizontal networking* on the agenda considered not only as tool for constructing new knowledge but also as organisational solution for the ever pending transfer problems of development projects. Again the Norwegian programme Value Creation 2010 taking up the experience of the programme Enterprise Development 2000 has been functioning as innovative trendsetter through starting from already existing, mostly regionally-based forms of cooperation between companies (Gustavsen/Finne/Oscarsson 2001, 19-70). Likewise the Finnish TYKES programme encourages joint *learning networks* between companies and institutes. In Germany, within the Framework Concept on Innovative Development of Work new forms of *combined projects* were developed and grouped later on in thematic clusters called *focus groups*, whereas in North-Rhine-Westphalia *joint projects* include strategic networks of crafts, media companies and along value chains. All WIN partners have made initial steps of networking by arranging seminars, workshops and conferences.

Indicators for the *resource input* of programme activities are the financial budget and the number of staff, the time span reserved for project activities and the continuation of programme activities. The German programmes stagnating between 25 to 30 million Euro since the middle of the 1990s, though cut in half compared to the top amount of around 50 million Euro during the 1980s, seem to be the best equipped with a permanent continuation since 1974. But, in relation to the size of the population and economy, the three Nordic countries rank highest in terms of public funding with Sweden holding the top position all over the world. Although the current picture is fragmented and marked by institutional discontinuity, the long-term

development of Swedish programmes distinguished by achieving critical mass of impact on innovation potential and partially productivity growth by the Work Life Fund in the early 1990s. Such positive outlook might also apply to the Norwegian succession of programmes and the rapid advance of the Finnish Workplace Development Programme, but the conceptual and financial dimensions of Nordic programmes' impact were yet not accomplished by other national programmes.

### **3.1.3 Particular initiatives for modern work organisations in the EU**

The fragmented national work-place development programmes have got only accidental support by innovation policies in Europe, while the Framework Programmes funded mainly technology research. Nearly exclusively, the European Social Fund delivered a broad range of activities dealing with aspects of organisational innovation. Ranging from the development of human resources to strengthening small and medium-sized companies in industrial change processes they presented also prominent objectives of the European Employment Strategy. However, the employability and adaptability pillars where dealing with issues of new work organisations did not have much resonance in the national action plans. Accordingly, the Green Paper *Partnership for a new organisation of work* (1997) launched by the General Directorate Employment and Social Affairs, met open rejection by some influential national employers' organisations.

In the aftermath of the elaborated Green Paper on Innovation (1995) distinguishing by an interactive stakeholder approach, the Communication on Innovation Policy (COM (2003) 112 final) updating the Union's approach in the context of the Lisbon strategy by supplementing technological with organisational innovation discovered again new ways of organising work through involving *all employees in order to make work organisation a collective resource for innovation*. In view of this regained knowledge in the Commission although short time after ruled out, the EU-funded WIN project represents again a step forward in its institutional consolidation without neglecting the former initiatives of organising national policy-makers from MODEM via ACTEUR to EWON. Moreover, WIN tries to take up the strategic discussions which have been the main efforts of EU-funded projects from the "European Work and Technology Consortium" via the "Innoflex" results to the "Social Dialogue and Work Organisation Initiative".

But, in contrast to sporadic insights presented in public pronouncements the Commission mainly has been laying the focus on stimulating global competitiveness

by market deregulation without taking much care in political practice for an effective promotion of work-oriented innovation processes. They are based, however, on public and private interventions for improving quality of work, modernising work organisations and building up regional or national innovation systems. In view of such an abstinence, with the exception of the activities of the European Social Fund, it is not surprising that the findings from the EPOC-surveys (on Employee direct Participation in Organisational Change) published by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions in Dublin (1999) evaluated only around 10% of workplaces in EU Member States as systematic users of advanced forms of work organisation. Corresponding studies proved that growing problems of occupational health and work-life-balance, competence development and work performance go hand in hand with insufficient organisational innovation, slow productivity growth and even declining competitiveness.

### **3.2 Favourable framework conditions for workplace development strategies**

“Best practice” examples are useful for cross-cultural learning only when favourable framework conditions exist. The controversial development of EU initiatives, the European divide of work-oriented innovation strategies and the benchmarking exercise of the WIN partners, however, strongly indicate that there are more or less inducing policy context conditions for workplace development strategies. We can find socially embedded cultures of cooperation intertwining institutional, social and infrastructural aspects, in particular labour regulations and collective agreements, social dialogue arenas between unions and employers including a broad range of intermediary organisations, support infrastructures for innovations in particular scientific and educational facilities which shall be outlined here including the indications of the benchmark approach.

- Policy context, systems of industrial laws and of industrial relations
- Programmes as dialog arenas of social partners and main stakeholders
- Infrastructures of support: especially education and research

#### **3.2.1 Policy context: reform coalitions and industrial relations**

Though often stimulated by successful company projects, the emergence and further design of workplace development programmes have been generally depending on

well-performing industrial relations including high legal standards of labour protection and participation opportunities altogether linked to stable political reform coalitions. Such long-term policy contexts explain why the industrial work restructuring and public work-life activities were mainly registered in Nordic and only partly in some Western countries and, therefore, have been resulting in a North-South- and a West-East-divide in Europe with minor or none activities in most Southern and Eastern countries, whereas the regained practice of social dialogue in Ireland since the 1990s pushed recently the quite astonishing shift of labour policies. Such innovative approaches were realized to a lesser extent in France and Germany and lost momentum with rising conflicts between the parties of the labour market also in Sweden with the employers' associations cancelling tripartite commitments.

In spite such disturbances in Sweden, the further elaboration of a *European profile for an innovation-led productivity growth* relies basically on the unique Swedish melting pot of ideas, activities and instruments since the early 1970s as well as on the experience of the long succession of work-life programmes in Norway since the late 1960s and compared herewith the relatively new experience of the Finnish workplace innovation strategy as an already a decade-long expanding activity giving an organisational input to replacing very effectively formerly raw materials-based by seminal knowledge-intensive growth patterns and finally the newcomer Ireland with a promising national workplace innovation strategy marking a shift in industrial policies.

The overall conclusion is that in a favourable social climate of limited conflict and industrial areas of growing trust between the social partners, labour and production problems may be successfully translated into work-oriented innovation activities helping to improve working conditions and companies' performance by implementing *human-oriented design alternatives* of workplaces, wider organisational settings and technology implementation. Thus, public promotion policies of social change may balance deficiencies of imperfect global markets inducing *constraints of competitiveness* (Krugman) tending to neglect the long-term demands of building up work-oriented innovation potentials. But, this final remark represents a point of departure for quite controversial policies within and between European countries what is reflected in European pros and cons for innovative work policies in Europe and their relative isolation in the prevailing European policy context.

### **3.2.2 Programme implementation: dialogue arenas for social stakeholders**

In contrast to pure or mainly research-oriented programmes, continuous workplace development activities especially in Norway, Sweden and Germany since the 1960s and 1970s, but also in Finland since the middle of the 1990s and just starting again in Ireland distinguish by translating political and social reform coalitions into their structures and procedures thereby referring more or less explicitly to institutionalised systems of industrial relations. Therefore, national labour protection laws concerning employment, working time and working conditions and, moreover, legal design opportunities by information, participation or even co-determination rights have been reproduced in promotion modalities as there are e.g.

- different forms of institutionalised participation of employees in planned change processes and the written approval of the works council or local union branch for the authorisation and implementation of projects;
- equal representation of trade unions and employers' federations in the steering committees of big project networks and branch projects, but above all in the advisory or even decision-making programme boards.

Likewise on European level, e.g. the European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions in Dublin and the Bilbao Agency for Occupational Safety and Health have been built up by a tripartite structure with equal representation of representatives of government, employers and unions from all member states. Such structural settings form the institutional backbone of the Social Dialogue incorporated in all social activities of the European Union. In particular, the European Social Fund (ESF) is to be mentioned which has promoted a lot of initiatives dealing with aspects of work-oriented innovations from diverse support programmes for employment issues of discriminated groups to preventive organisational initiatives as the Green Paper on Modern Work Organisation, the late EWON and innovative projects. But all these impulses expired more or less without stirring up sufficient transnational activities or national resonance.

Under increasing demands for workplace innovation the notion presented here that structure determines process has to be at least supplemented by an heuristic reversal: process sets structure. There is a growing need to encourage a culture of institutional change by reviving social dialogues in different spheres of public policy, institutional competence and workplace innovation. For this, the evolving network from the *Social Dialogue and Work Organisation* project funded by DG Employment and Social Affairs has recently identified short-term actions referred to here with slightly changed accentuations:

- A Social Policy Forum which will debate with officials from the European Commission and Member State governments emerging policy issues like flexicurity, innovation and employment or the ageing workforce.
- Development Forums led by social partners which will communicate good practice solutions and their framework conditions relating to social partner interventions, broader development coalitions and public policies.
- Public Inquiries which will critically interrogate practitioners of social partners involved in organisational change initiatives to detect barriers, conditions and opportunities for innovative development in their own organisations.

Though the social partners, the systems of industrial relations and participation rights are the hardware for implementing workplace development programmes there is often to be acknowledged an organisational blockage by institutional hierarchies and daily routines, formalized agreements and abstract declarations holding up innovative solutions. Here, these institutional protagonists of workplace innovation themselves have to be activated in cross-sectional development coalitions on European, national and regional levels transgressing their organisational borderlines and dissolving their inertia in collaborative networking with a broad range of other players as the intermediary organisations in the field of advice, support and control. The emergence of such actor configurations and pressure groups becomes a precondition for the establishment of regional or national programmes which themselves should function at best as flourishing development coalitions. But, such WIN processes generally need infrastructures of support and with the emergence of knowledge-intensive living and working processes more and more educational and scientific infrastructures.

### **3.2.3 Infrastructures of support: the role of institutionalized research**

After around forty or thirty years of labour research, it is still a not deniable though deplorable fact that the expenditures for technology research outreach by far those for social research on regional, national and European levels. Taking the specific case of labour research and workplace innovation in some countries there are normally only trace elements to be discovered often hidden under unsuspecting columns. The traditional trendsetters of workplace innovation, however from the very beginning, have excelled by their scientific and institutional infrastructures often built in workplace development activities. Pars pro toto look at the Norwegian case where the operation of the science system has been deeply embedded in the established system of social dialogue and tripartite arrangements. Formal agreements such as “change and renewal of work organisation” from 1982 with following adjustments have been connected with the administration of research stimulation funds and

labour research institutes which have been set up as instruments of improving working conditions by research, training and consultancy.

Therefore, the local needs implying the process approach of action research played an outstanding role in Norway and Sweden (“National Institute for Working Life” which existed until June 30, 2007 and its predecessors). While growing out of the discussions in the mid-seventies on the improvement of working conditions and industrial democratisation, it has become an institutional cornerstone of Swedish working life research. In contrast to other countries there were strong institutional ties combined with quite common exchange of personnel to the big promotion agencies like the Swedish Work Environment Fund (until 1998), the Council for Research in Working Life Issues (until 2001), the Swedish National Board for Technical Development, the Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems (VINNOVA) and the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS).

The outstanding importance of promotion programmes and research institutes may be studied when institutional ties are breaking up. During the heyday of German work and technology research in the 1980s protagonists of the social partners and the national programmes “Humanisation of Work” and “Production Technology” succeeded in persuading senior researchers in high-profile technical and engineering institutes with the help of big design-oriented projects that innovation is more than technical change and incorporates economical, social and human aspects. These interactions resulted in quite a lot of human- and workshop-oriented design solutions for new technologies like robots and machine tools, automation and manufacturing systems, not at least for the broad application fields of software ergonomics. But the well-known success stories expired with the drawbacks in financial budgets, research priorities and social dialogue arenas, in short with the permeating effects of a continuous rise of neo-liberalism linked to the sudden implosion of the socialist states. Thus, the strongholds of workplace innovation have been underlying a process of steady erosion: from the closed design departments in the automotive industry and at social partners to expiring life-long professorships of work research in particular and generally social science.

Such a historic recursion has an explicit legitimacy in the former socialisation of labour research and workplace innovation protagonists including WIN partners being still influential in their scientific, administrative and social interrelationships. So far directly opposed to adverse tendencies they are bearing increased responsibility for the demands of knowledge transfer while their partners in other countries sailing now with the wind as those unfortunate did in happier days may get a feeling of the needs for building up institutional strongholds and stable research networks quite in

opposite to the present mania of virtual looseness. This seems to be in many countries an outstanding problem where financial funds and support structures especially for labour research and innovative work design are shrinking or have still to be built up.

### **3.3 Questions for further discussion**

The discussion of these questions will be of general relevance for regional and national, but also European protagonists of social change and particularly work-oriented innovation processes, but shall be centred to successful WIN strategies in the course of exchanging our experience, knowledge and even visions.

- What are the regional and national experiences to mobilize the potential protagonists of social change including the present WIN strategies? Does the construction of a steering committee of national coordinators work at all and what additional means are needed to improve its function?
- What are the procedural and conceptual linkages to revive the social dialogue concerning the research on work-oriented innovations? How shall WIN contribute more effectively to create development coalitions between work and innovation research and with other social and civil players?
- What can social, labour and action researchers do to put questions of workplace change and workplace innovations on the agenda? How can WIN contribute to revive those objectives, neglected in some European countries and EU research framework programmes, and adapt them to new economic and social challenges?

## **4 A European profile for an innovation-driven productivity growth**

The key thematic subjects of work-oriented innovations or the WIN road as there are high quality of work, innovative work organisations and regional development systems are interrelated with each other in an upward spiral. Good work is a basis of organisational innovation and both are pillars in regional development systems which themselves function as drivers for modernising work organisations which may increase the quality of work. This conception of a structural feedback system

inducing an upward spiral will be charged by competent actors as there are human resource managers in private companies and public support systems which may stimulate innovative corporate cultures committing themselves to broader development coalitions. But, historic experience in many European countries teaches us that such upward spirals fuelled by expanding actor configurations can be broken by changing context conditions and turn into vicious circles of deteriorating social and working conditions, inflexible production strategies and regional decay spoiling already built up or only planned potentials of innovation, productivity and competitiveness. Confronted with such trends in and between European countries and regions reinforced or even generated by global pressures and neoliberal policies WIN tries to develop strong arguments for private and public interrelations and interventions in favour of an innovation-driven productivity growth by

- presenting strategic dimensions of work-oriented innovations and
- discussing the opportunities to cope with adverse context conditions.

#### **4.1 Key themes of the high road of work-oriented innovations**

Under the European framework conditions reflected in socially embedded and politically designed programme configurations there shall be developed and implemented work-oriented innovation policies from the level of workplaces to regions in a European perspective to meet the dynamic challenges of a more and more knowledge-driven economy. Already conceived during the second half of the 1990s on the basis of EU-funded research studies, the core elements of the high road of innovation have to be adapted to the rapidly changing conditions of the early 21st century. They describe at the same main programme developments from workplace improvements and organisational renewal in the 1970s via new production concepts and comprehensive company restructuring in the 1980s to production clusters and regional networks since the 1990s. Taking up the documented presentations and conclusions of the WORK-IN-NET thematic workshops in Bologna, Stockholm and Dublin, this subchapter deals with:

- human resource management for improving the quality of working life, the innovative potential of employees and labour productivity,
- corporate social cultures for implementing innovative work organisations in an increasing knowledge-intensive economy,

In this context, even the establishment of broad development coalitions for building up sustainable regional and national innovation systems with job-creating and positive cohesion effects is a key question. This strategy has to be covered in a separate paper.

#### **4.1.1 Human resource management for improving the quality of working life**

There are strong arguments for improving the quality of work from ethical and cultural, social and economic points of view. Whether seen as a painful necessity of economic survival, matter of social cooperation or driver for individual development, these basic dimensions of our daily work remain in their interrelationships the anchor of all our existence especially felt if there is no work available at all. But at present, there is to be paid more attention to the fact that in the course of the emerging knowledge society the traditional linear bottom-up dependencies from the economic production basis via social relationships to individual development turn to an increasing extent to top-down interplays from the demanded competencies of individuals and their social interactions to economic progress. European competitiveness is more than ever determined by the soft aspects of autonomous individuals creatively interacting in cultural promising surroundings from Barcelona to Helsinki (Florida/Tinagli 2004).

This change of paradigm is reflected by an increasing demand for improving the quality of working life, which at the same is endangered by still existent slave work including enforced women's prostitution, again spreading children's work and the common practice of impeding labour coalitions and collective agreements even in the highly developed countries. Besides sanctioned bans and basic rights against this, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) demands further regulations and standards for decent work such as job security, adequate income and social protection; limited working time, safety and health at work, skills and competence development including lifelong learning opportunities. But in addition, ILO and other international institutions, e.g. the World Health Organisation (WHO) and European organisations of the social partners and labour research demand also proactive dimensions of decent and good work as there are self-regulated task performance, participation in work design, enriched work contents, enlarged scope of optional decision-making, cooperative forms of organisational settings and social and gender aspects like workplace equality for women and social inclusion of immigrant workers, family-friendly working hours and an increasing work-life balance in general.

Such dimensions of quality of work are the social basis for building up innovative potentials in the labour market and work organisations (Huzzard 2003). They need comprehensive approaches of human resource management from personnel management in workplaces and companies to private support organisations in the area of health prevention and vocational training and above all public systems of health protection, vocational education and work and technology research supplemented and institutionalised by general labour laws and regulations. Thus, a successful human resource management for a high quality of work and high-performance labour markets needs a complex infrastructure of public and private interactions including a broad range of intermediary support actions for coping with the innovative challenges of the emerging knowledge-intensive society. Therefore, one of the main WIN tasks might be, to identify, benchmark and develop encouraging conditions and future opportunities for increasing communication and cooperation of institutional stakeholders and organisational protagonists of good work which functions as a driver for the implementation and development of innovative work organisations.

#### **4.1.2 Corporate social cultures for implementing innovative work organisations**

Human resource management of good work stimulates and relies partly on work organisations which perform socially inclusive structures for employees based on statutory regulations and collective agreements against dismissals and health dangers, institutionalised forms of maintaining and developing skills, participation and co-determination rights of works councils mainly in questions of changing working conditions. All these rules often forgotten in organisational concept-building on the greenfield give social security to employees thus balancing the increasing needs for new forms of work organisations which have to realise the flexibility imperatives of production and markets (European Commission 1997). Though such institutionalised linkages between management strategies and public regulations form the rationale of national and regional workplace development programmes their support of organisational renewal otherwise has often to transgress the Procrustean bed of frozen rulebooks and bureaucratic routines.

Enlightened business strategies unlock the hidden potentials of social infrastructures of production by involving all stakeholders in organisational change through promoting competence, cooperation and commitment of all employees (Rouilleault/Rochefort 2005) Such high roads of organisational renewal do not primarily aim at optimising returns in the short run by mere cost-cutting through downsizing companies, outsourcing tasks, reducing the workforce to a lean minimum

and speeding up production and logistic processes with the overall result of increasing competition in old stagnating markets with decreasing customer demands. Instead of such spoiling of their innovation potentials high road strategies cultivate and develop them further in order to opening up new markets for improved or new products and services at the same creating new employment opportunities (Work and Technology Consortium 1997). Promising employment-related business areas for satisfying individual, environmental and social needs are e.g. the still spreading application fields for information and communication technologies, urgently needed environmental protection and respectively designed products, the increasing demand for social and cultural services according to demographic change.

The argument presented here aims at the promotion of business strategies being not restricted to smarter instead of harder working in the context of model constructs such as high-performance workplaces or high-involvement innovation mainly in order to acquire competitive advantages. Related to improved quality of work they should, moreover, encompass sustainable work systems which regenerate creative resources over the long run (Docherty et al. 2002). Thus, corporate social responsibility attempts to link human resource-based innovation potentials with delivering quality products and services which respond to individual, social and public needs. By developing the competitive edge of business in purposeful innovation processes creating employment and based on sustainable work systems a European perspective shall be opened up to integrate the economic, employment and social aspects of the Lisbon strategy. It will be freed from the fixation on and fetters of the prevailing obsession of competitiveness as the ultimate goal of European development nurturing implicit dangers of landing or even crashing into the low road of shrinking businesses and a split society.

#### **4.2 Sustainable research and development tasks of WORK-IN-NET**

The key subjects of the high road have to be adapted to the changing framework conditions which challenge substantially the objectives for the WIN-approach. Under the context of stagnating or even shrinking markets, investments and employment formerly positive competition effects towards increasing product quality, innovation potential and growth patterns can be downgraded by pure cost-cutting and process rationalisation strategies. They will result in rising unemployment and precarious jobs, worsened living and working conditions, regional and sectorial decline instead of building up employment-creating development coalitions, innovation-friendly company cultures and and a quality-oriented human resource management. Therefore, contradictions of their implementation and transfer opportunities shall be

answered by analytical research on coping with the adverse trends to sustainable work life and high road strategies in Europe. Context-driven research implies a stronger consciousness of macro-micro-interrelations stimulating at the same a highly controversial discussion on hitherto largely neglected research issues in organisational studies. They are justified from a WIN-point of view towards an action-oriented research input on different levels to identify political opportunities of influencing favourably social change processes which may cover pink elephants of our national research activities. The discussion proposals are outlined along the dimensions of

- analytical research on coping with adverse trends to sustainable working life,
- concrete design approaches of context-conscious high-road strategies of innovation,
- social development alternatives of employment-creating innovation concepts.

#### **4.2.1 Analytical research concerning a new division of labour**

The revival of the QWL discussion in Europe points to rising contradictions between the demands for improving working conditions as an ultimate goal of social development and at the same as an essential driving force for productivity growth in the emerging knowledge-intensive economy and the detrimental long-term effects of an ongoing erosion of labour and social standards by pure cost competition in liberalized world trade and deregulated home markets. From the point of view of WIN strategies the alternative of bad work, that means to work harder, faster and longer for less income, social protection and self-determination which is fatefully forecasted in the bulk of media, demanded by some employers' organisations and more or less favoured by European governments is a dead end of economic competitiveness in the longer run (Kapstein 1996; Newsweek 2004). Moreover with evaporating social cohesion, a new internationally intensified *division of labour* may result in social splits between male and female, young and old, native and immigrant, highly skilled and less skilled, full-time and part-time, employed and unemployed work.

Particularly, phenomena of lasting unemployment, working poor and precarious work meanwhile familiar again not only in the United States, but also in Europe, provided by outstanding evidence in France already more than a decade ago (Bourdieu et al. 1993) do not comply at all with the ambitious goals of the Lisbon Council to combine dynamic and competitive growth with more and better jobs. To be quite clear: Coping successfully with older China and newer India syndroms electrifying the present debate in European business circles does not demand to lower wage levels and

social benefits by giving more responsibilities to employers and employees thus shifting the established power balance between labour and capital. In contradiction to the neoliberal ideology promising more freedom for all, there are growing dependencies and inequalities on all levels of society and all over the world. Only the richer nations and people can afford a weak social state based increasingly on mass taxes making the ordinary people and developing countries poorer in a double-edged way. Such a European *harmonisation by erosion* was fear and warning alike of a high-level group of experts on the building of a European information society already ten years ago (European Commission 1998, 47-49).

Instead of strategic choices in favour of social polarisation and increasing exclusion on the one hand and on the other economic disproportions and deflationary trends there are to be demanded inclusive macro-policies combined with enforceable basic regulations for labour and capital including workers' rights clauses, social labelling and codes of conduct as well as global rules for financial markets, global trade and transnational corporations already partially demanded by international institutions like ILO and OECD. Such basic regulations, not bureaucratic rules function like beta-blockers for decreasing high blood pressure by reducing the faux frais of *obsessive competition* forewarned of and predicted more than a decade before by economists (Krugman 1994). The nowadays to be stated effects on international scale remind of the aggravating social problems in early British capitalism undermining today high development paths of working in flexible, creative and innovative ways which are still put into practice in the Nordic islands of socially balanced productivity growth (Alasoini et al. 2005). According to these progressive benchmarks, the objectives of further realising WIN approaches of good work have to be analysed with respect to the available scope and space of actions for coping with global pressures.

#### **4.2.2 Design approaches on work-oriented high road perspectives**

Innovative work organisations have been a central theme of the European discourse agenda since the nineties, dating back to a certain extent to the new production concepts in the eighties and the work structuring attempts in the seventies not to forget all the well-marketed management concepts from lean to agile management. There is a plethora of best practice or better good practice case studies ordered, funded and collected by programme-makers on national and European levels. Though the reasons for high road solutions are compelling, an increasing gap is to be recognised between leading-edge practice and the so-called 'long tail' of companies that are lagging behind (Innoflex 2003, 28).

There are a whole range of well-founded explanations for the difficulties of change, but they are more and less methodologically confined to traditional practices, attitudes and beliefs of management. The marginal transfer effects in the business world justify to draw the scientific attention to Naschold's methodological approach of analysing the interrelations between micro- and macroeconomic developments maybe explaining far more convincingly the resistance to change. Accordingly, the German framework concept of innovative workplace development from 2000 already demanded to take into account the double-edged effects of deregulated labour markets with shrinking protection rules against dismissals and management's striving for short-termed and increasing profit margins claimed by financial markets.

The then foreseen effects are meanwhile documented in the daily news: breaking up of prosperous companies, cannibalising them and forcing the surviving parts to fierce competition which drives them into cost-cutting downward spirals with losing innovation potentials while the outsourced parts have already gone bankrupt with sending their former employees on the dole. How shall small and medium-sized suppliers contained in value-creating chains with strict logistic and financial guidelines admitting only small operational scope and profit margins develop innovative human and organisational potential which may match the overall flexibility and mobility demands? Under such tight economic and employment conditions of liberalized markets, there have to be arranged on societal and public levels new combinations between balancing social security and creative work for employees with financial independence and stable growth of companies.

### **4.3 Questions for further discussion**

The arguments for the social mediation of work-oriented innovation processes by basic regulations, public interventions and social actor configurations including privat and public partnerships do not only intend to balance competitive pressures, but furthermore to pave a democratic way from work-oriented innovations to socially accepted product innovations. This content-driven innovation approach contrasts with and at the same challenges the familiar Schumpeterian approach of innovation in the direction of innovation as entrepreneurial prerogative and as process of creative destruction thus opening up a broad floor for further debate.

- What are the means and measures for establishing a comprehensive human resource management between different protagonists, if the increasing global pressures of competition are deteriorating with the working conditions in a

causal conclusion also the human potentials of work-oriented innovations? Is there any chance left for developing and disseminating a research-based strategy for decent and good work in the framework of WIN partners?

## **5 Reflections on economic and political challenges for WORK-IN-NET**

The final chapter deals with the dilemma of contrasting context conditions which may disturb, divide or even stop the WORK-IN-NET process which is linked to specific European and national or regional framework conditions developing quite controversial in Europe between well performing social reform coalitions in Northern Europe and permanently failing neoliberal policies especially in the UK, Germany and the Eastern transformation states, to a lesser extent in Southern Europe and the other European countries somewhere in between. Though this uneven picture is reflected to a certain degree by EU policies they have remarkably shifted to the main objective of rising European competitiveness while the former accentuation of the European Social Model has more or less disappeared. Accordingly a shortened version of the Lisbon objectives neglecting the aspects of stable growth, better and more jobs including social cohesion, but already forgetting environmental sustainability has replaced the Delors Whitebook from 1993 outlining these factors in his macroeconomically founded policy approach.

Nowadays, there has to be found a social-economic solution between increasing innovation demands of a knowledge-driven economy and globally intensified cost competition steered by profit expectancies of financial markets. They are responsible for not taking up the lessons of the productivity paradox to supplement the implementation of the modern information and communication technologies by institutional, organisational and work-oriented innovations. Accordingly, there will be discussed the alternatives of public promotion activities for social development or neo-liberal disengagement policies leading e.g. to increasing labour market flexibility on the expense of social security for employees. Hire and fire policies with the side-effects of severe competence losses and wage deflation in the pure interest of short-term profit calculations for shareholder values shall be confronted with basic regulations for working conditions as drivers of social innovation. At the end, democratically embedded and based development policies on micro- and macro-levels of a knowledge-driven society shall open up perspectives for breaking the deadlock of socio-economic downward spirals by establishing new business fields for neglected customer needs.

- The productivity paradox and alternative policy approaches
- Basic regulations for social welfare or global cost competition with rising poverty
- Employment-related innovation policies in new business fields.

### **5.1 The productivity paradox and the rise of alternative policy approaches**

The socio-economic rationale for the public promotion of work-oriented innovation policies dates already back to the productivity paradox discussed in the 1980s with respect to data of not increasing or even shrinking productivity gains in spite of an accelerated implementation of information and communication technologies (ICTs). In view of the engineering dream of fully automated plants and computer integrated manufacturing (CIM) replacing completely or to a high degree human work, most developers, manufacturers and user companies did not sufficiently take care for organisational and institutional adaptation processes, not to speak of the growing need for human development and social innovations.

But, with the meanwhile acknowledged change to a more knowledge-intensive society with ICTs and CIM modules, value creating and logistic chains, production and service networks spreading, new flexibility demands on work organisations and human labour make it increasingly necessary to overhaul the established checklists and control systems in the area of occupational safety and health as well as the text- and schoolbooks of vocational education and training which have to be supplemented or even replaced by new scientific findings and foresighted innovative solutions on workplace level. Such requirements often appear to be too risky and expensive especially from the medium and small-sized enterprises' point of view. Alternative policy support approaches, therefore, offering help for self-help have to be established in order to strengthening market functions again and economic competitiveness in the long run.

Accordingly, several international studies, have proven that changes in work organisations and human resource management may create substantially different conditions for the improvement of labour productivity and product quality, company flexibility and customer satisfaction, innovation capacity and competitiveness. The reason is that these performance factors mainly depend on the scope and content of an active and extensive intra-firm involvement of employees combined with systematic staff training, new forms of work organisation and inter-firm co-operation

between manufacturers and their clients as there are developers, suppliers and dealers often demanding external expertise in a regional context of consultants, research institutes and training facilities.

Increasing productivity demands of business development strategies in knowledge-based environments depend on investing heavily in human resources, in particular, in safety and health, skills and competence development. Moreover, the agenda of enterprises, basically oriented to cost and profit calculations has to be infiltrated and completed by comprehensive explorations of reorganizing work processes which create ample scope for flexible solutions and for innovative design opportunities from workplace and technology adaptation to process and product development. Such enriched management strategies are a matter of pioneering entrepreneurship, of business visions and enlightened leadership encouraging cooperation with employees, unions and the wider public. Thus, functional flexibility linked to creative work organisations with skilled employees and innovative design solutions of work and technology are becoming decisive high-road drivers of productivity increases. WORK-IN-NET supports these objectives by offering a broad set of evaluations and benchmarking procedures, training and transfer concepts on

- core thematic elements: quality of work, innovative organisational settings and regional/national infrastructures
- main policy approaches: human resource development, enlightened corporate strategies, regional/national development coalitions
- the often neglected role of social infrastructures, intermediary organisations and cooperative interactions of main stakeholders
- specific configurations of development activities, learning networks and interactions between contiguous programme activities
- demands for expanding activities through mobilizing new social resources and intellectual synergies.

## **5.2 Global cost competition with rising poverty or basic regulations for social welfare?**

In spite of the attempts to overcome the productivity paradox, a variety of regional, national and European studies indicate, however, spreading management approaches of organisational change turning to the traditional mindset of controlling and cost-cutting through downsizing, creating precarious jobs and laying-off older and less skilled employees backed by corresponding labour market policies which result in social insecurity and worsened work-life quality. They result in shrinking

innovation capacities by extending times of operation and working times, speeding up delivery times and intensifying time pressures, limiting wages and salaries. Such production conceptions may even not succeed in some incremental process innovations while excluding definitely employment-creating product innovations opening up new business areas, particularly in the emerging knowledge economy. To sharpen the argument: Quarterly expected operational profit rises do not pay in the long run.

For this macro-economic deadlock, there are to be acknowledged influential powers and pressures intertwined with each other as there are:

- destructive restructuring practices by financial investors in favour of short-termed profit gains instead of long-termed strategic capacity building (human resource policies, research budgets, in-sourcing R&D, etc.);
- deregulation of labour markets in favour of external numerical flexibility thus making redundant especially elder workers and, in general, reducing the incentives for personnel policies to develop internal functional flexibility;
- liberal policies which are in contradiction to the demands of a democratic European Model based on participative social cohesion with better work and more employment as cornerstones for a dynamic and competitive knowledge society.

But in Europe, there are to be avoided the already deepening dangers of downward spirals of lasting unemployment, rising inequality and social insecurity combined with low road or even no road innovation paths not only for a range of companies, but for political economy on national and on European levels. The well-established European institutions and the national governments however, backed by far-sighted social partners and advanced management strategies have to agree on basic rules and regulations, in particular, in the areas of environmental and social sustainability as well as of safety and health, vocational education and training which altogether may stimulate quality competition and innovative competitiveness. There is a complex relationship between externally set regulations and internally driven process and product innovations. Moreover, they are dependent on a broad range of private and public support structures which are the societal base for successful market processes and private gains.

### 5.3 Employment-related innovation policies in new business fields

The downward spirals of cost-cutting competitiveness in mass production industries aiming at high profit margins for shareholder values represent a dead end of social and economic development in highly industrialized countries. Purely financially oriented restructuring processes in global dimensions will lead to an extensive social darwinism resulting in high unemployment and social exclusion, structural decay and economic decline, losses of innovation potential and individual creativity.

Contrary to this no future perspective the high-road of innovation backed by supporting infrastructures under the frame conditions of a progressive European Model excel in global markets by advanced products and intelligent services which meet individual and social, environmental and cultural needs by developing and disseminating

- integral technological systems, especially in the area of ICTs with special regard for small and medium-sized companies;
- complex environmental problem solutions based on interactions with manufacturers, customers and the respective environmental organisations;
- services such as business-related and financial, social and cultural, health and educational services for young and elderly people alike.

Such customer-oriented business fields demand long-term strategic approaches for comprehensive innovation processes which combine technological and social, here in particular organisational, competence-promoting and health-sustaining aspects, and which, therefore, cannot be sufficiently coped with by markets alone. Although there are to be found quite a lot of enlightened companies documented in collections of national and European case studies, the high road experience of combined process and product innovations in Europe opening up new business areas and employment opportunities needs to be deepened and broadened by public support strategies and a set of variable instruments from the stages of research and development until testing and dissemination as it is envisaged by the WORK-IN-NET process of communication structures including exchange mechanisms, coordination management of diverse programme activities and cooperation agreements resulting in joint research and transfer activities.

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