

The logo consists of a dark teal speech bubble shape containing the text 'walqing' in white lowercase letters. The 'w' and 'i' are on the top line, and 'alq' and 'ing' are on the bottom line.

walqing

Work and Life Quality  
in New & Growing Jobs

# Engaging stakeholders in developing working conditions

## Summary report on action research and policy lessons

Johan E. Ravn, Peter Hasle, Ursula Holtgrewe, Vassil Kirov, Ekaterina Markova, Jan Van Peteghem, Darina Peycheva, Monique Ramioul, Karin Sardadvar, Ole H. Sørensen, Hans Torvatn, Lisbeth Øyum

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# 1 Introduction: Action Research in **walqing**: research methodology and engagement strategy

## 1.1 The role of Work Package 9 (WP9) in **walqing**

In EU and in policy bodies elsewhere, there is a growing concern about the relevance of social science for society and its welfare and economy. Traditionally it has been argued that social science will matter when someone adopts the results of social science and ‘apply them.’ Social scientists find out about things and leave their findings with someone else (politicians, interest groups, government agencies), who then are the ones to act on it. The point of departure for Action Research is to claim that this research strategy aims for scientific rigor and societal relevance simultaneously. Action Research seeks to be a praxis where researchers actively engage in problem solving and reflection in a social field, with local stakeholders, in the pursuit of solving problems, and combining this with the scientific knowledge generation process.

**walqing** aims to increase researchers’, stakeholders’, managers’ and policymakers’ knowledge of the quality of work and life in new and growing jobs. The quality of work has multiple components along the dimensions of work organisation, pay and performance systems, skills and possibilities for development, security and flexibility, and collective representation and voice. Research findings suggest a mixed pattern of change, with considerable variation in change between countries.

**walqing** investigates linkages between new and expanding jobs, the conditions of work and employment in these jobs, and the more or less favourable outcomes for employees’ quality of work and life. **walqing** focuses on work in growing jobs in Europe with problematic working conditions, precarious employment, low wages and/or lack of social integration. It specifically addresses the representation of vulnerable groups in these jobs.

**walqing** helps to build actors’ capacity to identify both problematic and good practices of market developments, policies and company strategies in Europe. It also contributes to the dissemination of good examples and practices that can be translated across Europe while maintaining or even enhancing the competitiveness of companies and economies. Employment growth in Europe has been a policy aim since the establishment of the European Employment Strategy (EES) at the Luxemburg Employment Council 1997, and has been quite successfully pursued. The aim of improving the quality of jobs has had a more discontinuous history in both EU policy and empirical reality. The EU is at present facing grave challenges. But new and better jobs are still the core building block for generating productive and healthy societies.

**walqing** employs and integrates several analytical levels and research paradigms. The research approach of **walqing**’s Work Package 9 (WP9) has been so called *Action Research*. The core objective of **walqing**’s WP9 was to engage relevant stakeholders in the process of developing strategies about how to act on the knowledge developed about working conditions. The knowledge gained and produced from the interventions, the workshops and other work conducted in WP9 is summarised in this report on the practice

of Action Research, distilling the main learning points and providing recommendations for further Action Research in EU projects such as **walqing**.

## 1.2 Work Package 9 in short: Developing stakeholder strategies – policy lessons

Action Research was the chosen core strategy of **walqing** Work Package 9 (WP9). WP9 was a means to develop and disseminate strategies for improving unhealthy or dysfunctional working conditions. Through engaging the relevant stakeholders of a social setting, joint strategies may be developed to improve dysfunctional practices. Work Package 9 had the following objective:

*To engage relevant stakeholders (company level and/or sector level) in the process of developing strategies about how to act on the knowledge developed about working conditions.*

- Enable/facilitate for relevant stakeholders to get exposed to knowledge developed on working conditions
- Enable/facilitate for relevant stakeholders to acknowledge the knowledge developed on working conditions as relevant to them
- Enable/facilitate for relevant stakeholders to make use of this knowledge, through developing strategies for own actions and through addressing policy level

The aims of WP9 were also to develop fluency in Action Research methodology for partners in the project and to use it in order to search for the ways in which stakeholders on both business function and sector level can take joint responsibility and action for areas of concern regarding the quality of work and life in their sectors.

WP9 involved a selection of partners with a declared interest in Action Research:

- Forschungs- und Beratungsstelle Arbeitswelt (FORBA), Austria
- Katholieke Unversiteit Leuven, Higher Instituut of Labour Studies (HIVA-K.U.LEUVEN), Belgium
- Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge (ISSK), Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Sociology, Bulgaria
- Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Arbejdsmiljø (NRCWE), Denmark
- Stiftelsen SINTEF, SINTEF Technology and Society (SINTEF), Norway. SINTEF was in charge of WP9.

WP9 focused Action Research as the approach to learning and research. The program was specifically designed for researchers planning to work with practitioners in the field. By engaging the relevant stakeholders of a social setting being investigated in the **walqing** project, a company, a business function or a sector, joint strategies were to be developed to improve dysfunctional practices unveiled in the sector analyses and case studies. Action Research based interventions was the core methodology employed, putting particular emphasis on creating arenas for learning and dialogue, where the stakeholders engage themselves in discussing core findings from the case studies as well

as commit themselves to implement joint strategies at company or sector level. The main phases of WP9 were as follows:

1. At an initial workshop in Turin, Italy in September/October 2010. In this workshop the research partners were trained in the theory and methodology of Action Research.
2. During 2011 and 2012, the research partners conducted Action Research (including interventions) in selected cases in their own countries (often aligned with or based on research work conducted in **walqing's** WP6, the organisational case studies).
3. A second workshop was arranged in Trondheim, Norway in March 2012, in which the research partners worked together to refine their individual work and to align it within the scope of WP9.
4. In June 2012, an expert workshop was arranged in Leuven, Belgium. For this conference stakeholders from policy making and fields of practice participated together with the research partners, to jointly develop strategies for taking action to actively work on improving unhealthy and dysfunctional working conditions in the sectors being investigated in **walqing**.
5. Finally, the knowledge gained and produced from the interventions and the workshops is summarised in this report on the practice of Action Research in **walqing**.

### 1.3 Report structure

The core objective of **walqing's** WP9 was to engage relevant stakeholders in the process of developing strategies about how to act on the knowledge developed about working conditions. In line with this, the chosen methodology and engagement strategy was based on Action Research. The report's introductory section presents Action Research as a research perspective and methodology and as an engagement strategy in EU projects such as **walqing**.

The main section of the report is comprised of five accounts of AR projects by the five participating partners. The structure of these five is based on the criteria for quality in Action Research as they have been developed by the 'Journal of Action Research' (Bradury & Huang, 2007). These criteria have been adapted to the purpose of this report. The following template for the cases has thus been utilized:

- Situating the project: The case (a brief summary of what was done in the **walqing** project, preparing for the AR)
- Articulation of objectives (The dialogues with the field and process of generating objectives)
- Partnership and participation (participative & relational aspects; who were involved in what phases of the research)
- Action, impact and significance (how the research project had impact in content and process; how the research ideas that could guide action in response to need; what results for the different partners; what significance?)

- Contributions to Action Research (contributions the knowledge/theory of the Action Research literature; contributions to body of practice knowledge)
- Methods and process (clarify research methods and process; reflections on own role as change agents)

Following the five cases, the next section reports from the June 2012 expert workshop arranged in Leuven, Belgium. At this conference the AR projects by the five participating research partners were presented to and discussed with stakeholders from policy making and fields of practice, to jointly develop strategies for taking action to actively work on improving unhealthy and dysfunctional working conditions in the sectors being investigated in **walqing**.

In the second last section of the report there is a discussion that distils learning points from across the five cases. What are the key findings in terms of policy lessons and practice implications about improving challenging working conditions? Lastly there is a section that draws the final conclusions.

## 2 Action Research in walqing

### 2.1 Defining Action Research

The term Action Research is as a rule ascribed to the social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1948). In its early days this research practice was combining experimental social research with social action to solve urgent social problems. Its later proponents have traditionally stressed the following features: The Action Research process has a developmental focus, seeking to change some form of practice. It involves an interaction between professional researchers and practitioners, and it seeks generating new forms of knowledge and testing them in action. Rapoport (1970) defined Action Research in the following way:

Action research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework (Rapoport 1970, p. 499).

Since then, the term has been pointing to an increasingly diverse set of research practices with stronger or weaker linkages to the original program of Lewin (Reason/ Bradbury 2008). Although the term Action Research is meant to encompass a very varied set of practices, some central features seem to be common. The research is to be of a collaborative character, involving both researcher and researched in the problem definition and solving. Second, an aim is to counteract differences in power and interests between the people engaged in the research process. Third, its output is both knowledge and action, and finally, through the collaborative efforts the aim is to raise participants' consciousness, enabling them to improve their own situation (Schwandt 1997: 112).

Action Research involves researcher and 'researched' in problem definition and solving. Action Research's special role /position is carved out as a niche between on the one hand more conventional qualitative/social research, and field engagement of a more clinical/consultative kind on the other. Its product should ideally be:

- Actionable; producing learning and problem solving at case level for actors involved
- Reflexive; generating new theoretical insights
- Significant; practical learning and theoretical insights should be of importance for a wider audience, including researcher peers.

The traditional main methodological distinction in social science is between qualitative and quantitative research. Historically Action Research has been seen as a variant of qualitative research, because some of the data gathering methods most frequently employed in Action Research are qualitative (like the open-ended interview). But Action Research is a methodology or research strategy rather than this or that (qualitative) method. It is a research strategy for change and involvement that can encompass a variety of individual methods. Action Research is founded on 'partnership and participation': it always includes practitioners as partners in the work of knowledge

creation. It should produce 'actionable' knowledge, something that practitioners may make practical use of. However, Action Research should also contribute to the general knowledge growth.

Traditional qualitative research is research *about* something/someone, not *with* practitioners. And while social science might have and indeed produce changes in its research subject it does not do so directly, rather the change happens when somebody outside of the research learns from the research and changes. Different from social science, and also often employing similar methods, is consulting. Consulting is about change and development and it is work done *for* practitioners, usually for those practitioners who may pay or in other ways have the sources /capital to get an external consultant to address their concerns. However, consultants are usually not interested in transferability and generating knowledge for the wider society. In between conventional research and consulting lies Action Research.

## 2.2 Action Research in **walqing**

Although the field of Action Research has expanded substantially over the decades, there is no rich tradition for this research strategy in European research programmes. In this aspect, the European Commission's 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme took a new approach when Action Research was welcomed as a part of the **walqing** project.

The research in **walqing** was divided into three pillars according to research paradigms and methodologies, but with considerable priority given to cross-pillar integration of findings and the discussion of their implications with stakeholders and policymakers. The Action Research of Work Package 9 was grouped within Pillar 2: Stakeholder involvement, a pillar that sought to join the various perspectives in order to disseminate good-practice examples about working conditions beyond their specific contexts. Within Action Research-based interventions, and on arenas based on them, processes to facilitate mutual learning and dialogue among stakeholders were created, in which core findings from case studies/interventions were discussed, and through which actors committed themselves to joint strategies at company or sector level.

## 2.3 Introducing the cases

The purpose of WP9 was to develop and disseminate strategies for improving working conditions. The 'action' of the Action Research may be viewed in two main steps or at two levels:

- Key stakeholders at case level were involved in dialogue process about development of (unhealthy) working conditions.
- Dialogue among key people at EU/national/sectoral level was established, with the point of departure in learning from case level, to develop further policy/action to improve situation and dissemination beyond the single case level.

At the **walqing** Budapest meeting early 2011 a WP9 meeting/roundtable of three hours about status of work and to jointly design and develop the initial phase and start-up of the

Action Research activities. The selected cases for Action Research projects aimed at improving identified unhealthy or dysfunctional working conditions were based on the WP6 work of the partners. The following table summarizes the partners and the cases.

**Table 1** AR partners, cases and issues

Country	Case	Issues
Austria	Company case, cleaning (and the Chamber of Labour)	The roles of front-line managers (involve stakeholders in reflection of the implication of <b>walqing</b> results)
Belgium	Sectoral case, construction	Greening: what does it mean for the jobs?
Bulgaria	Company case, waste collection	Romani minority employees with low education, women who do manual works and men who drive trucks
Denmark	Sectoral case, waste collection	Subcontracting: the role of the municipality authorities
Norway	Sectoral case, cleaning	The mutual problems and mutual learning in tendering processes



## 3 Learning by doing: Getting active on different levels (or not): **walqing** Action Research in Austria

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### 3.1 Introduction

This report comprises several initiatives to carry out a small Action Research project in the Austrian **walqing** research context.<sup>1</sup> This required several approaches:

**Approach 1a:** An initial concept based on findings in the WP6 Cleancomp case planned for an ambitious clarification of the roles of front-line managers (object managers) in commercial cleaning. This failed due to poor timing and a lack of an accepted role for the researchers in a process of change at the company investigated.

**Approach 1b:** However, it led to a discussion with management at Cleancomp, generating further insight into the case and the challenges of introducing an Action Research approach into a context that is not very amenable to it either institutionally or on the level of the company culture.

**Approach 2:** In parallel, we aimed to engage employee representatives at the institutional level in a discussion of the practical implications of the **walqing** research. This resulted in a workshop and brainstorming session that was located in between the usual format of 'disseminating results' and an effort to involve stakeholders in the validation and reflection of the implication of these results.

In this report, we are first going to present approach 1a and analyze the reasons for its failure, drawing some more general conclusions for the implementations of Action Research projects. We then proceed to approach 1b and discuss the conclusions it allows to draw both in terms of further knowledge about the case and in terms of the Action Research approach. After this, we present approach 2, reflecting upon the format as well as the content, before drawing final conclusions for the Austrian activities within Work Package 9 of the **walqing** project.

### 3.2 Situating the project

#### 3.2.1 The *Cleancomp* case

The first project of the Austrian Action Research work package is situated in the cleaning sector. It is based on the Work Package 6 case study conducted at the company *Cleancomp*. The company's main activity is in the field of general facility management.

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<sup>1</sup> Some findings need to be left out in this report in order to ensure confidentiality.

Within the case study, 13 interviews were conducted, including interviews with managers, first-line managers (also referred to as FLMs or 'object managers') and office cleaners. One management interviewee helped to ensure access to the interviewees and was eventually also the contact person for the WP9 activities.

### 3.2.2 The object managers' role

In the case study, the role of the object manager soon drew particular attention to it. The object managers can be seen as a very important group of employees at *Cleancomp*, as they have a high amount of responsibility. One object manager is in charge of about 80 objects and about 50 cleaners. The main tasks of object managers include planning the allocation of cleaning staff, supervising the objects and keeping contact with the clients, exerting quality control in the objects, and leading the team of cleaners. Specifically within office cleaning, there are some additional tasks, such as driving cleaners from one place to another if they lack transportation, or delivering material such as detergents, toilet paper, towels, etc. to the objects.

In practice, one of the core tasks of the object managers is dealing with short-term changes and absenteeism. It is one of the most common and difficult tasks of object managers to find replacements for cleaners at short notice. Cleaners call late at night or early in the morning if they cannot come to work; object managers then need to find a replacement. On the one hand, they have to make sure that clients get what they paid for; on the other hand, they have to adapt to cleaners' availabilities.

On some days, there can be three or four cleaners away sick for whom replacements have to be found. In rare cases, if nobody can be found, object managers themselves have to go and clean. The object manager interviewed perceives the flexibility demands and the need to be available on the phone all the time as a genuine part of the job.

During the time of the case study research, the management at *Cleancomp* reported considerable trouble with absenteeism and turnover of object managers. In addition, finding new qualified staff was perceived as difficult or hardly possible. Also, management expressed general concern over object managers' commitment and awareness of their leadership responsibilities.

## 3.3 Articulation of objectives

### 3.3.1 Generating objectives

The object managers and their roles were thus relevant in two ways: Management interviews suggested that there was dissatisfaction with their performance and awareness of their roles and responsibilities, while the case study pointed to high demands, extensive working time and very limited compensation. Researchers thus developed an intervention around the clarification of roles, improving the awareness of management, object managers and cleaners of the mutual expectations and capacities to fulfil them.

### 3.3.2 Articulated objectives

The concept (see box) was offered to the company, but eventually rejected after some delays.

#### ***Clarifying roles and mutual expectations of cleaners, first-line managers, 'the company', and the customers***

The management sees a lack of identification of cleaners with the company X. Cleaners are dispatched to different customers' sites, some of them never having been to company X's site. They are hard to reach for health initiatives, company parties, etc., and sometimes they negotiate issues such as working times with the client companies rather than company X. The contact point with the company is the first-line manager. Communications here have to be close to coordinate work, and personal relations become important. However, among first-line managers, there has been some turnover. **walqing** case study research has found that indeed, in combination with the flat hierarchies first-line managers' jobs can become overburdened by demands and needs from all sides. Among cleaners and first-line managers (FLMs), relations are structured by rules and expectations of reciprocity and social exchange. The WP9 initiative aims at some clarification of roles and mutual expectations among cleaners, FLMs and management/'the company' which should generate ideas about resources, procedures and spaces of discretion needed by all sides for FLMs to be able to navigate these requirements.

#### *Our proposal:*

We suggest organizing a series of group discussions, the first ones separately with cleaners and first-line managers respectively. The aim is to clarify reciprocal roles of cleaners, first-line managers, 'the company' X and the customers, to identify expectations, desires and opinions of the people involved and to facilitate exchange between them in order to develop suggestions for support and measures to address the issues raised. In order to facilitate an exchange that is concrete and focussed on the situation, and in order to be able to document the results and communicate them to the other groups, we are going to work with tokens, visualizing tools and jointly created maps.

We suggest a multi-stage design with several workshops. The groups involved are supposed to work separately in a first step, which can be assumed to enhance an atmosphere of trust as well as an authentic and group-specific discussion. In the next step, the results of the single working groups are going to be brought together and discussed.

## 3.4 Partnership and participation

While the cooperation with *Cleancomp* management was friendly, professional and supportive, the concept fell through for several reasons:

- Delays had occurred between the initial discussion and managers' attention to the concept, which was then felt not to tie in with management's approach to the question. Meanwhile, leadership training for object managers and a teambuilding series had been implemented. The issue that was meant to be dealt with in the WP9 intervention had been transferred to these internal activities – and researchers had not managed to insert themselves into managers' ways of addressing the problem. In addition, there had been further staff changes on the middle management level.
- The concept was perceived as professional and comprehensive, but also as exceeding what was originally planned. *'Raising FLMs' awareness of leadership responsibility'* was the term managers used to state their objective.
- In addition, management felt that staff, not being accustomed to working in the way proposed in the concept, were likely to be reluctant to speak and work in a workshop format. However, researchers had a different impression on the basis of their experiences in the interviews with employees.

This way, the concept was rejected for several reasons after some delays. Instead, management were interested in having a presentation of research findings at the company. This presentation offered a new opportunity to discuss findings and the object managers' role, and it eventually yielded some additional findings that were not expected by the researchers.

## 3.5 Action, impact and significance

### 3.5.1 The failed Action Research approach: Reflections, conclusions and lessons learned

The failure of actually carrying out the initiative that had been carefully planned and outlined in the original concept was retrospectively analyzed. Conclusions were drawn that may serve as helpful inputs for putting other Action Research projects into practice. We conclude that

- there should have been more 'rapid prototyping', even if an intervention is planned to be comprehensive. The time that passed from the managements' first expression of interest to the finalization of concept was too long.
- something too long and elaborate can frighten people off.
- there can be competing logics, as, in the current case, the management's logic of narrowing down the problem as opposed to the Action Research logic of broadening inputs.
- it is preferable to not only rely on one (overworked) contact, but to involve more managers sooner to be able to keep the project on the agenda.

### 3.5.2 The presentation of findings: An unexpected source of additional data

In April 2012, the research team was invited to *Cleancomp's* headquarters in order to present selected case study findings. The original promotor organized the meeting and invited management colleagues as well as the object managers. By the researchers, the presentation was primarily thought of as a service for the company, with the option to get some feedback and communicatively validate findings. However, it turned out to be a rich additional data source.

### 3.5.3 The setting and the absence of object managers

The presentation took place in a meeting room at *Cleancomp's* main building. Apart from the two FORBA researchers, the participants were several managers including HR and assistants.

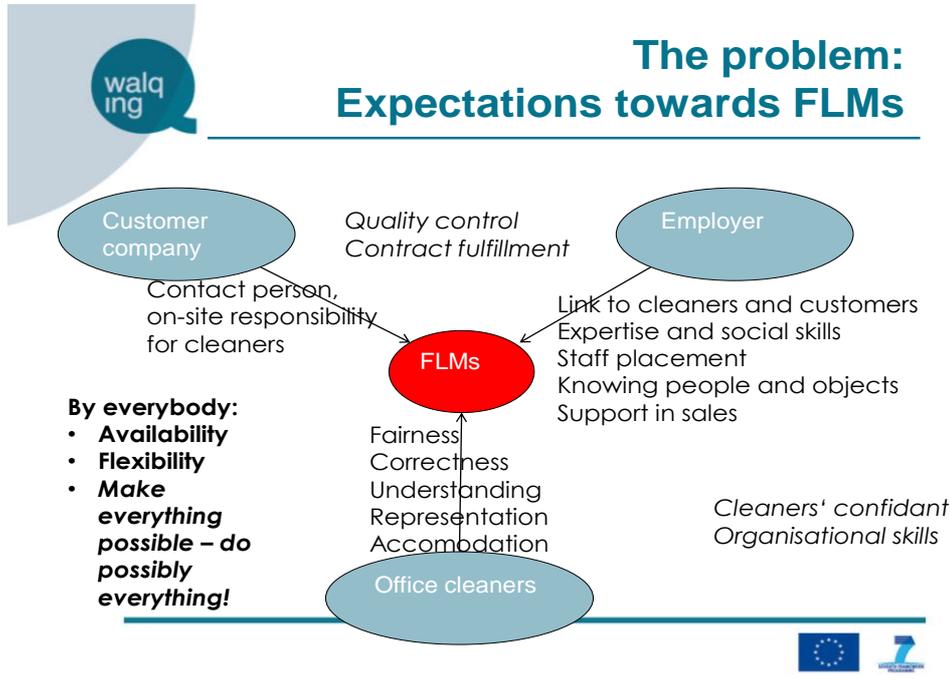
Although all four object managers had been invited, none of them turned up. Managers interpreted this absence as yet another instance of the well-known problems they framed as object managers' lack of commitment and understanding of their leadership role.

However, from the researchers' point of view, the object managers' absence could pragmatically be interpreted as further evidence for their work overload. In addition, in a situation where object managers can hardly have been unaware that managers perceived them as 'a problem', they may have been expecting researchers (a little-known species to them) to add weight to that perception and thus preferred to avoid a situation with uncertain outcomes in which blame might be assigned. However, by preferring absence to voice they unintentionally reiterated the sense of 'being left alone' on the front-line.

### 3.5.4 Contents, feedback and conclusions

The researchers now presented the **walqing** case study findings focussing on the role of object managers – aiming to gain further insight into managers' perception of the problem and to introduce their own hypotheses. The main point of the presentation were the multiple workloads and expectations object managers were confronted with. The following figure (which, in German, was also presented at the meeting) illustrates these expectations:

Figure 1 Multiple expectations



Researchers with this intended to suggest that just possibly the framing of the challenges object managers faced in terms of 'leadership skills' added to the overload rather than providing organisational resources to address it – and that a redefinition of the location of possible solutions to the problems was in order.

Interestingly, management agreed with the results and interpreted them as strengthening their own point of view. The researchers therefore felt that they had not entirely got through with their message. Obviously, there were diverging interpretations of the same facts. The following table summarizes the oppositions between researchers' and managements' perspectives and understandings:

Figure 2 Diverging perspectives

Researchers' approach	Managers' interpretation
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Managements' expectations towards FLMS too high	<input type="checkbox"/> FLMs do not live up to expectations
<input type="checkbox"/> Relationship between FLM and cleaners is overloaded	<input type="checkbox"/> Relationships are main resources
<input type="checkbox"/> Point out that FLMs need relief by company	<input type="checkbox"/> FLMs need to be more aware of their responsibility
<input type="checkbox"/> Formalisation of procedure	<input type="checkbox"/> Formalisation of procedure

Concluding, researchers and managers agreed on the situation but even after the presentation retained two different interpretations of it. Social scientists perceived an overload of expectations, managers a lack of professionalism and leadership skills of object managers – and both interpreted both the research and the situation of object managers' absence in their respective framework.

Hence, both researchers and managers stayed on the respective paths set by their cognitive (and normative) frameworks: as social scientists we tended to side with the assumed workers' (in this case, object managers') standpoint, in the name of an interest in feasible workloads and organisational support, with some scepticism towards 'mere' training measures, particularly when implemented in lieu of structural changes. Managers stayed with the notion of leadership and commitment, which they suppose could and should be further developed through training.

Interestingly, nevertheless, the measures managers had implemented were partly in line with researchers' conclusion that some formalisation of procedures might relieve the pressure of intransparency and day-to-day negotiations with cleaners on object managers.

Since the case study had been conducted, there had been major changes at *Cleancomp*, including the implementation of new documentation systems, the dismissal of employees who had not worked correctly, changes in payment and bonus systems and trainings

Some of these measures do correspond to what the researchers would have recommended on the basis of the case study findings: more transparent company strategies so that expectations and requirements are not only loaded on the object managers as individuals and their relationships to the cleaners. However, some of these measures were introduced in a framework of a different logic and objective: as a way of making object managers aware of their responsibility rather than as a way to disburden them.

Interestingly, the reports of recent activities also enhanced some new, refined interpretations of case study data. For instance, they helped to explain cleaners' high priority on object managers' 'being correct' that we had found in the interviews, and made problems found explainable by the previous payment system.

## 3.6 Approach 2: Interactive dissemination

### 3.6.1 The context

As an attachment to the **walqing** project, the research team have also contracted with the Viennese Chamber of Labour (AK) for a small subproject adapting and translating the **walqing** findings for the Austrian context. The Chamber of Labour is an institution of interest representation in analogy to the Economic Chamber, with the legal mandate to 'represent and further the social, economic, occupational and cultural interests of employees' (§ 1 AKG). It has compulsory membership of all private-sector employees, provides support and services to unions and works councils, gives legal and general advice to employees and consumers, contracts research (to a limited extent) and publicly

advocates employees' interest. It is funded by 0.5% of gross wages that is collected from all private-sector employees as part of their social security contribution. The project for the AK entails some Austrian follow-up to **walqing** Work Packages 2 and 3, and the translation and presentation of **walqing** case study results and good practice examples to Austrian stakeholders with an output of a report, a workshop for unionists and a final short conference.

With the general experience of **walqing** dissemination and stakeholder involvement (from a fairly early stage in the project), and the experience of the failed first Action Research intervention, we decided to use the first workshop as an opportunity to gather further input by stakeholder representatives on the usability of social science results and to discuss Austrian labour representatives' needs and wishes for input from social science research – aiming at turning the challenge of involving stakeholders into a question to pursue in a dialogue. Since the Chamber of Labour expected a presentation of results, we created a somewhat hybrid workshop to which Chamber of Labour employees, works councillors and unionists from sectors close to the ones investigated in **walqing** were invited by both FORBA and the Chamber of Labour.

### ***Workshop with the Chamber of Labour: 'Indices, examples, interventions: how to improve quality of work?'***

*Duration:* July 4, 2012, 9am – 4 pm, Chamber of Labour, Vienna

*Participants:* 11 unionists, works councillors (from social services, construction, and catering) and Chamber of Labour people, 3 FORBA researchers

Facilitated by Ursula Holtgrewe und Karin Sardadvar

#### **Welcome**

**Introductions:** Apart from their name and organisation, participants were asked to briefly talk about 'the last 'bad work' subject I had to deal with'

**Presentation:** 'Quality of work – measuring, showing, designing' (Ursula Holtgrewe)

**Presentation:** 'What makes a good job? Data from Europe and Austria and what are the problem areas?' (Bernhard Saupe)

**Discussion:** Quality of work: Where do good arguments come from? What is missing?

#### **Lunch**

**Presentation:** Examples of good practice and design – Possibilities and obstacles (Karin Sardadvar, Ursula Holtgrewe)

**Discussion:** Good work in company practice: how useful are these examples? What is relevant?

**Summary** (discussion): What would you like from the **walqing** project? How to continue?

### 3.6.2 The workshop

Invitations were circulated using both the AK's and FORBA's lists of contacts, with e-mail follow up, etc. Some 10 participants plus the organisers finally came – union secretaries from the construction union and the service union vida (social services), works councillors from municipal, outsourced and non-profit social services and catering, and two experts from AK Vienna.

The round of introductions, asking a specific question about people's 'last experience with 'bad work' issues was well liked and already generated a lot of examples and issues for later discussion and can thus be recommended for other contexts.

Construction unionists report that agency work is increasing and often enough, employees are hired very informally, at petrol stations, etc. by grey sector companies who will not necessarily register workers and pay social security for them. Indeed, the union investigated some 5000 employees in the sector and found inadequate pay in a third of the cases, mostly concerning migrants from Slovakia or Hungary. While Austria has introduced a fairly strict law against social dumping (see Holtgrewe/Sardadvar 2011), enforcement appears to have room for improvement.

Unionists and works councillors from the social services reported work overload and enforced flexibility particularly during the holiday season. In care work, workers often are only allowed two weeks' holiday in the summer, and work in the meantime is intensified when workers have to fill in for colleagues' holidays – resulting in a pile-up of sick leaves in September that prolongs the problem. Shift plans are changing continuously, working hours extended up to 9-10 hours in the summer, and teams are feeling 'left alone' in a situation of severe understaffing with ever fewer reserve pool employees or agency workers.

A works councillor from a restaurant/catering company reported that collectively agreed wages in catering and hospitality do no longer amount to a living wage. Compared to cleaning, they are some 100 EUR lower for unskilled work – and neither sector is interested in older workers.

This discussion was basically continued after Ursula's presentation on 'Quality of work – measuring, showing, designing' – an overview on dimensions of quality of work and different approaches pursued in **walqing**. Participants emphasised health and safety issues, in particular with regard to older workers. In construction, younger workers are reported to be mostly interested in the money and accepting all kinds of substandard conditions, a challenge for both management and works councils to inform them. Poor-quality safety equipment continues to be an issue (such as wearing work gloves that cause skin problems). Older workers can be examples and are able to sensitise their younger colleagues to health and safety issues. However, in the hospitality sector companies try to avoid hiring older workers altogether.

With regard to company surveys, works councillors and unionists find frequent scepticism and 'survey fatigue': It appears to be a familiar experience that surveys are conducted by

companies, and afterwards no consequences are drawn. Social insurance bodies might also be able to contribute: in Germany, large health insurances analyse (anonymous) diagnoses by company/employer – an effective way of showing management a need for action that would be transferable to Austria with its more centralised system of health insurance.

Karin presented good practice examples derived from the **walqing** project. This also worked as a test for the **walqing** web resource. Participants were given a short form as a ‘thinking aid’ to structure the discussion (an idea borrowed from the Leuven workshop, see chapter 8):

Figure 3 Working form: Good practices

The figure shows a vertical form with three light blue rectangular boxes, each containing a question in bold, dark blue text. The boxes are stacked vertically and separated by white space. The first box contains the text 'relevant example:', the second box contains 'possible area of application?', and the third box contains 'idea of a concrete measure?'.

Participants were particularly interested in sector-level activities – in line with the Austrian tradition of social partnership that gives more attention to collective bargaining than company-level initiatives, and also with the heterogeneity of companies in the respective sectors.

The daytime-cleaning example (<http://www.walqing.eu/index.php?id=100>) raised the question why companies would develop an interest in daytime cleaning – the argument would be less cost and effort in managing larger headcounts which increase the risk of absenteeism.

While work peaks in cleaning may be flattened, the question remained open how to do this in elderly care – another sector where split shifts are not uncommon in Austria. Partly, it may be possible to shift tasks that are less time-critical but a campaign would need to involve all stakeholders including the medical profession and clients.

The remuneration of part-time work and overtime in part-time is an issue insufficiently resolved in collective agreements (and labour law) from unionists’ point of view. Overtime

supplements should apply immediately to increase the incentive for adequate staffing levels – currently there are compensation periods over several months that increase workloads and flexibility pressures and encourage employers to hire workers for fewer contractually agreed hours than are effectively worked. Part-time generally is regarded as problematic for income levels and levels of social security claims – but unlikely to change anytime soon.

The Italian initiative to address racism in care (<http://www.walqing.eu/index.php?id=106>) also generated some interest: how can employers make clear that they are protecting their employees? So did the initiatives to improve the image of low-wage sectors. Particularly the ‘women’s’ sectors apparently can use all the visibility, recognition, etc. they could get.

Participants were also impressed with the Danish ‘future workshop’ for the waste sector (see Chapter 6) and discussed a similar initiative for the care sector in Austria – issues such as working times appear to have all the ingredients and need a dialogue well beyond collective bargaining.

Indeed, in the final discussion interestingly a certain ambiguity over the international European character of our examples and the Austrian situation emerged: Some participants said, ‘We shouldn’t just complain’ and would also like more visibility of Austrian initiatives. Indeed, a result of the workshop was the invitation of Christian Fölzer of the Construction Union to present their research into underpayment of construction workers to the **walqing** final conference.

## 3.7 Contribution to Action Research

### 3.7.1 Learning from experimenting

While not altogether successful as intended, this first attempt at moving in the direction of Action Research still has been a valuable learning experience and may also contribute to Action Research. Generally and trivially, Action Research attempts will need to be adapted to specific country and cultural contexts, and we cannot generally assume that either companies, workers or other stakeholders will jump at any opportunity to engage or participate. Non-participation, either by explicit refusal, by ignoring well-meant offers or by simply not coming is common enough. The instance of object managers invited by their bosses and not showing up (at a simple presentation and discussion) shows that views on dialogue, discussion and participation are indeed hierarchically and habitually unevenly distributed, and in Austria not everybody subscribes to the view that reflection and collaborative knowledge generation are generally worthwhile activities, particularly not on the company level.

While the researchers clearly have made mistakes in the setup of the project, ranging from overambition to lack of strategy, we do think the societal context should not be underrated. Although there is a German-language tradition of Action Research (for an overview, see Schemme/Zimmermann 2009) in the 1970s/80s tradition of ‘humanisation of working life’, in Austria the approach is hardly known, making it new both for companies

and for researchers. This is a country where industrial democracy is mostly conducted through representative bodies (or in informal workplace relations), and work organisation and job design are generally regarded as managerial prerogative in spite of the comparatively strong social partnership. Hence, it was difficult for researchers to find and assume a legitimately interventive role. This is also illustrated by the fact that in the Chamber of Labour workshop unionists were particularly interested in the sector-level examples of good practice.

On the basis of our 'failed' Action Research approach, we agree with Gayá Wicks/Reason (2009) that it is particularly the first steps, the beginning of the project, that are decisive for future activity and should gain particular attention – and that a 'rapid prototyping' approach, starting with small dimensions and stakes in the process to generate trust but involving upper management from early on, may work better.

Nevertheless, we were impressed with the data we could obtain from just presenting research results at the company. Of course, '[s]imply offering one's insights is not Action Research' (Bradbury Huang 2007: 101f.), but the activity went beyond just presenting as well as beyond a standard interview. Taking smaller steps towards involving stakeholders, a participant, observing, open-minded setting of presenting and discussing findings and attaching further questions, combined with the specific dynamic of this setting, can enhance case study research in general.

Finally, even if it was not put into practice, we found and were affirmed by the company and project partners that the concept we had elaborated for the Action Research project was perceived as an innovative, adequate and promising approach. It may thus be adopted for other projects and is presented in the next section.

The workshop in collaboration with the Chamber of Labour did not lead to concrete measures, hence probably does not amount to Action Research in the full sense of the term either. However, it took small steps into the direction of a more dialogical format of presenting results, allowed stakeholders to exchange experiences across sectors and identify common issues. For the **walqing** team, it also helped to put the **walqing** findings into context beyond the sectors investigated in Austria and provided additional insight into unionists' priorities and mind sets. It may thus provide an inroad into activities beyond **walqing** that make both sector-level and cross-sectoral challenges and initiatives more visible, and involve stakeholders beyond the social partners.

### 3.7.2 Methods developed for the workshop concept

In the concept that was originally suggested as intervention outline to *Cleancomp*, we developed methods and processes which were discussed with research partners from other countries and the feedback was worked in. Although developed for the specific context, they may be fruitful for other occasions. The outlined project included the following steps and methods:

### **Workshop 1: ‘Where do we work and who is ‘the company’? Cleaners’ perspectives**

*Duration:* 3-4 hours

*Participants:* ca. 8-12 office cleaners, out of the teams of different first-line managers.

Facilitated by Ursula Holtgrewe und Karin Sardadvar. (If necessary, options for translation need to be clarified. Alternatively, participants with poor German skills should be assisted by participants with the same mother tongue who can help with translation.)

**Part 1 – Introductory session:** Prior to the workshop, the participants are asked to bring an object which represents or symbolizes an important aspect of their work. Referring to these objects, a session with introductory statements takes place, allowing for making first references to the work and to what is important there.

#### **Part 2: Where do we work and who is ‘the company’? Employees’ perspectives with regard to work in a complex situation**

*Content:* In this session, participants jointly and by means of discussions create a map presenting places, people, relationships and resources that characterize their work.

*Outline:* There are several tables for about four people each. On each table, there are two blank maps, i.e. big empty sheets of paper or boards. Additionally, there are tokens in different colours (e.g. LUDO tokens or PLAYMOBIL dolls), objects or pictures, small sheets of paper and pens. Parts of the tokens and objects are pre-labelled with terms such as ‘coffee break’, ‘my wage’, ‘this is where rules are set’, ‘colleagues’, ‘first-line manager’, etc. Additional non-labelled tokens can be labelled by the participants and added.

*To do:* To create a map of the work situation. The tokens are meant to be distributed onto or between the boards during discussions in the small group. Additionally, pieces of thread will be provided which can be used as arrows or connecting lines.

*Objective:* To reflect and clarify tasks, functions, expectations and desires of the customer company and the company X from cleaners’ perspective. Optionally, additional tokens can be distributed to others as ‘desires’.

*End of session:* The small groups walk round and look at other groups’ boards, and explanations are given. Pictures of the boards will be taken.

#### **Part 3: The first-line managers – relationship, perspectives, needs**

*Outline:* Two presentation boards are provided. One symbolizes the best possible first-line manager (‘If my object manager was the best imaginable object manager...’), the other one the worst possible first-line manager (‘If my object manager was the worst imaginable object manager ...’). The participants have small cards on which they write characteristics and behaviours and which are then put on the two boards. The facilitators group them by issues addressed. In a next step, the attributions are sorted according to priority: Which are the most important good or bad characteristics and behaviours of a first-line manager? Optionally also: Which of them are easy or hard to influence?

#### **Part 4: Collection and negotiation of findings**

The group agrees which findings can be communicated to the other groups. Which are the messages to be transferred? If necessary, the facilitators choose central findings and suggest them as results. Discussion of what is supposed to be communicated to whom (object manager, management).

### **Workshop 2: Perspectives and role perception of first-line managers**

**Duration:** 3-4 hours

**Participants:** All four first-line managers. Facilitated by Ursula Holtgrewe und Karin Sardadvar

**Part 1 – Introductory session:** Prior to the workshop, the participants are asked to think of a statement to the following topic: ‘The best thing that happened to me at work in the last six months ...’ Referring to these statements, a session with introductory statements takes place.

#### **Part 2: Where do we work and who is ‘the company’? Employees’ perspectives with regard to work in a complex situation between employer, customer companies and co-workers**

**Outline, to do, objective, end of session:** Like part 2 in workshop 1. In this session, participants jointly and by means of discussions create a map presenting places, people, relationships and resources that characterize their work. The participants work in one group of four or two groups of two. On each table, there are two blank maps, i.e. big empty sheets of paper or boards. Besides, there are tokens in different colours (e.g. like from LUDO or PLAYMOBIL), objects or pictures, small sheets of paper and pens. Parts of the tokens and objects are pre-labelled with terms such as ‘coffee break’, ‘my wage’, ‘this is where rules are set’, ‘first-line manager colleagues’, ‘co-workers’, etc. A stronger focus is put on comparing desire and reality with regard to the two types of companies.

#### **Part 3: The office cleaners – relationship, perspectives, needs**

**Outline:** As in workshop 1, but with regard to the cleaners. Two presentation boards are provided. One symbolizes the best possible cleaner (‘If my co-workers were the best imaginable employees ...’), the other one the worst possible cleaner (‘If my co-workers were the worst imaginable employees ...’). The participants have small cards on which they write characteristics and behaviours and which are then put on the two boards. The facilitators group them by issues. In a next step, the attributions are sorted according to priority: Which are the most important good or bad characteristics and behaviours of the workers? Optionally also: Which of them are easy or hard to influence?

#### **Part 4: Collection and negotiation of findings**

The group agrees which findings can be communicated to the other groups. Which are the messages to be transferred? If necessary, the facilitators choose central findings and suggest them as results. Discussion of what is supposed to be communicated to whom (object manager, management).

### **Workshop 3: Exchange meeting between cleaners and FLMs**

**Duration:** ca. 1 hour. In this rather short workshop, FLMs and cleaners are given the opportunity to learn about the other group’s respective results as a preparation for workshop 4. The main objective of this workshop is to get to know the other groups’ results and to be able to respond to them prior to the meeting in workshop 4 that will include the management, too. Results from workshops 1 and 2 are presented and reactions collected in a discussion facilitated by Ursula Holtgrewe and Karin Sardadvar. This way, last changes for the presentation of results in workshop 4 can be made.

### **Workshop 4: Discussion of findings**

**Aims:** To identify problems and issues, communicate differing points of views between the groups, find possible solutions. To explicate that and why management wants the cleaners to identify with company X and the FLMs to facilitate this identification and to work out tensions linked to these demands. What are the interests, relations of exchange, rules and resources for the different groups that enhance or limit the stronger inclusion of cleaners to company X?

**Duration:** ca. 2-3 hours

**Preparation:** Based on the negotiation of findings in workshops 1 and 2, all groups involved receive the results of the previous workshops as a paper/series of photographs in order to be able to prepare. If feasible, results such as the maps will be put visibly into the room.

**Participants:** Building cleaning manager, HR manager, all first-line managers or 1-2 volunteering speakers of the group of first-line managers (organized in advance by Karin and Ursula), 1-3 volunteering speakers for the cleaners (organized in advance by Karin and Ursula). Alternatively: all participants, possible fishbowl structure with interchangeable audience/speaker roles. Facilitated by Karin Sardadvar und Ursula Holtgrewe.

**Outline:** *This is a preliminary concept. The outline of the workshop will be adapted according to the findings of the first two workshops.*

**Part 1:** Karin and Ursula present the results of workshops 1 and 2 in an anonymized and abstract way. They have already been sent to all participants to facilitate preparation. They may also be looked at in the room.

**Part 2:** Reciprocal statements of each group with regard to the results of the other group – collection of solutions that have been found? Which unsolved areas of tensions have been identified? Arguments, points of view, pros and cons on the presentation board. Maybe working with the following questions: ‘What do we want or need from whom (the company, the super- or subordinates)? What is important and in which way, what is easy and in which way?’

**Part 3:** Summary of main points and pain points by Karin and Ursula

**Part 4:** Findings and perspectives. Which options for continuing the process do exist? Joint creation of board: What are the next steps, what will be done?

### **3.7.3 Reflections on researchers' roles**

In general, and not only in an Action Research context, social scientists have a range of roles: in the field, they ask questions and observe, when presenting results or teaching, they provide answers, explain or even challenge others' observations and theories and defend their own. Even in conventional social science, this range of behaviours is not easy for everyone. Another way of handling the problem is to keep data gathering, analysis and presentation of results apart spatially and socially – having interviews transcribed before analysing them, anonymizing them, writing jargon-laden text, etc. – all are practices that protect not just interviewees but also researchers from the

entanglements of multiple roles and encounters across the boundaries of social spheres. Now, Action Research effectively makes some of these practices impossible because role switches and balances are now required in continuous interactions with the *same* cooperation partners.

Who is the expert in this context? Is it the ones who live and work in the field, know the hierarchies and context and have experienced them maybe for many years? Or is it the ones who have the advantage of an outsider perspective, of a distance to the field and to what is happening there, combined with access to systematic research tools? And who gets to make decisions over consequences of the knowledge generated?

It is probably both of them, in different ways. But even if this is acknowledged, the role of the researcher as someone who presents problems, explains reasons or suggests solutions is a less clear one than the one of the researcher who respectfully asks life-world experts to share their experience and interpretations with her or him.

Indeed, it is a specific challenge to turn 'audiences' into participants, and the challenge does not just lie with the 'others' but with researchers' own understanding of their role (cf. Johnsen 2010). One way out of this problem – attempted in Approach 2 – was to redirect the problem of 'finding an audience' into a research question about practitioners' needs first. This provided some insight and may have the additional advantage for researchers that they can operate within their comfort zone – formulating a research question is what we do every day.

Furthermore, it can be helpful to remind oneself of some basic ideas of Action Research – not only in Action Research projects but also in other situations of less familiar researcher roles such as project presentations and discussions with representatives of an empirical case. It can be useful to remember that such a role switch does not necessarily mean that the researcher now – e.g. after a completed field study – knows everything and understands everything. Indeed, aiming to explain 'the case' or the workings of a company to an experienced manager of that company is quite unnecessarily daunting. Rather, it is more adequate to perceive oneself as in a process of 'knowledge creation' (Bradbury Huang 2007: 93), a kind of 'intersubjective or dialogical involvement with the participants' (Levin/Ravn 2007: 2) that is characterized by 'partnership and participation' (Bradbury Huang 2007: 101).

While thus, from a purist Action Research viewpoint, this range of approaches cannot be dressed up as a full success story, the exploratory steps into more continuous interaction with the fields of investigation have certainly been instructive and helped to reflect and enrich the experience of **walqing**.

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## 4 walqing Action Research in Belgium: Job quality in Belgian ‘green’ construction

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### 4.1 Situating the Action Research project

The study of the Belgian ‘green’ construction sector led to the following reports:

- A sectoral study (WP5)
- Three case studies in companies active in the building or refurbishment of energy-friendly houses. In each company, between 4 and 7 interviews were held with managers out of various hierarchical levels. This investigation phase led to the establishment of three case study reports (WP6)
- A comparative analysis on the basis of 14 in-depth interviews transcripts with blue collar workers out of the three companies in question (WP7)

In the selection of cases for the construction sector, we concentrated on green construction of private houses. The five reports established during the project contain a lot of interesting material on the consequences on the job content and working conditions of this evolution. We decided to integrate it into one report and use this as a basis for an Action Research approach at the sectoral level. In the course of the WP5 sectoral investigations at the earlier stages of the project, a key conclusion was that all sector level social partner and interest organisations are quite concerned with the impact of greening on the sector, but apparently the issue of the job quality is not high on the agenda. The focus is rather on the environmental concerns and sustainability, the quantitative job creation it involves, the number of new companies that will be created and to some extent the specific sectoral training efforts that might be needed in the future. For the unions, the topic of ‘greening’ is considered as new and they mostly think of it in terms of new and specific skills, for which more training is needed. The employer organisations put their hopes into the fact that more societal awareness about sustainability will improve the image of the sector and, hence, reduce the recruitment problems and staff turnover they are faced with. It was striking that, at that level, there was actually little knowledge about – and interest in – the factual effects on the work organisation, the job content, the working conditions and health & safety issues.

During the case studies, it appeared that precisely these latter dimensions of job quality may in fact quite strongly be affected by the technical evolutions in the product ‘house’ and in the process of building it. While obviously not all the changes observed can directly be related to the shift to passive house construction or the strict energy consumption regulations, it has become quite clear that jobs are changing in construction. Observations include, amongst others, a growing standardisation of the construction process and of the jobs, a tighter planning of the whole process, and the increased use of subcontracting leading to a lengthening of the entire value chain and a related increase of coordination

requirements. These changes are related to the very detailed quality requirements and technical specificities of all aspects of construction, but also to growing cost pressures in a shrinking market of private house building. These combined trends have mixed and ambiguous effects on the different dimensions of job quality. At the same time, it also appeared that the three studied companies apply a completely different company strategy and policy with contrasting effects for workers. These observations raised questions about what determines this growing standardisation and its ambiguous effects: the product and process innovations (the greening) or the company policies (cultures and strategies) or still other evolutions (labour market mismatches, etc.).

On the basis of these combined findings, the identified gap between sector-level knowledge and company-level practices was considered a good basis for Action Research. We thought that raising awareness amongst the range of well-established sectoral stakeholders and organisations about these issues is crucial if they have to develop visions, strategies and actions concerning the quantity and quality of jobs in green construction. In addition, this was found more feasible than company-level interventions. The three companies, recommended to us by the sectoral social partners, are examples of employers who have developed a clear strategic vision on the way their company should be managed, and they are aware of the tactical and operational consequences of their strategies. This results, in our view, in little to no room to problematize specific aspects of their management. In addition, several of the key issues raised during the interviews can and should also be addressed at the regional and sectoral level, such as VET and labour market shortages. The choice was therefore to situate the action at the sectoral level by bringing together, on the one hand, top management of these three companies and have them discuss jointly the main findings of our **walqing** investigation, and on the other hand sectoral social partners and various institutions involved out of the civil society to discuss these findings in terms of societal perspectives and impacts.

## 4.2 Articulation of objectives

The main aim of the Action Research was to investigate in more depth the ambiguous and mixed evolutions in job quality as related (or not?) to greening in the frame of WP9 and to confront these with the assessments of these evolutions of social partners and other stakeholders at the sectoral level. The Action Research approach makes it possible to include in a participatory way practitioners as partners in the knowledge creation on these evolutions. In a series of workshops the different objectives were to:

- acquire cumulative knowledge on the real effects of greening in construction on job quality (also in view of publication and further dissemination beyond **walqing**)
- actively seek feedback of and discuss this progressing knowledge with different stakeholders and practitioners
- communicate to both company management and sector level stakeholders the contrasting findings and outcomes in terms of work organisation and their effects on job quality in order to raise awareness of organisational choices and their effects for workers
- raise awareness of the importance of human resources policies (such as recruitment and training practices) for the current and future labour market evolutions, the qualitative and quantitative labour market shortages herein and in particular the ageing workforce
- identify and discuss possible actions, strategies and policies to take account of these trends and challenges

## 4.3 Method, process and actions

We organised four Action Research workshops in view of these objectives.

### 4.3.1 Workshop 1: Discussion with management of three green construction companies

**Duration:** 3 hours

**Participants:** 1 to 2 representatives of the three companies involved in the research.

**Documents:** A basic text integrating all findings of WP5, WP6 and WP7 was split into two documents and translated into Dutch. One report was a short introductory text on the **walqing** project and the general characteristics of the Belgian 'green' construction sector, the other one contained a synthesis of the main findings out of the three case studies without drawing clear conclusions. The draft conclusions were mainly built on the observations made in the three case studies, and consequently did not have any claims on generalisation.

**Time and place:** 10 February 2012. Meeting organised at HIVA premises

**Objectives:** Workshop 1 served three main objectives. Each one was addressed in a different phase of the meeting:

**Objective/Phase 1: validation of the synthesis report:** Prior to the workshop, the participants were asked to read the synthesis report that integrated the observations done in the three case studies. The first stage of the meeting consisted of a short presentation reiterating the **walqing** approach and the main topics discussed in the synthesis report. Participants were asked either to validate, point per point, the synthetic observations from the case study reports or to amend them. Important disagreements that after a short discussion could not be resolved were noted and postponed to an in-depth discussion for the next stage.

**Objective/Phase 2: discussion of the draft conclusions and items on which the three companies seemed to have diverging opinions.** These were presented as statements or questions (each slide containing one statement or question) accompanied by some comments. The relevance of this second stage was also to look beyond the three company case studies and to lift the conclusions to the construction sector as a whole as assessed by the three company representatives. Here are some illustrations of the presented statements:

- The increased standardisation of the construction process, such as off-site prefabricated module construction, improves health and safety at the workforce but makes jobs more short-cycled and routine. What are possible long-term effects on workers of these changes?
- How will the companies cope with the expected rise of the age of retirement (in the first place for bricklayers and related professions)?
- The availability of suitable applicants appears as a major drawback for the construction sector. Will the tendency towards task narrowing and relative outsourcing of craftsmanship further tarnish the sector's attractiveness?
- The building of a new house will become less and less payable for the modal citizen. Will this lead to a continuous further standardising and outsourcing? Is the drive to keep costs down more, less or equally important in these evolutions than the greenifying of the sector?

**Objective/Phase 3: discussion of the future:** how will the sector as a whole evolve, as well as each one of the companies concerned? Here a deepening and finalisation of the discussion was the main objective. In particular, the aim was to raise awareness on the importance of work organisation for job quality and sustainability of jobs and the divergent organisational options that are apparently feasible in this respect.

**Outcome:** Validated case study findings and additional data from the three companies on trends and challenges for the sector as a whole.

#### 4.3.2 Workshop 2: Discussion with the sectoral trade unions

**Duration:** 3 hours

**Participants:** 1 or 2 representatives out of the three major trade union organisations active in the construction sector

**Documents:** The revised WP9 report including the validated company data and complemented with new information derived from the first workshop was used as the document for the discussions in Workshop 2. Again, the participants were asked to read the report prior to the workshop. The workshop started with a presentation of the main observations and conclusions from the research and Workshop 1 and ended with a range of specific questions and statements for validation and discussion.

**Time and place:** 12 March 2012. Meeting organised at HIVA.

**Objectives:** The main objectives of this phase were:

1. Broaden the perspective beyond the three exemplary companies included in the case study research. Since these were typical 'cutting-edge' companies in green construction (and were selected for that reason), it was important to achieve a more qualified overview of trends in the sector as a whole, for instance on companies mainly working in renovation rather than in building new houses. The majority of companies work in the first type of construction.
2. Add more explicitly a trade union perspective to the recorded evolutions in the sector in order to complement the case study findings which were dominantly based on interviews with management (by reasons of absence of trade unions in the three studied companies)
3. Discuss specific job quality issues in green construction such as related to health & safety, short-cycled work, standardisation, work intensification, etc.
4. Raise awareness on different possible outcomes for the job quality as related to the work organisation and about the importance of improving job quality to make jobs sustainable and prevent early retirement
5. Set the step from diagnosis to solutions and strategies and actions to be taken at the sectoral level. This included a.o.:
  - discuss recorded problems on skills and qualifications, investments in and use of VET, labour market shortages, high turnover of youngsters, early retirement, undeclared work and overtime, and the situation of migrant workers
  - discuss what to do about it, more precisely with respect to competence certifications, focused VET programmes and efforts, scenarios for sectoral and intersectoral mobility of older workers, the opportunities and limits of social economy initiatives for social inclusion of vulnerable groups in construction, etc.
  - collect information and opinions on issues (except salary issues and function classifications) liable to be discussed during the forthcoming negotiations preparing the new collective agreement for the sector.

**Outcome:** A third version of the comprehensive WP9 report including possible priorities valid for the 'green' sector with respect to the promotion of decent working conditions (safety, health, well-being, workability of the various functions...).

### 4.3.3 Workshop 3: Discussion with the sectoral employer organisations

**Duration:** 3 hours

**Participants:** 1 to 2 representatives out of the three major employer organisations active in the construction sector

**Documents:** The further updated WP9 report. The workshop started with a presentation of the main observations and conclusions from the research and previous workshops and ended with a range of specific questions and statements for validation and discussion.

**Time and place:** 22 March 2012. Meeting organised at the premises of the employer organisation of the SMEs in the construction sector.

**Objectives:** The main objectives of this phase were similar to those of the second workshop:

1. Add the perspective of the employer organisations to the observed trends, problems and suggested solutions.
2. Collect information and opinions on issues (except salary issues and function classifications) liable to be discussed during the forthcoming negotiations preparing the new collective agreement for the sector.

**Outcome:** A fourth version of the comprehensive WP9 report including possible priorities, valid for the 'green' sector with respect to the promotion of appropriate working conditions (safety, health, well-being, workability of the various functions...).

#### 4.3.4 Workshop 4: Discussion with various sectoral stakeholders

**Duration:** 3 hours

**Participants:** 1 representative out of various organisations involved in the 'green' construction sector.

**Documents:** The updated version of the comprehensive WP9, read by the participants prior to the workshop.

**Time and place:** second half of March 2012. Meeting organised at HIVA.

**Objectives:**

1. Broaden the perspective beyond the social partners involved in the previous workshops.
2. Put a main emphasis on issues of quantitative and qualitative labour market shortages, VET initiatives in construction in general and on greening in particular.
3. Present and discuss data from a quantitative survey on job quality in construction as compared to other sectors and collect comments and interpretations to these figures
4. Collect information on important tri-partite and social dialogue level initiatives in the construction sector and discuss the place of job quality in these initiatives
5. Special attention was paid to the future developments of the sector and societal issues, such as sustainable jobs, flexicurity issues, inflow and outflow of the labour market, etc.

**Outcome:** Fifth and final version of the comprehensive WP9 report in Dutch (Van Peteghem et al 2012) and to serve as a basis for further publication at national and international scientific events and journals.

## 4.4 Partnership and participation

The Action Research plan and strategy deliberately aimed at the sectoral level as explained. One major reason was that we discovered a gap between the ideas and opinions on the effects of greening in construction at the sectoral level and what we observed in the firms participating in the case study research. In particular the absence of awareness on possible changes in job quality was assessed as offering opportunities for a 'two-way communication' research approach such as fostered with the Action Research methodology. The first workshop with the managers of the studied companies was mainly conceived as a validation process of the case study research and, if possible, a deepening of our understanding of the contrasting corporate strategies and work organisations found in each of them.

In reality, the series of workshops have learned two things. First, contrary to our moderate expectations, the discussion of the synthetic findings of the case study research with the three company managers (Workshop 1) ended up in quite lively discussions on the divergent company visions and strategies adopted by the each of them. Our starting point

was that there would be little to no room for critically assessing these and for confronting the managers with the different corporate choices and their consequences for work. However, in the course of the workshop, these contrasts came explicitly on the table and the participants engaged in intensive debates, to the extent that we as researchers, at one point, let the discussions evolve on their own. This not only contributed to a validation and strengthening of our research findings but made the research and the workshop rewarding for the participants as well. In the end, they agreed that such exchange of strategies, visions, experiences and approaches amongst companies should happen much more often because they all learned a lot from it.

Second, as for the sector-level initiatives, here we were confronted with the fact that the construction sector, as a lot of other sectors in Belgium, has long-standing and well-established sectoral social dialogue and tri-partite structures and practices. In addition, for historical reasons, the issue of work organisation, and hence of the job content, are the prerogative of management at company level while trade unions traditionally focus their actions and strategies on the fair distribution of the proceeds of productivity increases amongst the population. As a result, work organisation and job content are traditionally not high on the agenda of the social partners at sectoral level. At the time of the organisation of the workshops, a 'Round Table' initiative had been taken at the level of the Socio-economic Council of Flanders (a tripartite advisory body) on the future of the construction sector. One of the working groups of this initiative was also concerned with the issues investigated in **walqing**. On the one hand, this made it easier for us to bring together the identified stakeholders (social partners, sectoral funds, VET organisations ...) and all agreed to participate because they would benefit from our research results. On the other hand, we were aware that different initiatives with similar concerns are running in parallel. The contribution of **walqing** can be assessed positively in that it put job quality issues explicitly under attention. The statements and questions that were presented to the workshop participants were formulated quite strongly which forced them to qualify them and to engage in discussions. As a technique this worked well. Further, the participants of the trade union workshop committed to use the **walqing** outcome in the activities following up the Round Table initiative.

In the 'continuum' between consultation and continuous co-research activity, the workshops can be best described as follows: cumulative knowledge generation and sharing with active participation of practitioners, pro-active dissemination of research findings, moving from diagnosis/analysis to the testing of solutions and raising awareness on aspects and consequences for workers of the green economy that were at risk to be overlooked. As for the scope of participants, we can state that we have succeeded to involve all identified stakeholders in the workshops, including not only the trade unions and employer organisations, but also several institutions and organisations beyond these operating on the same issues (VET, labour market intermediaries).

## 4.5 Impact and significance

The direct importance of the Action Research part of the **walqing** study on job quality in construction is that we have a better understanding of the precise and qualified impact of

greening of construction on work. We feel that we have validated conclusions about to what extent jobs in construction are 'new', where improvements are to be found (e.g. in health and safety) and where new risks emerge (e.g. on standardisation, work intensification and jobs with less autonomy). In addition, this AR phase of **walqing** has generated new knowledge about additional, influencing factors which can often not be investigated in-depth with case studies alone: the problem of quantitative and qualitative labour market shortages, the role of on-the-job and off-the-job training in companies and at sectoral level, the turn-over of youngsters and the more general problem of retainment of qualified personnel, the increased use of management techniques in some construction companies, etc. In this respect, we are also more aware of possible selection bias of case study research and the need for careful sampling. The step to move from diagnosis/analysis to the exploration of solutions is further mostly absent in 'traditional' qualitative research and can thus be identified as a clear benefit as well.

It is, however, not possible to assess the real impact of our project within the time frame of the **walqing** project. In all, the overall objectives of our AR, however modest in terms of real change, were met: each workshop was a two-way direction process of knowledge exchange, qualified discussions, input from us, thinking of and discussing problems and possible solutions, as well as their prerequisites, limits and or constraints. For the companies participating in the research, they were much more actively involved in the validation of the findings as compared to traditional case study research. Moreover, bringing together the companies participating in qualitative research is normally not included, to begin with because of anonymity requirements. In this case the anonymity was indeed breached, but the clear merit of this was a fruitful exchange and discussion on divergent visions, strategies and solutions by companies facing similar evolutions in their economic, technological and labour market environment. This was in the first place appreciated by the participants themselves.

As for the sector-level workshops, as indicated it was not obvious to position ourselves in the configuration of well-established industrial relation structures, labour market intermediaries, VET structures and newly launched initiatives which also bring together all the stakeholders. The least we can say is that we contributed to a deeper knowledge on the specificities of green construction, on the impacts on the organisation of the value chain, on the work organisation and ultimately on the job content, the different dimensions of the job quality and possible new risks and opportunities. The qualified outcome of the **walqing** investigation further contributed to raising awareness about the different and divergent impacts that the greening evolution may have and, hence, is likely to influence the agendas of the operational actors and initiatives in this area.

## 4.6 Conclusions

Looking back on the AR workshops, we can conclude that they added value to traditional research approaches in several aspects. First, they made it possible to validate, strengthen and qualify the outcome of an (inevitably) limited number of case studies. Second, it was possible to disseminate our research findings in a more systematic and active way to both the case study participants and the relevant stakeholders at different levels, which fostered opportunities for raising awareness and influencing their agenda's. Third, it was possible to shift from analysis to the search for solutions to problems encountered during the qualitative research (for instance on ageing workforce, turn-over of youngsters and limited VET efforts by companies). Fourth, in discussing these solutions, it was possible to bring the job quality issues more explicitly on the agenda. Finally, the AR made it possible for representatives of the companies and of sector-level organisation to reflect more explicitly on the macro-perspectives and long-term tendencies in their sector as well as on the impact of their policies and choices on these.

## 5 The application of the Action Research intervention approach in the Bulgarian municipal enterprise *CityClean*: Implementation and impact

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### 5.1 Introduction

The report presents the collaborative efforts of researchers, company management, and employees to jointly influence the current (in a way problematic) working conditions in a direction of continuous improvement through the application of an Action Research (AR) intervention approach<sup>2</sup>.

The background of this report and a basis for the application of the AR approach in the company is a case study report of a municipal company in waste collection and sanitation written in the framework of **walqing** (Work Package 6).

### 5.2 Situating the project

The case study research in *CityClean* was done in February 2012. *CityClean* impressed the researchers with its responsiveness and commitment to the problems of employment and working conditions in the enterprise. Simultaneously, the case study findings provided indications there are specific areas mainly related to the work organisation that could be further improved. These led us to believe that *CityClean* could benefit from the application of the Action Research approach, where researchers and employers, but also workers influence together the process of improving working conditions.

A few areas appeared as problematic during the case study (and before the start of the AR intervention):

- There were no dramatic changes in terms of work organisation (during the last years). The work of employees is monotonous and done in poor working conditions.
- The voice: low awareness of low qualified workers regarding the activities of trade unionists and trade union sections in the company, especially concerning the agreed in the CLA working conditions.
- The majority of workers are poor and have very low educational levels; only some of them aspired to increase their educational levels.

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<sup>2</sup> We would like to thank all our respondents and our colleagues J. Ravn and L. Øyrum from SINTEF.

Thus the following areas were initially perceived to be studied in-depth and be an object of Action Research:

- increasing employees' involvement and participation in improving working conditions
- promoting information and consultation (through trade unions activities among low qualified workers and providing information on potential benefits to workers when becoming trade union members)
- promoting trainings for young (and ambitious) workers in waste collection with an aim for retraining and multiskilling (garbage truck drivers, welders, etc.), funded by the employer

The case study findings have been presented to the company management. Both PowerPoint presentation and hard copy of the case study report were provided to the *CityClean* manager in June 2012<sup>3</sup>. Therefore the management reflected on the research results.

The interest of *CityClean* to the walqing project and its overall goals was additionally confirmed when the Executive Manager accepted the invitation to participate at the walqing Stakeholders' seminar 'Greening the Economy: What Impact the Quality of Work', held in Brussels on September 28, 2011. This was a good opportunity to start a discussion on the possibilities and the interest to continue the study on the problematic areas in the company, while influencing some of the revealed issues through an AR intervention. During this meeting the manager of the company accepted the proposal for an AR in *CityClean*. The communication continued with formal letter (sent on the October 3, 2011) introducing the AR approach and official request to apply it in *CityClean* in the framework of the walqing project. The company management accepted the proposed approach, based on a further diagnostics through focus group discussions, followed by the joint meeting of actors.

## 5.3 Articulation of objectives

### 5.3.1 The process of generating objectives

The process of generating objectives started during the WP6-7 fieldwork. The first case study results suggested areas where further intervention would be of particular value. As mentioned the good dialogue with the company management was among the key stimuli to continue the communication with the enterprise in way to introduce and apply the AR as an instrument for change.

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<sup>3</sup> Initially a presentation at the *CityClean* enterprise was scheduled, but it was cancelled because of some problems of availability of the management. Thus the presentation and the report were sent to the management via email. Few days later we also had a feedback from the company manager that the case-study report accurately represents the situation at the enterprise on the studied topics.

### 5.3.2 Articulating the objectives

The smooth communication and efficient dialogue supported the key AR objectives: to get the company management involved in the intervention, to clearly establish the need for change and the importance of shared responsibility. Since we had the commitment of all stakeholders (researchers, high and middle level managers, but also employees), started the process of generating ideas how to improve working conditions, what should the initiatives look like, the methods and tools, the programs and schedules of the intervention, etc. Could the improvement of working conditions be measured and how? How to evaluate the effectiveness of the AR interventions?

## 5.4 Partnership and participation

### 5.4.1 Reflecting on participative & relational aspects

The main participants in *CityClean* intervention were the company management at all hierarchy levels. The high management was presented by the manager and the middle-level managers – the so called organizers and controllers. The workers at the lower hierarchy levels – the waste collectors and sweepers were a significant target group for AR as well. The process of AR intervention was supported both indirectly via e-mail and telephone consultations and directly via personal participation in the AR events (e.g. the joint management meeting) by SINTEF-Norway (with strong experience in the application of the intervention approach).

### 5.4.2 Extent of participation

All the partners in the AR intervention had strong sense of commitment to the initiatives, thus the extent of participation could be considered as equally shared with all the stakeholders involved. However the lead actor in terms of provision of structure and programme, but also the development of methods and tools for the AR application, was the ISSK team. The overall support of the company manager was also very important for the AR.

## 5.5 Action, impact and significance

### 5.5.1 How the research project developed ideas that could guide action in response to need

The ISSK team planned the intervention phase in 3 steps:

- Preparation: negotiation with the management; adoption of the methodology of the AR
- Diagnostics: organising and executing four focus groups discussions (FGDs) with managers, employees, workers in the *CityClean* enterprise on key problems of working life and challenges revealed through the case study
- Intervention: Joint meeting with the *CityClean* high management and representatives from the FGD (first line management<sup>4</sup> – organizers, and controllers, waste collectors and sweepers), and researchers from ISSK and SINTEF

Since the company was fully involved in the AR, the research team focused on the AR programme and the methods and tools that would be relevant to obtain an in-depth picture of the everyday working life of workers and employees at the lower company levels, but also their ideas on improving working life.

Thus as a next step of the AR application we organized focus group discussions (FGD). In total 4 FGDs were held with *CityClean* middle-level management – organisers and controllers – and waste collectors and sweepers<sup>5</sup>. The case study research gave an overall idea of the quality of work at the company. The research team decided to use the FGDs to be the method for in-depth data collection in order to achieve information about variations and perceptions about job quality. FGD composition was based on the principle to be homogeneous by organisational levels.

The initial assumption was that such discussions could increase the employee involvement in the company's problematic areas. We also assume that the data collected during the FGDs could be further used by the *CityClean* management and HR experts in the preparation of proposals to the new funding schemes of the 'Human Resource Development' Operative Programme such as 'Social Innovations at Enterprises', 'Labour Safety', 'Training and adaptation', etc.

Two FGD guidelines were developed as tools to collect in-depth data on problems of everyday working life of employees. One guideline aiming to catch the perspective of middle-level management – organizers and controllers – and the other – the perspective of low-level workers – waste collectors and sweepers. The following topics were covered within the guidelines used during the focus groups.

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<sup>4</sup> Called also middle-level management in some parts of the report.

<sup>5</sup> The FGD methodological aspects are described in point 5. Method and Process.

### **Key topics covered in the FGD Guidelines (FGD scenario)**

1. The typical working day of waste collectors and sweepers (incl. questions related to potential problems that could be faced during each working day phase – starting with the preparation of workers for work and commuting (travelling to the work place); the start of the working day – dressing-up, but also bathrooms and laundry rooms available; work tasks allocation, work communication, health and safety instructions, work with mechanisation and its storage; lunch and other daily breaks; trainings and re-qualification, etc.)
2. Listing the benefits that the management of the enterprise provides to workers in waste collection and respondents assessment as important benefits for workers
3. Listing the problematic areas (related to the work and workers in sewage) that the management has to continue working on. Paramount problematic areas
4. How respondents see the decisions of those problems/problematic areas. What has to be done?
5. Workers representation: How respondents assess the role of trade unions (in managing these problems)? An assessment of the trade union in informing and consulting workers in general
6. Role game: Respondents are asked to imagine if they are managers of the enterprise, what they are going to do in order to improve the work process in waste collection (included only in the FGD scenario for middle-level management)

In the period 13-14 October 2011 in the enterprise four focus group discussions (FGD) have been conducted with different categories of workers and employees – organisers and controllers (implementing control functions over the sewage workers)<sup>6</sup> and workers – waste collectors and sweepers. The average duration of each FGD was approximately one hour and a half. The FGDs aimed to validate the overall impression for the enterprise, collected through the case study research. Another aim of the focus groups is to capture in-depth the opinion and assessment of the workers and employees in the enterprise what difficulties they face in their everyday work, what could be improved in their professional life and how. The information gathered is important both for the researchers and for the management of the enterprise in order to increase employee participation and their engagement in the company.

The FGD results were summarized in a short report *WP9: Descriptive analysis on the FGDs in the municipal waste collection company 'CityClean'* (available in Bulgarian language) and presented to the *CityClean* management as a basis for reflection and as a precondition to progress further – from the diagnostic step to the intervention step. These results were the background for the discussion at the next joint meeting with management.

<sup>6</sup> Each FGD was homogenous in regard to the position of participants in the company. Each group was supposed to include 8 participants – one participant from each city district, in order to cover well all the areas where the company operates. Participants were also required to represent different age groups. The average continuation of each discussion was approximately one hour and a half. The group discussions were moderated by a research member of the Bulgarian team in the **walqing** project, following previously developed guidelines for focus group discussions.

### **Key FGD findings: pointing out areas of following intervention**

In general the key problems within the enterprise were considered in two directions:

1. **Unequal working conditions** within city districts, related to the provision of the basic conditions like electricity, water supply and drinking water, toilets, rest places (the situation differs within districts, some city districts have all these basic conditions, others do not have any of them).
2. And the second, that could even be considered as a precondition for the first problematic area is an **organizational and internal communication problem**. To high extent the working conditions within districts depend on the organizers as first<sup>7</sup> line managers. It was clear from the discussions that the information provided to the workers from the high management has not always been submitted to the workers and the workers themselves do not have a clear vision on the main principles of work and even their safety at the work place.

The problem with the working conditions was defined as the most important as each 'improvement' of working conditions means 'going beyond of the current situation'. However, there were city districts where employees do not have places for rest or places for rest were not supplied with electricity, water supply, toilets, etc. In some districts all these were available, in some of them not. [This information was not provided by the case-study research and was not visible during the case study. The principal difference between the case study approach and the FGD, and the two different realities revealed are also commented in point 5 (Methods and Progress)]. Then with the lack of elementary basic working conditions other questions of interest, such as the adaptation of feeding places with basic kitchen appliances and equipment, got inadequate. Also issues related to the adaptation of places to change the working clothes (dressing rooms), the workers' attitude towards the usage of washing and hygiene rooms in the headquarters of the enterprise were also not perceived as expected and the argument was the cultural differences of the Roma ethnic minority. Roma workers are not likely to get dressed at the working place or to wash their working clothes together with those of other workers.

There were also other interesting but contradicted views among managers and workers on the efficiency of the provided by the company free bus transport to and back to the work place. Lots of questions were raised how to make the route of the buses more convenient to workers. As an important problem also appeared the quality of the waste collection trucks provided by the outsourced company. These machines caused serious problems to workers as they frequently got broken and damaged. Such problems are the additional working hours, because waste collectors could not leave work before finishing their work, but they also have to wait until the truck is being repaired or another truck come, which sometimes takes a few hours; problems to health and safety as some workers shared that they try to lift by themselves the waste containers when the machine does not work, which is not permitted to the workers, and this is how the again gap in communications appear again, the lack of information on working tasks – what workers are allowed and should do, and the operations they are not allowed and should not do in order to stay safe at

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<sup>7</sup> Presented also in the paper as middle-level management, as the high level management is considered the (top) manager of the company.

the work place. This is again an indication of inadequate or not efficient role of the organizer and it is a problem of communication.

Thus the role of the organizer was also considered as a precondition to better working conditions, with regard to their initiatives in improving working conditions within the districts and the provision of enough and adequate information to sewage workers.

Better working conditions could also be searched for the organizers with the aim to optimize the working time and time needed to transfer documents to the headquarters (it is currently done by going every day from a particular district to the headquarters of the enterprise to give the required documentation in handwritten format). A possible decision could be the introduction of computer based system in their work, in order to save time (and even to impact the green idea of saving paper and reducing the pollution of the environment by driving to the headquarters).

In conversation with the *CityClean* (top) manager after the FGD, and after sharing some of problems raised, the manager of the enterprise said to us that the enterprise has some resources and such improvements could be done, because this would be of use for the enterprise. He was really interested in the outcomes of the discussions and engaged personally to improve some of the problems. Thus we thought it would be very useful to have feedback from the management after some period of time, to see what has been done to improve the current situation. This could serve as a form of evaluation of the effectiveness of the research efforts.

The formal discussion on the results of the focus groups continued during the joint meeting with the management of the company and participants from the groups. The discussion was held on November 24, 2011, in a conference hall in a hotel in the regional city. Among the participants there were representatives from the management, organizers, controllers, waste collectors and sweepers, as well as researchers from the ISSK and SINTEF (in total a bit less than thirty participants). The ISSK researchers presented some of the key results from the conducted focus groups among organizers, controllers, waste collectors and sweepers. The focus groups pointed out some of the challenges in regard to the working conditions and the joint meeting had the real role of intervention as it served as an 'arena' to discuss practical measures to equalize the conditions within the places for rest, to optimize the provided work transport, to improve internal communication, to introduce computer technologies for documents management in the work of the organisers. In the final stage of the discussion the possible decisions for the revealed challenges were discussed. As a result of the discussion there were some engagements taken by the *CityClean* management.

***The following areas of improvements were agreed among the participants and the next engagements were taken:***

1. Places for rest – in a week after the joint meeting the organizers had to prepare detailed information for the existing resources, the problematic areas and the opportunities to equalize the working and rest conditions in the different areas in which the company operates. These data had to be submitted to the HR manager who would summarize the results and gave them to the manager of the enterprise.
2. The optimization of the provided transport had already been started in practice, because in the new budget of the enterprise the purchase of a new bus has been planned.
3. According to the introduction of new computer technologies in the work of the organizers, a request had to be prepared to the layers in the company asking for the opportunities to use electron versions of the documents in the work process.

All the participants assessed positively the possibility a second meeting to be organized in nine months, where the progress of the tasks and commitments to be discussed.

The management took the engagement/the responsibility to present the results of the Action Research to the expected new manager of the company<sup>8</sup>.

#### 5.5.2 How did the research project impact on content and process (What did we do? How did it play out? What results can we see for the different partners?)

Six months later, in April 2012, some changes in terms of improved working conditions and refurbished premises for waste collection workers within the city districts have already been implemented. A short report was provided to the research team by the *CityClean* HR manager, (also signed and stamped by the new management of the company). The report summarized by dates and city districts what has been done to improve the working places of waste collectors. The improvements include provision of electricity, water supply, chemical toilets, entirely changed or re-painted caravans, provision of new desks, tables, benches, etc.

The planned meeting in a 9 month period after the joint meeting is forthcoming, and will be most probably held in Autumn 2012. *CityClean* will be presented there by the new management, the one managing the company since December 2011, after the local elections and the change of the previous management of the enterprise. However, during a meeting of ISSK members with the new management in April 2012, they seem to be interested in the project as well and in the walqing findings and intervention in the enterprise.

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<sup>8</sup> The joint meeting was held in late November. A few weeks before the event, there were local elections in the country and respectively in the city where *CityClean* operates. As a result of the elections the management of the municipal company was expected to be changed. The new manager was expected to come in December.

### 5.5.3 Significance: What meaning and relevance have the results beyond immediate context (significance for the general community)?

In general the AR intervention was assessed by the research team as very flexible and efficient tool for identification of employee related and working conditions problems, and to provide a framework and guidelines aiming to solve specific problems. The advantages of the long term approach including a continuous study, followed by intervention measures could be illustrated through the examined case.

However the ambition of AR was somehow limited in the context of low participation (and lack of resources). In Central and Eastern European countries there is a dominant working culture with limited employee participation, where the forms of information and consultation are not widely spread. In this context AR is an approach for improving (internal) communication and work process and even giving a 'voice'.

## 5.6 Contributions to AR

The AR case of *CityClean* addresses the need to contextualise the Action Research that was developed mainly in developed industrialised societies. The examined case is in a low wage sector where many basic working conditions problems exist.

## 5.7 Methods and process

### 5.7.1 Reflections on own role as change agents

The role of the researchers as change agents was an object of internal discussions. In the examined case the dilemma was the following: shall researchers also propose to the actors some possible directions or it was necessary just to create an arena for the confrontation of their views, to facilitate the intercompany communication. Finally, ISSK team decided to support actors from the company to structure the plan eventual actions and distribution of roles – e.g. to propose to them to map the problematic areas by administrative districts, to synthesise them and to address them.

### 5.7.2 Reflections on the method

The approached used by ISSK team aimed at the better expression of the voice of actors and combined different methods. *CityClean* case study research represents the work organization, quality of work and life of the employees available at the company. The gaps, structural or organizational problems were mentioned, but not fully explored. That was one of the main reasons to switch the method, to extend the methodological tools and to use FGD among homogeneous hierarchical groups. The FGD is a research method that allows confrontation of individual points of view and through the mechanisms of the group dynamics to achieve the group's focus on specific aspects of interest and problem areas. Discussing the same topics in four different groups and with four different categories of respondents (in a short period of time) makes it possible to monitor response variance and to evaluate and analyze conflicting views within the groups. Thus

some problematic areas within the enterprise emerged, mainly related to corporate communication and the levels of awareness among the different categories of workers in regard to the possibilities to improve the quality of work and work organization in the company.

The method of intervention was implemented through joint discussions, consultations and decision-making procedures during the final meeting with the management, organizers, controllers, waste collectors and sweepers.

## 5.8 Conclusion

The application of the Action Research intervention is considered successful in the case of *CityClean*. This approach is relatively new and unknown in Bulgaria and its implementation was a challenge to both researchers and company representatives. All the AR criteria were successfully met, namely the engagement and commitment of stakeholders in a way to change and improve. The intervention engaged all the key stakeholders, all of the AR participants were fully committed to the general objectives of changing working conditions. The AR identified several potential areas for policy – working conditions, transportation, internal communication, use of ICT. Improvements were obvious in short-terms in the area of working conditions.

The risks of AR in this case were related to the change of management – the examined company is municipal and the change of the political majority in the municipality was followed by change of the management. The second major risk consisted of the opposition of some representatives of the middle management. During the intervention some of them felt endangered in their roles.

## 6 The Danish Action Research case: Mobilizing voluntary, collective, coordinated action

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### 6.1 Introduction

The core objective of WP9 is to engage relevant stakeholders in the process of developing strategies about how to act on the knowledge developed about working conditions.

### 6.2 Situating the project

In WP5 (stakeholders), WP6 (organizational case studies) and WP7 (individual case studies) the Danish **walqing** researchers identified that the main working environment problems in the Danish waste collection sector was:

- high tempo leading to musculoskeletal problems
- biological components in the waste
- conflicts with customers
- traffic accidents and accidents related to snow and ice

In addition, the waste collectors experience problems related to job security and loss of tenure due to frequent changes of contractors. Especially vulnerable groups were single parents, elderly or disabled employees, and dyslexic employees. Furthermore, the frequent change of contracts was perceived by the employees as a threat to critical employees and weak employees e.g. in terms of competences or disabilities.

The research also identified that although such problems were worse in some companies than in others and in some municipalities than in others, the main challenge in the sector and the main limitation related to improvements of working conditions was related to complex interdependency problems between municipalities, contractors and citizens – many of these problems created by subcontracting. The relatively short contracts periods of three to five years make it difficult to develop long-term partnerships and to solve working environment problems because neither the municipality nor the contractor can rely on a stable, long-term contracts which make it risky to invest in new technology and new routines that require long-term depreciation.

Consequently, it was decided to target the Action Research on the sector level rather than the company level because the discretion of each company in relation to the major problems in the sector was limited. Instead, it was assumed that initiatives involving several actors and stakeholders in the sector would have a larger potential to solve a range of the problems identified in the sector. The Danish researchers therefore arranged a future scenario workshop (a variant of the search conference) with the aim of generating collective initiatives and subsequent action involving several shareholders. A follow-up

workshop was arranged six months after the first workshop to assess progress in the proposed initiatives and to revitalize initiatives and embed future action in existing sector structures.

## 6.3 Articulation of objectives

### *A. The process of generating objectives and dialogues with the field*

The research results and the related discussions with stakeholders such as unions and employers pointed out that many working environment problems were unintended consequences of interactions between several stakeholders and that most solutions to these problems could not be solved by a single stakeholder alone. However, the discussions also revealed that many stakeholders have positive intentions to solve these problems but that they were difficult to fulfil e.g. due to competitive pressure or contractual or legal limitations. Consequently, the **walqing** research partners discussed whether Action Research targeting the sector level rather than the company level could be an acceptable strategy to reach the research objectives. It was decided that conducting Action Research at the sector level was an appropriate research strategy in **walqing**.

Subsequently, the Danish research team negotiated with DAKOFA, which is a Danish competence centre for waste organizing various stakeholders, such as employers, municipalities, consultants, and suppliers. DAKOFA already hosts various stakeholder networks in the sector and arranges conferences related to various issues, and they were interested in hosting a seminar on how to improve working environment conditions in the sector. DAKOFA endorsed the research objectives, but they required a conference fee to cover administrative and practical costs. The researchers accepted that participants had to pay a fee of around €150, provided that the researchers could invite a limited number of guests associated to the research freely. The relevant union for garbage collectors, 3F (United Federation of Danish Workers) had previously been a member of DAKOFA but currently they were not members. Special invitations were sent to the union and selected union members were offered free participation.

### *B. Articulating the objectives*

In conclusion, the overall aim of the Action Research can be articulated as generating momentum for voluntary actions involving stakeholders having the intention to improve working conditions for employees in waste collection by solving problems that require coordination between two or more stakeholders.

The following objectives were considered essential to meet this aim:

1. To create a shared sense among stakeholders in the sector of urgency ('a burning platform'), i.e. a sense of need for change, and a feeling of shared responsibility.
2. To generate ideas for improving working conditions in the sector for problems that require coordinated actions from several stakeholders
3. To convert ideas to concrete initiative proposals with time perspective, responsible actors, and possible pitfalls
4. To get stakeholders committed to one or more initiatives, thereby raising the level of probability that initiatives will get implemented
5. To evaluate the progress of initiatives after a period of time and to embed future initiatives in sustainable networks of stakeholders or in established institutions/organisations.

## 6.4 Partnership and participation

### *A. Reflecting on participative & relational aspects*

Participative and relational aspects of the Action Research method were considered essential (and instrumental) to meet the aim of the Action Research project. To get an overview of which participative and relational aspects were important to meet the overall research aim and how, we highlight the importance in relation to each of the objectives.

To meet objective 1 it was considered essential not only to provide knowledge to the key stakeholders about an expert based view of the present state affairs in the sector and possible future but also to involve the stakeholders in defining the problems and in developing and evaluating plausible positive and negative future scenarios. Participation was important because each stakeholder has invaluable knowledge about the working conditions and trends in the sector and also because they can provide insight into their own motives and interests. Developing a sense of urgency is difficult if the actors cannot see their own role in the processes and the consequences the changes will have for them.

To meet objective 2 it was important to involve the participants, because the key stakeholders are key sources of ideas. By arranging a collective process it was possible for all stakeholders to articulate ideas for changes and to inspire each other. However, it was important that the process is non-obtrusive which in this case required a relatively low power distance and facilitation by explicit rules about not objecting to new ideas in the outset.

To meet objective 3, participants' information about the sector and their own role in new developments was essential to determine what the best responsible actors would be and what the time perspective for a change initiative is. Furthermore, the stakeholders are also knowledgeable about potential pitfalls. In addition, relations developed between stakeholders may induce socially binding obligations that may remove certain pitfalls.

To meet objective 4 it is almost unthinkable not to involve the stakeholders because they have to commit to initiatives. Relations between the stakeholders are also important

because a promise made at a meeting with all the stakeholders present is more difficult to break than a promise made to the researchers is only.

To meet objective 5, it is necessary to arrange a dialogue with the stakeholders in order to get access to their reflections about progress and fate of initiatives. In addition, such reflections may help to induce corrective actions and to embed future initiatives in sustainable networks. The researchers' relations to the field are bound to terminate at some point. Therefore, it is important to embed initiatives in other structures or institutions.

### *B. Extent of participation*

In a continuum between 'consultation with some key stakeholders once' and 'continuous co-researcher activity from an abundance/diversity of stakeholders' the axis intervention in this project can be placed closest to 'consultation with some key stakeholders once'. There were no contact between the researchers and the key stakeholders between the two workshops. However, the interaction with the key stakeholders should probably be characterized differently from 'consultation' as the first workshop consisted of a whole day of discussions between key stakeholders. In addition, the second workshop was not simply data gathering to check whether actions had been taken as a result of the first workshop, it was also a workshop with ambition for future action in the industry and for embedding the already achieved results in a new lasting network. The new network was built on already established relations and do not involve the **walqing** researchers.

## 6.5 Action, impact and significance

### *A. How the research project developed ideas that could guide action in response to need.*

The central idea in this Action Research project was that the actors had to participate in developing ideas to take ownership and to make ideas relevant for the particular stakeholders. However, due to the research already conducted the researchers had 'privileged' information about the sector. 'Privileged' in the sense that the **walqing** researchers had gathered information from many different stakeholders and they had had the opportunity to combine this information into a synthesis conceivably transcending the individual actors' perspective. Furthermore, other researchers and consultants have also gathered systematic knowledge about the sector over many years. Therefore, it was decided to feed such knowledge about needs in the sector to the group of stakeholders before they started to develop ideas for action.

The invited experts were: an associate professor from Aalborg University, who had previously worked as garbage collector and who has published research on the sector; a very experienced, retired employee representative (a legend in the sector according to several interviews) from one of the most progressive companies in the Danish waste collection sector, R98 (now discontinued), and an expert from a large consultancy company (COWI), who provided information about possible new technology developments and trends within the legal and the tendering environment.

After the expert presentations, the stakeholders at the seminar were divided into groups of around eight people. Each group selected one or more of the predefined problem areas, and they were also urged to define new problem if necessary. The groups discussed various trends in the sector in light of the expert presentations and they combined it with their own knowledge of the sector. Each group defined two scenarios: a positive and a negative, which were presented and discussed in the whole group (about 50 persons). Subsequently, each group proposed ideas for initiatives that would prevent some of the negative tendencies and support positive tendencies. Timeframe and possible actors were assigned to each initiative. See full program in appendix. A six month follow-up workshop was announced to give the participants a timeframe for working on the problems and thereby creating a sense of accountability (a light pressure).

*B. How did the research project impact on content and process (What did we do? How did it play out? What results can we see for the different partners?)*

The overall content of the Action Research was as follows:

- Preparation: idea generation and project planning, method development identifying and inviting participants, and arranging activities
- Future workshop conducted in October, 2011 (full day)
- Reflection on results with research partners and planning of new activities
- Six month follow-up workshop conducted in April, 2012 (half day)

The one-day future workshop attracted a broad range of stakeholders: a public employer (2); private contractors (8), some of which were also active in the employers' association; employers' association (1); union representatives from 3F (5); a consultant (1); network organizations (1); incinerator plant (3); and representatives from the municipalities involved in tendering and planning (18).

The total number of participants was 40 and a few municipalities were placed on a waiting list because the method required a maximum limit of participants to retain possibilities for group work and a feeling of shared responsibility. A program and concrete results of the first workshop are shown in the appendices.

At the workshop, several participants mentioned that only the 'usual suspects' had participated in the workshop, meaning that only the progressive employers and municipalities showed up. This means that there is a bias, which suggests that the initiatives developed at the seminar may not be applicable broadly in the sector (best cases).

In addition, there were no representatives from the national association of municipalities (Local Government Denmark), the Danish Ministry of the Environment) and the Danish Working Environment Authority. They were invited but they did not show up. This means that three very important actors did not contribute to finding solutions. The second workshop showed how important this was. One of the initiatives involved putting pressure on the working environment authorities to specify rules and directives more precisely. However, at the second workshop, the representatives from the working environment

authorities firmly argued that such a pressure was futile, because it would not be practical or legal to specify the rules in more detail. Instead, the initiative was redefined to focus on solving problems through a better dialogue.

The reflections on the results of the first workshop showed that the detailing of the initiatives may have been insufficient. In several initiatives responsibilities and deadlines were unclear. Consequently, it was difficult to follow-up and to hold anyone accountable. The lack of detailing may be related to the time-frame, but it is also related to methodological choices (see discussion of method).

The follow-up workshop attracted 31 participants: a public employer (1); private contractors (7), some of which were also active in the employers' association; employers' association (1); union representatives from 3F (4); a consultant (1); network organizations (2); incinerator plant (1); and representatives from the municipalities involved in tendering and planning (11). Two thirds of the participants also participated in the first workshop. In addition to the types of stakeholders participating at the first workshop, three representatives from the Working Environment Authority participated in the second. A program and concrete results of the second workshop are shown in the appendices.

In addition to the initiatives described in the appendices, there was a discussion about additional training for garbage collectors. The aim would be to increase job scope and to decrease tempo. However, a warning was also raised that such training should not be obligatory for garbage collectors. No initiatives were defined specifically for these ideas, but they are part of the dialogue between the social partners.

### *C. Significance: What meaning and relevance have the results beyond immediate context (significance for the general community)?*

Some of the results achieved in the actions research, were only implemented in some municipalities and in some contractors. However, the results were relevant for the whole sector, such as the good results obtained with communicating with citizens using SMS services, thereby relieving the garbage collectors from problems caused by angry citizens. Therefore, the researchers and DAKOFA tried to convince the participants to continue the work with some of the initiatives in a network administered by DAKOFA.

Some discussions were immediately relevant for the whole sector, such as the discussions on good practices related to the tendering process and to difficult working environment problems. However, as representatives from all actors in the whole sector were not present for obvious reasons, it was decided that the sector working environment council (BAR) should be asked to continue the discussions and to disseminate the results broadly, because this is part of the official purpose of the council.

Overall, the results of the research indicate that other sectors with complicated, interdependent working environment problems would benefit from a similar participatory process as the one used in the Action Research. Other relevant sectors could be cleaning, catering and construction because of the abundance of subcontracting in these sectors.

## 6.6 Contributions to AR

The first workshop (future workshop) may be a new take on the search conference method, where one of the particularities is the definition of future trends and another particularity may be the compressed time frame of one workday. Here a future scenario method was used (Holman et. al 2010). Basically, it consists of the following phases (see program in appendix):

- frame the problem and provide expert knowledge about the problems
- ask participants to use their own knowledge to define and access future trends
- ask participants to develop a good and a bad scenario
- define possible initiatives to further the good scenario and prevent the bad
- assign actors to initiatives, define timeframe and identify possible obstacles

To create a collective understanding of the future trends and possible scenarios, it was essential to mix stakeholders. In addition, it was the intention to create initiatives that involved collective action from several actors.

Reflecting on the first workshop, we can see that to foster creativity and openness in defining initiatives, it was necessary that the stakeholder representatives did not assume strong stakeholder viewpoints. To avoid that, the facilitations of the processes did not press for formal stakeholder endorsement of the trend analysis and binding commitments to initiatives.

In hindsight, this becomes a weakness of the method, because it is difficult to formally hold any stakeholder accountable for not having worked on a specific initiative. Instead, the method relies on 'soft accountability' – the informal social obligations developed at the workshop during collective discussions and collective problem and solution definition.

The experiences at the second workshop show that the lack of accountability makes it difficult to assess progress because none of the stakeholders had been responsible for tracking progress. However, the analysis of the workshop shows that the 'soft accountability' produced some results in some of the problem areas that could be related to the initiatives defined by the Action Research workshop. In the areas that required 'hard negotiations', the social partners had taken the discussions to the appropriate arena for such problems – the collective agreement negotiations – and although there were no concrete results to present at the follow-up seminar (initiatives concerning fair wages and physical demands), the intentions to solve the problems were intact and negotiations continued.

It is probably too optimistic to claim that all or even most of the achievements identified at the second workshop can be attributed to the Action Research. Most of them were already discussed before the first workshop, so they might have been implemented even if the Action Research had not been conducted. However, the Action Research has contributed to involving stakeholders, to refining the problem definitions and to committing stakeholders to the initiatives.

Finally, there are no guarantees that the accounts provided by the stakeholders at the second workshop are accurate. However, with the method selected, the actors' accounts are the best measure we have for progress of initiatives.

## 6.7 Reflections on own role as change agents

The researchers' role as change agents was to initiate a partnership with one of the sector stakeholder organization that arranges network meetings and seminars on various topics of interest in the sector. We selected DAKOFA because it focuses on a broad range of sector issues, it has the broadest membership base (variety of stakeholders), and it is least connected to specific stakeholder interests. Together with this organization, the researchers' role was to identify and invite relevant stakeholders to participate in the actions research.

At the first workshop, the researchers' role was to define, arrange and facilitate the workshop with assistance from DAKOFA. In addition, the researchers acted as sector experts by providing information about the results of the initial studies as starting point for the discussions at the workshop, thereby situating the discussions of the stakeholders in what the research project had identified as the most serious problems in the sector. In addition, the researchers identified and invited other sector experts to provide knowledge as input for the discussions.

After the workshop, the role of the researchers was to produce a resume of the workshop to documents the decisions and together with DAKOFA to disseminate the resume to the participants.

At the second workshop, the researchers assumed similar roles as sector experts and facilitators of processes to generate new knowledge and to document which actions the stakeholders had completed since the first workshop. In addition, the researchers tried to make the participants embed future networking activities in DAKOFA.

A weakness of the approach may be that the researchers were too active in defining the problems in the sectors thereby possibly suppressing other problems. However, the researchers based their analysis of the problems in the sectors on interviews with the same types of stakeholders that participated in the workshop, so providing the researchers have been loyal to the empirical material, this problem should be minimal.

However, at the workshop, some stakeholders actually did criticise the researcher for painting a too rosy picture of the working conditions in the sectors because the case studies had been performed in two of the contractors who were considered in the sector to be some of the most progressive employers providing the best working conditions. This comment should, in addition to reflections on the Action Research workshop, raise awareness that the initiatives and results are primarily valid as best cases.

## 6.8 Conclusion

The core success criterion of WP9 is not AR perfection, but the degree to which the WP9 objective are met: to engage relevant stakeholders in the process of developing strategies about how to act on the knowledge developed about working conditions. In the Danish case:

- relevant stakeholders were exposed to knowledge developed about working conditions
- the stakeholders acknowledged knowledge developed about working conditions as relevant to them and the contributed to development of new knowledge
- the stakeholders used of this knowledge through developing strategies for own actions and through addressing policy level (the Working Environment Authorities and the social partners)
- Some progress in working conditions could be traced and attributed to the Action Research initiatives



## 7 Action Research for sustainable work in cleaning: The case of Norway

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### 7.1 Introduction

Based on AR theory the ideal AR case would be an organization where:

- atmosphere seems open; issues of (dysfunctional) working conditions can be discussed openly
- attention to (unhealthy) working conditions and vulnerable groups, identified through interviews with the social partners or workers/management
- critical crisis consciousness: acknowledged that working conditions will deteriorate if not dealt with, but still not too late to deal with them
- case can be brought to AR dialogue

The objective of the Norwegian AR case was to contribute to sustainable work in cleaning. The first intervention in the AR process is likely to be a dialogue meeting where key workers and key management try to construct a shared understanding (of the work situation) in the company. In such a meeting is allowed for a researcher role that is proactive, asking questions, bringing in concepts. The walqing AR project naturally built on the foregoing case study research and approached the case companies for seeking to establish a prolonged project.

The Norwegian case had a difficult birth. The intention from the beginning was to make company internal collaborative meaning construction, much in accordance with the model of 'co-generative learning' as proposed by Elden/Levin (1991). It was only after a period of muddling through that the AR project was rephrased in a content and scope that engaged the participants.

The downside of this prolonged process of groping one's way is that the actual practical outcomes of the AR project are somewhat limited at the moment of this reporting. The upside is a project that at the moment seems well anchored and is judged to carry high relevance for the ultimate goal of developing working conditions.

### 7.2 The cases and the cleaning industry in Norway

In all the three **walqing** case studies of cleaning in Norway, we tell quite positive stories, at least relatively to many of the others stories of cleaning in **walqing**. They go some way to show that it is possible to create cleaning jobs with dignity, acceptable wages, and work load and autonomy. The outsourcing of the cleaning services in both the private and the public sector has turned the support function in most companies into a core business and centre of value creation. This means that many employees who for many years have worked late evenings and weekends now go to work in the morning and return home in

the afternoon like most employees. The case studies tell about cleaning becoming into a profession in line with other crafts.

In the course of **walqing** research the Norwegian research team had interviewed relevant stakeholders in trade unions, employers' association and experts in the process of writing the WP5 Stakeholder report. In this we learned the following about Norwegian cleaning.

While cleaning always has been and remains a physically demanding job with relatively low pay the last decades has shown a possible transformation of cleaning from something that anybody with a bucket of hot water could do to something different, a profession. Cleaning is becoming professionalized. With the term professionalization we mean to describe a process of several elements that transform the work of a cleaner from something that can be done by 'anybody' to something that is recognized as requiring a necessary set of skills and training, and in the same process increase wage levels, status, visibility as well as increasing the demands of productivity. In the cleaning sector professionalization takes place through, among other things, a movement from a support activity to a core activity in a distinct value chain, technologization of the work (also reducing the physical demands), increased use of day time work, upskilling (including certificates) increased dialogue with users and standardization and measurement of work quality.

- Cleaning has been a growing sector, where existing industrial relations/tripartism was used for both cooperation and negotiation ('Boxing and dancing')
- Improving work status (from split work to daytime and fulltime, from periphery to core in their various companies)
- Improving wage levels
- High costs /high wages – higher productivity demands – high job demands and professionalization/intensification
- Several technology introductions: for efficiency and sustainability
- Cleaning: an 'entrance sector' to Norwegian work life for immigrants and European work seekers
- Profit potential in exploitation of the vulnerable ones is high
- Junk enterprises is considered the major challenge for the cleaning industry, those operating within rules and regulation are challenged by junk enterprises: 'Enterprises and employers that systematically and repeatedly operate on the borders of the laws and regulations, breaking laws and regulations and not complying with good business practice.' This challenge is really difficult.

This is in a situation where employment is high (Norwegian workforce is around half of the population); wages are relatively high; working conditions relatively good. We also learned that there is a lot going on within the sector to develop and professionalize it (see Torvatn (2011) for a more detailed discussion):

- Certificates of apprenticeships
- Identity cards
- Generalization of collective agreements
- Regional safety representatives
- Tax authorities fighting the junk enterprises

Following on this, three case studies had been conducted in different organizations; dubbed *MuniClean*, *BigClean* and *RegioClean* respectively. *MuniClean* was owned by the municipality. It was a municipal service that had been 'companized' through a process of outsourcing in the nineties and then been insourced again later. While owned by the municipality it was organized like a standard enterprise and it established contracts and service level agreements with all the organizational units it served, typically public schools, kindergartens and elderly care. It was medium sized (ca. 300), 15-20% immigrants and heavily unionized with collective agreements. *BigClean* was a regional unit of a large international group. It had been in Norway for decades, steadily growing and still successful. *BigClean* is present all over Norway. It competes on tenders to public and private enterprises. It has a very diverse group of nationalities, and is used to train and integrate workers from very different cultures and background. There is a strong trade union and collective agreements are in place. *RegioClean* is a private enterprise, established around the turn of the century. It is medium sized, approximately 30 percent of its workforce are immigrants and it has a strategy of developing skills in a new and growing professional sector. It is unionized and uses collective agreement as recruitment strategy.

### 7.3 Core challenges across the companies

There were some clear challenges that we could observe across the companies. First of all there was cost pressure and productivity pressure resulting in increasing job demands. This was true in all three cases, also in *MuniClean*, where management were very concerned about demonstrating their efficiency to the municipality.

Contract tendering (price, quality, timing, visibility, HSE) was another major problem. Here *MuniClean* was in a better situation than the others, they had to deliver on the agreed service level and internal price, but they had monopoly inside the municipality. The other two were involved in contract tendering, facing heavy competition from legal and illegal enterprises as well as the tenderers insatiable demands for productivity increase. Productivity demands were both a cause to strive for professionalization/ intensification (to keep productivity increase ahead of wage increases) as well as a source of polarization of the cleaning business, between the serious ones and the 'junk enterprises'.

## 7.4 Articulation of objectives

### 7.4.1 1<sup>st</sup> attempt

Through feedback meetings with companies of the case studies, the following three areas were deemed very important areas:

- Job quality development: develop understanding of the work life of cleaning; identify the core challenges for sustainable work; develop strategies to address core challenges
- Social dialogue, particularly at national/sectoral level for addressing indecent work and the challenge from junk enterprises
- Tendering processes and the development of cleaning through better work condition monitoring and management through the value chain

In the process of writing up the case studies we received some surprised questions from the **walqing** management. Was the degree of autonomy really so high? Could the teams operate independently like we described? And so on. What we had considered, if not exactly standard operational practice in cleaning, at least within what could be considered plausible, was seen as very unlikely outside Norway. Could we please check on this? We had to do some extra validation of the findings, but we were able to validate our findings. Norwegian work life is very different from many other European countries.

In this situation it was clear to the researchers that while each of the enterprises would have fulfilled the criteria for choosing one of them for Action Research (including willingness), the challenge was in defining something that would be important on a sectoral level, and also not already part of ongoing development work.

The researchers then attempted, but did not succeed, in pulling of AR oriented projects at company level focusing organization development and job quality development. The companies did not seem very ready for this. Obviously, the case companies had their differences among them and expressed differences of interests internally, and forming a common ground for Action Research over such a manifold of interest and obligations is always a challenge. But this was not the primary challenge.

Measured up against the sector, the cases also had their commonalities. It is perhaps fair to state that they represented the 'high end' of cleaning. The researchers toiled and tried to create an opening, but after a while it became clear to them that addressing the company level and its insides was not the most fruitful approach. More than concerning themselves with internal company development, the focus and concern of the companies pointed outwards. Specifically, their challenges followed the value chain. Their combined challenge of living with a tendering regime and being exposed to competition from the junk enterprises was their primary concern. Both at union and management side, several of the companies had actors who took part in the sectoral social dialogue, so they were already engaged in this problem are through sectoral social dialogue.

### 7.4.2 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt

After having discussed with the various stakeholders and validated our findings, the researchers redirected the approach and went for the big problem that plagues the industry, namely the tendering regime.

The tender system and the heavy emphasis on price, combined with other elements have opened up a market for non-professional, illegal/black market enterprises, called junk enterprises. Currently these enterprises are very successful in winning tenders, and the existence of such enterprises put pressure on the professional enterprises.

Judging the importance the sector put on the tendering process and also the value chain perspective developed through the EU programmes WORKS, **walqing** and PIQUE (as our Austrian and Belgian friends were involved in) we found out that we had to work along the value chain rather than at the company node to address the central problems.

In general the case companies had experienced that tender processes focused narrow economic issues and little else. For instance, working conditions for the cleaners are rarely visible. Since wages form the most important part of the cleaning company cost structure, and since companies who often get the job are those who deliver cleaning to the lowest price, those with the lowest wages often may outcompete the ones with more serious and high quality employment policies.

## 7.5 Partnership and participation

One of the company managers tells of instances where dubious companies have been given the contract because they offer a lower price, and where requirements such as decent wage, industrial relations, occupational health and safety were ignored. *'Our company is ISO certified from the neck down, but we feel that it is sufficient for a competitor to say that they have a quality system'*.

The relationship between the social partners centres on the challenge of living with a tendering regime and being exposed to competition from the junk enterprises, and they fight alongside each other against the common enemy of junk enterprises and the purchasers of junk services. Even though they have the occasional fall out and conflict on wages or something like the regional safety representative, this does not change the general supportive relationship. Removing junk enterprises is the most important goal in order to create a decent work life for cleaners and efficient high quality services for the enterprises.

For this reason the companies welcomed an initiative addressing the tendering processes of public procurement, and they agreed to take part in developing a project focusing on this. After having discussed with the company stakeholders the idea of redirecting the Action Research, an idea for addressing the tendering process in a value chain perspective was welcomed. The three elements of the value chain of cleaning felt necessary to include were:

1. Cleaning procurement clients: the users and buyers of cleanings services. They come from both private and public sector, but particularly public sector procurement was deemed important.
2. Cleaning practitioners: This is the cleaning companies themselves; the case companies and all their competitors. Although there are some publicly owned actors (like *MuniClean*), most actors are private companies.
3. Cleaning service recipients: These are those for whom it is cleaned: people working in hospitals, office buildings and so on. These are the ones who both a) live with the cleaning and its quality and who b) constitute the work environment of the cleaners.

Through the winter of 2011/12, we had meetings, e-mail and phone conversation with all three case companies, as well as with public service procurement offices, and together, we developed a proposal for a pilot project aiming for economic support from regional research fund.

We have now (mid-September 2012) just achieved knowledge that the bid was successful, and we are about to embark on the project. The overall objective of the project is to make preparations for a larger cooperation project.

The pilot project will provide a foundation for the innovation in the system of public outsourcing of services, both quantitatively, through focusing on increased efficiency and simplification of the process, and qualitatively, among others by developing new and more multidimensional guidelines for the evaluation of offers, new procedures for monitoring service for to ensure compliance with Norwegian law and the development of a user-driven feedback instrument in relation to the quality of services delivered.

The overall project interest is to develop procedures and support mechanisms to ensure a more socially responsible procurement process. All the three companies where walqing case studies were conducted have agreed to take part in the project. Also, significant Cleaning procurement clients are part of the project.

The time span of the pilot project is 6 months. Within that time span, studies, data gathering and two workshops will be important activities. These latter will work as stakeholder expert workshops, for the three elements of the value chain of cleaning mentioned in previous section, where representatives of the value chain of cleaning will be able to meet, reflect and jointly explore how to develop towards a more socially responsible service procurement.

### 7.5.1 Reflecting on participative & relational aspects

Compared to other Action Research, the researchers have chosen a more sectoral role than typical in Norwegian Action Research tradition. We have positioned ourselves further from the company floor, with its actual concrete company internal development processes than usual. This was not our choice, but the opening that we found.

At the same time, our assessment was that all the three companies were relatively advanced compared to sector average, and relatively at ease with their internal work climate situation. Local assessment was that there was little to be gained from traditional company internal AR. We may contest that view, but the client point of view, the 'burning issues' were company external, and further refinement of the relatively good businesses would not be the best way of contributing to quality of work in the sector.

Judging the extent of client participation in this project, as laid out on a continuum between 'consultation with some key stakeholders once' on the one end and 'continuous co-researcher activity from an abundance/diversity of stakeholders' on the other, we must conclude that judging from where we are at this point of time, October 2012, the project is closer to the former.

As has been conveyed, it had a difficult birth. Judged against its original intention (to develop company internal collaborative meaning construction, 'co-generative learning' and practical problem solving as proposed by Elden/Levin (1991)), it is somewhat a failure.

After a period of muddling through the AR project was rephrased in a content and scope that engaged the participants. This is not the first time in Action Research. If the process allows for and brings itself to depend on field participation, this will often happen.

The downside of this prolonged process of groping one's way is that the actual practical outcomes of the AR project are somewhat limited at the moment of this reporting. Also, as the research agenda has changed, the access to the actual shopfloor of cleaning has become limited or indirect. Addressing cleaning in a value chain perspective has led the project to be in touch with the handlers of cleaning (buyers, users, managers, union representatives) more than the cleaners themselves.

The upside is a project that at the moment seems well anchored and is judged to carry high relevance for the ultimate goal of developing the working conditions of cleaning. Also, it as a project that fits with the reality of today's working life, which is rather different than the one the Action Research pioneers of the fifties and sixties worked in. In these days, at least in the male dominated traditional manufacturing/goods producing work places where the Action Research took place, the management inside the companies had the ability and power to improve working conditions. In today's value chain driven, customer oriented service work the power and ability to improve working conditions inside the enterprise is much lower. As researchers the logical step in Action Research then is to start working along the value chain. If we want to avoid deterioration and continue to improve working conditions in enterprises competing through tender processes we need to involve the tenderers and the costumers. While very different in methods and results the Norwegian

and the Danish AR case both end up doing the same, involving the outside of the enterprises in the process of improving the inside. This is a road AR needs to go down in the future, and there is a need for methods, tools and reflections on how this can be done in different settings.

## 7.6 Action, impact and significance

From the side of researcher-company interaction, we divide the partner project participation into four main phases.

### 7.6.1 Study fields for **walqing** research (WPs 5 and 6)

In this phase, researchers were in contact, through conversation and interviews, with regular employees, supervisors, managers, general managers, safety representatives and union representatives in all three. The principal role of the company representatives in this phase was a rather passive or responsive one, on arenas and in processes staged by the researchers.

### 7.6.2 Feedback/reflection/correction of findings and investigating possible further action

In this second phase, findings from **walqing** research (WPs 5 and 6) was fed back to the companies and discussed and corrected. The researchers were in contact with fewer company people in this phase, mostly managers, general managers and union representatives. The principal role of the company representatives in this phase was firstly that of quality assurance, secondly that of co-investigating possible further action. At the outset, this phase took place in processes on arenas staged by the researchers, with company representatives in a passive or responsive role. But as the researchers unveiled their findings, the process developed. Firstly, both managers and union representatives took efforts to adjust some of the researchers' findings. Secondly, through the unfolding discussion, reflections developed and suggestions for further action emerged. It came strongly through as an idea from company people that there was a need to look more carefully into the processes of tendering, particularly from the public sector. Also, they proposed strategies for how to go about it if one were to study more in detail the smaller unserious enterprises ('junk enterprises').

### 7.6.3 Cross case/cross nation reflection and research validation

**walqing's** WP9 was a joint responsibility of five national research partner who each on their side carried out research in their own national context. This phase is one of the WP9 elements that go beyond this. Principally it consists of a workshop held on the premises of *BigClean* in March 2012. At this workshop, the company participated with people from its managers, union representatives and also a well experienced cleaner. All five WP9 research partners participated. At this arena, not just the Norwegians (who' owned' this field) but also the Austrian, Belgian, Bulgarian and Danish WP9 researchers got an opportunity to interact with managers and union representatives of this one case company. Methodologically this was interesting for WP9, since it allowed for some 'researcher alignment' and also research validation. Very rarely, researchers get the chance to co-investigate in the same field. On beforehand, the researchers were well informed and well-read about the Norwegian **walqing** research findings on cleaning. Therefore, they could take this opportunity not just to 'look for themselves' into the field of colleagues<sup>9</sup>, but also to engage in active dialogue with the company people. The principal role of the company representatives in this phase was a rather passive or responsive one, on arenas and in processes staged by the researchers.

### 7.6.4 Cogenerating further research/embarking on an Action Research agenda

What gradually became clear also to the researchers, through the preceding work phases, was that although case companies had come a long way in developing cleaning jobs with autonomy, dignity, and acceptable wages and work load, there were clearly obstacles and stumbling stones – particularly in the company environment. Companies claimed that new roles within the public sector such as 'public chief buyers' have made the situation for the service sector much harder because they are employed to force prices down which in practice means that this is done at the sacrifice of the well-being of the work force. New Public Management (NPM), outsourcing of services and the public sector purchasing officer emerge as the new 'big bad wolf', as seen from the serious companies of the cleaning sector. As seen from the cleaning company, the most vital threat to good business and healthy work conditions was deemed to be found outside of the company itself. Having co-reflected over this for some time, the idea came up to develop a new project to look more into this and to look for ways to come up with possibilities for a more 'socially responsible process of tendering and service procurement'. A research proposal on service providers' role and experience regarding tendering/the process of public procurement and use of cleaning services was conceived:

- It would need quantitative and qualitative interviews with actors from diverse positions of 'the cleaning value chain' in order to establish a proper picture of the situation and evaluate current practices and challenges of tendering as they are experienced by the actors themselves.
- A broader survey to procurement offices would clarify according to what criteria and in what manner they decided on tenders.

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<sup>9</sup> In a similar manner, two SINTEF researchers, Ravn and Øyum, were invited into the Bulgarian Action Research project and participated in workshop with the *CityClean* company in November 2011.

- Based on a more solid situation assessment, workshops where the core actors, sellers, buyers, users and doers of cleaning participated could be arranged. On these, based on factual presentations, one could coach cogenerative dialogue processes aiming at addressing and analyzing problems, and jointly coming up with better means for a socially responsible way of managing the quality of service work that is carried out and managed through a value chain – and not through the responsibility chain of the organizational hierarchy.
- The long term interest: developing new, more multidimensional guidelines for the evaluation of tender offers, not just focusing costs. Also, to develop new procedures for ongoing monitoring of procured service contracts, to ensure continued compliance with Norwegian law.

Through the winter of 2011/12 a proposal for a pilot project was developed, and in September 2012, funding was granted to us. The objective of the pilot is to develop a full bodied larger cooperation project lasting for a couple of years. The overall project interest is to develop procedures and support mechanisms to ensure a more socially responsible procurement process.

## 7.7 Contributions to AR

It is a hard claim to make that the relatively modest AR attempts of the Norwegian researcher group moved the theoretical or methodological field of AR. However three points should be made.

Firstly, the AR strategy allowed *extra validation* and strengthening of the previously made findings developed in the earlier phases of **walqing**, from sector report and case studies.

Secondly, the AR dialogue moved us to *go beyond the individual organization perspective*: address an interorganizational value chain perspective rather than the originally preconceived intraorganizational work reform agenda. Through the agenda negotiation with the potential client companies, we were not able to arrive at a joint understanding about an intra-organizational agenda. This took a new and interesting turn, however, when we redirected the focus towards the value chain and the tendering process. Both within conventional research (e.g. the WORKS project) and through previous AR, interorganizational issues have been previously addressed. Nevertheless, the process of agenda negotiation with the field and the resulting new and, we must admit, improved focus confirmed to us that practitioner involvement really carries the potential of improving a research process. It is not just mandatory push-ups.

Thirdly, the implication of the new research agenda was a research perspective somewhat a hybrid between more conventional research and Action Research; less 'pure' Action Research. We positioned ourselves further from the concrete internal development processes of the company than usual at least in the Norwegian AR tradition. This, it could be argued, is watered down AR. On the other hand, one could argue that it is a token of AR proving itself as a valid element within a larger more all-encompassing research strategy. AR cannot be static, cannot be only inside company activities. AR needs to develop methods,

tools and reflection for working with the value chain. While this was a rather modest attempt, it is still a start of *expanding* AR.

## 7.8 Conclusion

To repeat ourselves, the success criterion of WP9 regards engaging relevant stakeholders in the process of developing strategies about how to act on the knowledge developed about working conditions. Based in this case, the criterion is may be argued met in the following manner:

- Through feedback workshops and also the workshop with our European partners, relevant company stakeholders were directly engaged in dialogues about working conditions in cleaning and
- Through the direct exposé of one of the Norwegian company cases through the joint workshop, the stakeholders of the Norwegian case got a better appreciation of their present conditions as contrasted with other Europeans situations
- Stakeholders formed an alliance with researchers and others to push forward an initiative to study and eventually reform the value chains of cleaning in the public sector, thus broadening AR as a research strategy



## 8 ‘The sustainability of work: How to enable workers to stay healthy in the job, and to develop as a person and professional?’

### The Leuven expert workshop 25-26 June 2012

*Johan E. Ravn, Hans Torvatn, Lisbeth Øyum*  
*SINTEF Technology and Society*

#### 8.1 Introduction

**walqing** WP9 hosted an expert workshop to discuss the lessons learnt through the project on the challenges and opportunities of creating sustainable work in sectors with problematic working conditions or low wages. The event took place at the Irish Institute for Europe in Leuven, Belgium, on 25-26 June 2012. Core stakeholders in the area of work and working conditions at the EU, national, sectoral and company level were invited to discuss good working practices and social partnership initiatives. The expert workshop, named ‘The sustainability of work: How to enable workers to stay healthy in the job, and to develop as a person and professional?’, provided an opportunity for knowledge sharing as well as the discussion of problem areas and potential policy lessons for future working life in Europe.

##### 8.1.1 Research findings is one form of knowledge/ input: Individual experience is equally valid and important

The overall goal of the meeting was to create and discuss policy lessons for future action on the sustainability of work (in the relevant sectors). This was done through pooling and combining **walqing** research results and the individual participants’ knowledge and expertise on these issues.

In the room we had around 25 different experts on various topics and aspects of the European Work Life. Nobody knows all there is to know, but together, the group represented a large body of knowledge, from different perspectives. Among the participants were trade unionists, business confederation representatives, researchers, EU-level officials and decision makers.

Pooling and combining the knowledge and perspectives of this group, one can succeed in creating new insights, which was the overall aim and purpose of this workshop.

### 8.1.2 The workshop structure

The workshop was structured in accordance with this stated goal and put due emphasis not just on presentations, but also on having participants meet, reflect and discuss policies towards the goal. In general, it worked according to the logic below in a sequence of cycles:

1. Prepared presentations as input
2. Group work and plenary sessions to create joint situational awareness
3. Status assessments: How far away from sustainability are we? Actions and policy lessons

## 8.2 Workshop

The Leuven expert workshop was named 'The sustainability of work: How to enable workers to stay healthy in the job, and to develop as a person and professional?' The jobs investigated in **walqing** were construction, waste collection, elderly care, catering and cleaning.

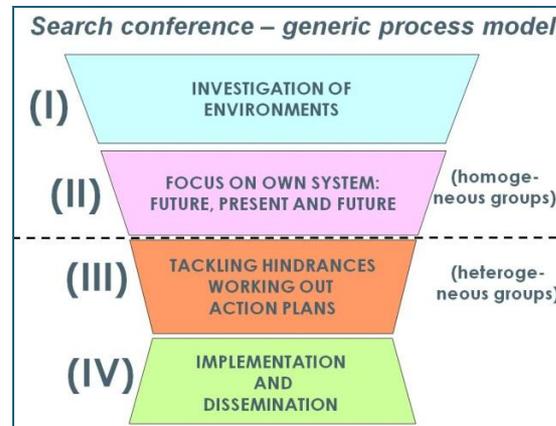
By 'sustainability of work' is referred to the characteristics of a job that enable the employee to stay healthy in the job and to develop as a person and professional. The concept of sustainability is a vehicle for understanding how a society can reduce the level of sickness absence and early retirement, and increase the level of work quality and work-life balance.

The expert workshop's ambition was to discuss the lessons learnt through the project on the challenges and opportunities of creating sustainable work in sectors with problematic working conditions or low wages. Core stakeholders in the area of work and working conditions at the EU, national and sectoral level, as well as company and employee representatives participated, to discuss good working practices and social partnership initiatives.

Through the **walqing** project several lessons have been learnt about the challenges and possibilities of creating sustainable work in sectors with problematic working conditions or low wages. In particular, valuable insight into companies with good working practices and social partnership initiatives to improve the quality of work has been gained. The challenge is to act on this knowledge. Key dimensions of the quality of work and job holders' life are shaped at the organisational level. Work organisation can offer learning opportunities, intrinsic interest and challenges or can render work monotonous, tightly regimented and frustrating. The expert workshop invited relevant practitioners into knowledge sharing, and to commit, based on identifying problem areas, to develop policy lessons for future working life in Europe.

The design of the expert workshop grew out of the so-called 'search conference' (Emery/Purser 1996):

Figure 4 The search conference



A search conference is a participation-based process that allows a large and diverse group of people the possibility to share the same discussion space. Through a mix of individual, group and plenary sessions, everyone is brought into one and the same (shared) dialogue on the overall issues at hand. Normally, the direction of the discussion/process moves from appreciating the environment and the past (what has brought us here, what have been critical events, etc.), through developing a picture of the present situation at hand, towards developing conceptions about desirable futures and ideas about how to increase the likelihood of arriving in such desirable futures.

One could argue that the walqing research prior to the workshop did a lot of the preparatory phases (phase I), and that we attempted to use the workshop to organize the expert panel around phases II, III and IV.

### 8.3 Key problem issues about sustainable work

The following headlines were used to address core problem issues: Standards and frameworks, sharing responsibility (union and employer), the role of the middle managers, the function of tenders, and the gap between theory and practice.

#### 8.3.1 Standards and frameworks

- In e.g. cleaning, standards are used to regulate quality of cleaning work (levels of cleanliness).
- Standards can be both good and bad for the worker
- Differing standards between different levels (national level, international level, ISO standards for cleaning (the reason behind the dry cleaning))
- There is a need to monitor standards, to have them work in practice
- How good is the enforcement mechanism between EU and the national bodies?
- Frameworks are generally implemented at sectoral level, but when the union coverage is low, what becomes out of this?

### 8.3.2 Sharing responsibility

- In order to put sustainability into practice, one must make it also a trade union responsibility. There are different traditions for this across sectors and countries
- Unions with also a societal perspective
- Too much industrial relations along well-trodden paths; a need for more 'out of the box' thinking

### 8.3.3 Middle managers and supervisors

- Middle managers and supervisors have a key role in implementing standards
- Middle managers and especially supervisors have a demanding work role, often finding themselves sandwiched between worker and employer
- They are a resource that could be much better used
- A need for a better balance between demand and control in their work role

### 8.3.4 Tenders in service work

- Often the conflicts are not between employers and employees but between tenders and enterprises who get tenders
- What could or should be in a tender, and what worker participation in this
- How the workday is made up and controlled by the customers, and not the employer or manager). Unclearness as to what are the responsibilities of the employer. In Norway, construction sector has come furthest
- The need for better regulation on public sector procurement
- Observable 'new risks' – lack of fulfilment of psychosocial AND basic needs (appear to be expanding with increasing service work. There is a need to keep an eye both on the basic and on the new emerging ones

### 8.3.5 Theory vs. practice (on sustainable work)

- QWL (Quality of work life) is not necessarily high up on political agenda, particularly not now
- QWL easily disappears in labour market concerns, but is essential to address these
- To have standards is not the same as to use them. There are e.g. ILO recommendations about decent work, without being used everywhere
- Have we investigated only the good enterprises and avoided the worst?
- There are great variations across the various countries, sectors and also within the sectors regarding the sustainability of work. This makes it a very hard task to disseminate learning across
- A bias in that too few of the shown good examples are from outside of Scandinavia

## 8.4 Sustainability issues: Lessons learned/policy implications

The following is an account of the results from the group discussions and plenary sessions of the workshops' second day

### 8.4.1 Better use of standards and frameworks

- Acknowledge the framework or directive at EU level, such as the EU directive on temporary agency work)
- Next, work towards raising the awareness about this framework
- Better ways of implementation of framework at national level, hereunder the Government role, and also agreements and cooperation between the social partners
- Use existing structures + extend information & participation (creatively exploiting existing bodies (works councils, inspectorates, social partners, etc.)
- Standards could be a good way of creating sustainability
- In the cleaning sector visibility is very important to upgrade work, a first step in many countries (connected with working time arrangements)

### 8.4.2 Ways of sharing responsibility

- The active role of the state initiating social dialogue e.g. in Norway could be taken up by others
- Increase the focus on using social dialogue on several levels about sustainable work
- Redefinition of roles between social partners
- Develop policy to address 'new' issues ('out of the box' thinking)

### 8.4.3 The role of middle managers

- Could we have more attempts at having union reps, safety reps and managers at the same training courses?
- Preferably at company level (in e.g. cleaning and construction)

### 8.4.4 Coping with the tender system

- Tenders and contracts are of **major** importance in creating a sustainable work life
- Sustainability at work must become integral part of the tenders and contracts
- Better systems for feedback is needed for the contractors/ tenders
- We need to create more knowledgeable and responsible tenders
- There is a need that those who educate the tender officers (business schools, etc.) teach them about working life and working conditions
- Improve the systems of inspection and follow up, after entering into a contract
- Working time arrangement is important in several sectors – we should take care to provide examples of this

#### 8.4.5 Aligning map and terrain (theory and practice): Steps towards sustainable work practice

- Examples of good practice is an important method for improving sustainability
- Important to intensify the search for good examples from all sectors and countries to improve perceived applicability
- We should try to be concrete and ‘de-contextualized’ in our presentation of good cases in order to increase case attractiveness and thus ensure transferability
- However it is important to have in mind that transferability is difficult and we should not recommend practices that cannot be implemented in another country
- Increase the work to demonstrate the benefits of good practice in economic terms
- Use/coordination of national labour inspectorates and SLIC (senior labour inspectorate committee). SLIC’s mandate is to monitor, on the basis of cooperation with its members and the Commission, health and safety at work, and to analyse the practical questions involved in monitoring the enforcement of legislation in this field. SLIC have representatives of the Member State inspectorates and is a mechanism for exchange of information and to achieve common labour inspection principles.
- Establishing a dialogue at different levels and involving different actors is an important tool for sustainability. It might take time and effort, but the dialogue opens up for finding new solutions jointly.
- Better awareness of and therefore use of agencies such as the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) and SLIC.

### 8.5 Conclusions

Unsurprisingly there is great variation on sustainability across Europe at national and sectoral level as well as between enterprises (including public bodies). There exists a framework at the EU level but it should be used better than is the case now and the aim must be implementation on national level.

It was pointed out that the ILO recommendation of decent work is an important starting point for defining sustainable work.

Most of the presentations emphasised the key role of middle management. Maybe we should focus more on them as they are a resource for implementing good standards.

Similarly, the importance of the responsibilities of the unions was underlined: Strong unions are needed but also modern unions. Unions are a vital instrument to take the development further.

The tender process is of major importance in creating a sustainable work life. Often the conflict is not between employers and employees but between clients and contractors. We need to raise the level of knowledge of those generating the tenders.

Sustainability must be part of the tenders. Feedback is needed for the contractors/tenders. The improvement of systems of inspection was suggested (‘You get what you inspect’).

Presenting good practice: Some examples of good practice were presented at the Expert workshop. To generate sustainability, it is important for those who know good practice to spread their knowledge for others to see how things can be done. However, it is important to take into consideration when learning from Scandinavian as the social partners in Scandinavian working life has regulated and developed their collaborative practices ever since the first social dialogue agreement of 1934. Quality of work is not necessarily on the political agenda. Especially, when the focus is on how to have people stay in the labour market, it is often forgotten to discuss what these jobs should be like.

How far away from sustainability are we, then? The general conclusion will depend on what country, sector or region that comes to mind, and on how high you set your aims. Measured up against where Europe itself wants to be, seen in the European Employment Strategy (EES) at the Luxemburg Employment Council 1997, we are still quite far away from a sustainable work life in Europe. The aim of improving the quality of jobs has had its setbacks in empirical reality.

The discussions among the workshop experts (trade unionists, business confederation representatives, researchers, EU-level officials and decision makers) represented an ability to learn from each other and build a loose network that may support the individual stakeholders in their daily and strategic work.

A shared awareness of the most critical issues is a vital step in addressing challenges and shortcomings. Although rudimentary, incomplete and perhaps somewhat unbalanced, the points made in the previous sections do identify important directions for where to go with further work on developing sustainable European work, such as addressing tendering processes better or the multi-level understanding of the use and dissemination of standards, regulations and frameworks.

## 8.6 Workshop programme and participation

### 8.6.1 Programme

#### **Monday 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2012**

12:00–13:15: Lunch and welcome

13:15–13:45: 'On the road to a sustainable working life – experiences from Norway'  
Marianne Svensli and Wenche Thomsen

13:45–14:30: Presentation of participants

14:30–15:15: Ursula Holtgrewe: The **walqing** project and sustainability of jobs

15:45–18:00: Section I: Mapping past and present:  
Stories from work practices  
Key case lessons about developing sustainable work

20:00: Workshop dinner

#### **Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2012**

09:00–14:00: Section II: How far away from sustainability are we?

14:00–16:00: Section III: Converging about policy lessons

16:00: **walqing** expert workshop closure

The workshop had 31 registered participants.

## 9 Across the cases

### 9.1 Introduction

Action Research may take many forms. As has been shown in the preceding five national case chapters, the researchers handled quite different cases and strategies.

**Table 2** Partners, cases and issues in AR studies

Country	Case	Issues
Austria	1. Company case, cleaning 2. Chamber of Labour	1. The roles of front-line managers 2. involve stakeholders in reflection of the implication of <b>walqing</b> results
Belgium	Sectoral case, construction	Greening: what does it mean for the jobs?
Bulgaria	Company case, waste collection	Romani minority employees with low education, women who do manual works and men who drive trucks
Denmark	Sectoral case, waste collection	Subcontracting: the role of the municipality authorities
Norway	Sectoral case, cleaning	The mutual problems and mutual learning in tendering processes

The cases differed from one another in many ways, in terms of content, type of case, issues, closeness to case, what was produced, or what was learned. In this section we lift ourselves out of the individual cases and try to extract learning points across them. This will be carried out under the following four headlines, Participation, Process, Action produced and Knowledge produced.

Participation will refer to the ‘who’ of the AR process: who were the practitioners who were brought into the research process? Process will refer to the how of the AR process: what types of dialogues and kinds of interaction was taking place during the Action Research process? Action produced will refer to the ‘practical what’ of the AR process: what types of results were produced in terms of problem solving and practical outcomes? Finally, Knowledge produced will refer to the ‘epistemological what’ of the AR process: what types of results were produced in terms of new knowledge or new theory, or rejection, refinement or confirmation of existing knowledge.

### 9.2 Participation

The Austrian project originally set out for an ‘ambitious clarification of the roles of front-line managers’, but would later reorient itself towards a stronger focus on the sectoral and social partner level of low-wage services. When the researchers' plan was turned down at the cleaning company, this led to an opportunity to discuss the research findings with upper management. In parallel, they engaged employee representatives at the institutional level, at Chamber of Labour, resulting in a workshop and brainstorming session. The Belgian researchers, having studied construction companies, integrated the

findings into one report and used this as a basis for an Action Research approach at the sectoral level, which was carried out as a series of workshops, conducted as cycles of refining the analysis and investigating future action. At the first, one or two representatives of each of the three companies involved in the research participated. At Workshop 2, one or two representatives of the three major construction trade unions participated. Based on WS 2, yet another report revision base for Workshop 3, where one or two representatives of the three major employer organisations in construction participated. Lastly, a fourth workshop was run with representative of various organisations involved in the 'green' construction sector. The Bulgarian report presents the collaborative efforts of researchers, company management, and employees to jointly influence the working conditions in a waste collection company. Main participants were the company management at all hierarchy levels; general managers, the management groups (organisers) and supervisors (controllers), but also regular employees of two groups: female street sweepers and male waste collectors. The Danish research identified that the main challenge and limitation to working condition improvements in the waste sector was related to interdependency problems between municipalities, contractors and citizen – many of these problems created by subcontracting. Action Research was thus targeted to the sector level. A future scenario workshop was held with the aim of generating collective initiatives and subsequent action involving several shareholders, and a follow-up workshop was arranged six month after the first workshop to assess progress. The original Norwegian intention was to make a company level Action Research project focusing working conditions in one or two of the WP6 researched companies, but this did not succeed. After a period trial and error, a different design was developed, focusing on the tendering processes of public procurement. The field participation of the five cases is summarized in the table below.

Table 3 Field participation in the five cases

Country	Case	Participation
Austria	Company case, cleaning / (Chamber of Labour)	Mid-level manager in company as contact person. Discussing research findings with upper management, absence of front-line managers workshop and brainstorming with employee representatives/ Chamber of Labour
Belgium	Sectoral case, construction	representatives of each of the three companies representatives of the three major construction trade unions representatives of the three major employer organisations in construction representative of various organisations involved in the 'green' construction sector
Bulgaria	Company case, waste collection	General manager management group (organisers) supervisors (controllers) selection of employees (waste collectors and street sweepers)
Denmark	Sectoral case, waste collection	Workshop 1: a broad set of sectoral stakeholders (35 +), including employers' associations, union representatives and municipalities Follow up – workshop: also with a broad set of sectoral stakeholders
Norway	Sectoral case, cleaning	Phase 1: Company WS's: presenting WP6 findings, reflecting and trying to sell AR projects to managers, shop stewards, safety representatives and selected employees Phase 2: co-generating a project of the value chain of cleaning with cleaning managers and procurement offices

### 9.3 Process

What types of dialogues and kinds of interaction was taking place during the Action Research processes? The Austrian presentation for the management group took place at the company. Apart from the researchers, the participants were five managers. Four 'object managers' were also invited, but none showed, which in itself was an interesting finding reiterating the difficulties of different hierarchical levels to enter a dialogue. In the Austrian 2<sup>nd</sup> approach, interactive dissemination, researchers contracted with the Viennese Chamber of Labour for a subproject adapting and translating **walqing** findings for the Austrian context, and a workshop was set up. When participants were asked to talk about 'the last 'bad work' subject I had to deal with', this turned out to be a very energizing process facilitation, and the whole WS allowed stakeholders to exchange experiences across sectors and identify common issues. The Belgian Action Research plan and strategy deliberately aimed at the sectoral level, for which a cyclical/spiralling process of four workshops building on one another was set up. Each workshop was a two-way direction process of knowledge exchange, qualified discussions, input from researchers, thinking of and discussing problems and possible solutions. The Bulgarian researcher team planned and conducted their AR in three steps, preparation, diagnostics and intervention. Prior to this they built on the case study, where company people of all levels were respondents. For the 1<sup>st</sup> phase, they were mainly interacting with the GM. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase, they conducted a set of carefully facilitated focus groups discussions (FGDs) with people of four typical work roles. Building on this, a cogenerative conference was held. Among the participants there were representatives from the management, organizers, controllers, waste collectors and sweepers, as well as researchers from ISSK and also SINTEF (in around 30). In the Danish case it was assumed that initiatives involving several stakeholders in the sector would have a larger potential to solve problems identified. The researchers ran future scenario workshop (a variant of the search conference) to cogenerate collective initiatives and subsequent action involving several shareholders. A follow-up workshop was arranged six months after the first workshop to assess progress. The Norwegian case had a slow development. After the initial rejection of initiatives for company internal AR projects, the researcher got back to the companies with a reframed proposal, which again was jointly developed into a research proposal that got accepted by a research fund.

Table 4 AR process in the five cases

Country	Case	Participation
Austria	Company case, cleaning /  (Chamber of Labour)	Case study – presentation – intervention proposal – rejection – reflection meeting with management group ( <b>walqing</b> research presentation – inviting participants' own experiences – rich dialogue with and among stakeholders to contextualise findings)
Belgium	Sectoral case, construction	Case studies – case studies integrated – WS 1 – refining report – WS2 – refining report – WS 3 – refining report – WS 4 – final refining
Bulgaria	Company case, waste collection	Case study – preparation/discussion process with management – A series of facilitated focus groups discussions – cogenerative conference – planned follow-up workshop
Denmark	Sectoral case, waste collection	Walqing research – scenario workshop (stakeholders defining problems/developing and evaluating plausible future scenarios/commitment to initiatives) – signs of a new emerging network among participants – second workshop (not just data gathering to check on first WS; also developing ambition for future action & for embedding already achieved results in a network)
Norway	Sectoral case, cleaning	Case studies – presentation meetings/proposing AR – rejection – researchers reframing – research proposal writing with user involvement – new project start-up

#### 9.4 Action produced

What types of results were produced in terms of problem solving and practical outcomes? We think that this table speaks for itself. It does not need presentation or explanation (beyond leaning on the country presentations in the previous sections).

The amount of 'action' produced varied in all five cases. Generally, most partners decided on an approach on the sectoral level first which managed to indeed identify salient issues and problem that engaged participants enough for continued dialogue. On the company level, entering the process was more difficult, especially in Austria, where an intervention failed due to unfavourable timing and parallel initiatives by management to address the problem according to their established tools and perceptions. On the other hand, with considerably poorer standards, the Bulgarian waste project made considerable project in addressing basic issues of quality of work. We might conclude that indeed, problems and relevances are and need to be posed by the field and researchers may well be in for some surprises. This process also takes time, and resources in WP9 were obviously too limited to allow for a stretched-out progress. The art of linking projects together, initiating one while working in another and mobilising resources for that, emerges thus as an increasingly integral part of Action Research.

Table 5 Action produced across the five cases

Country	Action produced
Austria	<p>Particularly the first steps, the beginning of the project are decisive for future activity and should gain particular attention.</p> <p>The need to master 'rapid prototyping' in order to be 'online on-time.'</p> <p>Something too long and elaborate can frighten people off.</p> <p>There can be competing logics resting in the same facts.</p> <p>Preferable to not only rely on one (overworked) contact/promotor, but to involve more managers.</p> <p>The (rejected) concept elaborated for the Action Research project was perceived as an innovative, adequate and promising approach and may be adopted for other projects.</p>
Belgium	<p>Challenging the Belgian traditional view that issues of work organization and the job content are the prerogative of management at company level while trade unions traditionally focus their actions and strategies on fair distribution.</p> <p>Cumulative knowledge generation and sharing with active participation of practitioners, pro-active dissemination of research findings, moving from diagnosis/analysis to the testing of solutions and raising awareness on aspects and consequences for workers of the green economy that were at risk to be overlooked.</p> <p>Involved all identified stakeholders in the workshops, including not only trade unions and employers, but also several institutions and organisations beyond these.</p> <p>AR made it possible for representatives of the companies and of sector-level organisation to reflect more explicitly on the macro-perspectives and long term tendencies.</p>
Bulgaria	<p>The AR identified several potential areas for policy – working conditions, transportation, internal communication, use of ICT.</p> <p>Six months later some changes in terms of improved working conditions and refurbished premises for waste collection workers within the city districts have already been implemented.</p> <p>The risks of AR due to change of management (loss of contact point/process support). Another risk consisted of the opposition of some representatives of the middle management who felt endangered during the intervention.</p>
Denmark	<p>The detailing of the initiatives may have been insufficient. (some responsibilities and deadlines unclear)</p> <p>AR has contributed to involving stakeholders, refining problem definitions and committing stakeholders.</p> <p>Relevant stakeholders were exposed to knowledge developed about working conditions. Stakeholders acknowledged knowledge developed about working conditions as relevant to them and contributed to development of new knowledge.</p> <p>stakeholders used this knowledge through developing strategies for own actions and through addressing policy level (the Working Environment Authorities and the social partners)</p> <p>Some progress in working conditions could be traced and attributed to the Action Research initiatives</p>
Norway	<p>Relevant company stakeholders were directly engaged in dialogues about working conditions in cleaning, far beyond merely reporting back the case study findings</p> <p>The process originally conceived: company internal 'co-generative learning' and practical problem solving, was turned down</p> <p>The new 'socially responsible process of tendering and service procurement', is likely to produce practical methodologies for an improved procurement and ongoing quality monitoring across value chains of cleaning.</p>

## 9.5 Knowledge produced

The following table summarizes some of the key findings of the Action Research projects of walqing WP9; the knowledge produced.

**Table 6 Knowledge produced across the five cases**

Country	Action produced
Austria	<p>Difficult for researchers to find and assume a legitimately interventive role in the Austrian context.</p> <p>Views on dialogue, discussion and participation are indeed hierarchically and habitually unevenly distributed.</p> <p>Not everybody in Austria subscribes to the view that reflection and collaborative knowledge generation are generally worthwhile activities, particularly not on the company level (the AR approach is hardly known).</p> <p>Work organisation and job design are generally regarded as belonging to managerial prerogative in spite of comparatively strong social partnership.</p> <p>Involving stakeholders can enhance case study research in general (not just AR).</p> <p>Raised awareness about different researcher roles – not just in AR.</p> <p>The Action Research process also validated and improved on the case study findings from Work Package 6 in the walqing project.</p>
Belgium	<p>The discussion of case study findings with the company managers produced exchange of strategies, visions, experiences and approaches amongst companies</p> <p>Better understanding of the precise and qualified impact of greening of construction on work</p> <p>New knowledge about additional, influencing factors which can often not be investigated in-depth with case studies alone</p> <p>AR made it possible to validate, strengthen and qualify the outcome of an (inevitably) limited number of case studies</p> <p>It was possible to disseminate our research findings in a more systematic and active way to both case study participants and relevant stakeholders, which fostered opportunities for raising awareness and influencing agendas</p> <p>It was possible to shift from analysis to the search for solutions to problems encountered during the qualitative research</p>
Bulgaria	<p>The FGD sessions produced important insights that the previous case study research had not revealed.</p> <p>AR intervention assessed by the research team as very flexible and efficient tool for identification of employee related and working conditions problems, and to provide a framework and guidelines aiming to solve specific problems.</p> <p>Central and Eastern European countries dominated by working cultures with limited employee participation, and AR is an approach for improving (internal) communication and work process and even giving a ‘voice’.</p> <p>AR approach is relatively new and unknown in Bulgaria and its implementation was a challenge to both researchers and company representatives</p>

Denmark	<p>The results of the research indicate that other sectors with complicated, interdependent working environment problems would benefit from a similar participatory process as the one used in the Action Research.</p> <p>The first workshop (future workshop) may be a new take on the search conference method, where one of the particularities is the definition of future trends and another particularity may be the compressed time frame of one workday. Here, a future scenario method was used.</p> <p>The relationship between process form and degree of stakeholder/participant accountability (c.f. 'soft accountability').</p> <p>Critical comments at workshop should, in addition to reflections on the AR workshop, raise awareness that the initiatives and results are primarily valid as best cases (not representing the average).</p>
Norway	<p>Project has produced a further refinement of the understanding of how Norwegian work life is very different from many other European countries</p> <p>Learn to organize a an AR project along the value chain rather than firmly within a company node</p> <p>Involving the outside of the enterprises in the process of improving the inside is in a way redefining AR and challenges some of the commonly held systems assumptions.</p> <p>(Only) Indirectly addressing cleaners: addressing cleaning in a value chain perspective is likely to lead the project to be in touch with handlers of cleaning (buyers, users, managers, union representatives) more than the cleaners themselves.</p> <p>'Researcher alignment' and also research validation through bringing in colleagues into 'our case'</p> <p>The process of agenda negotiation with the field and the resulting new and, we must admit, improved focus confirmed to us that practitioner involvement really carries the potential of improving a research process.</p>
All	<p>The project has improved the researchers understanding of AR as a possible method for developing sustainable work in precarious work settings, expanded on the methodological and practical knowledge in social science as well as increased their understanding of the work life and challenges in countries different from their own.</p>

## 10 Discussions and conclusions

We knew from WP6 that it is sometimes hard to get companies to commit themselves to collaboration for case study scrutiny. Contracting for Action Research is for obvious reasons not easier. The initial phase is a stressful phase of an AR project. There is a struggle to get a grasp of what to do (since the participants should have a say in this). There is a struggle to get the case/client organization committed to engage themselves in a collaboration/intervention process ('How many resources will it take?', 'What's in it for me?'). AR is less open for 'pre-design' than other research strategies are, therefore one will face more uncertainty.

But do not let too lofty ambitions be our worst enemy here. The core success criterion of WP9 is not the degree of AR perfection, but rather, the degree to which we meet its core objective, namely, to engage relevant stakeholders (company level and/or sector level) in the process of developing strategies about how to act on the knowledge developed about working conditions. The whole idea is to improve the discourse between (EU) policy level and (enterprise) practice level.

This is to ensure that

- relevant stakeholders are exposed to knowledge developed about working conditions
- they acknowledge knowledge developed about working conditions as relevant to them, and
- they make use of this knowledge, through developing strategies for own actions and through addressing policy level

The whole idea is to improve the discourse between (EU) policy level and (enterprise) practice level. We wanted to do AR in **walqing** because we want to know more about **how big** the gap is between policy level/ EU level and the company/organizational level, **why it is so, and how to bridge it**. Why are the institutional intentions or arrangements not always observed and applied at company/organizational level? How can this gap be reduced or bridged? To gain knowledge on this we needed to engage with enterprises and their understandings of EU policy, their choices and arrangements as to fulfil the policy goals, and the possible discrepancies among various groups within a company.

The AR forefather Kurt Lewin's old phrase applies here: *if you really want to understand a social system you should try to change it*. I.e.: the mechanisms and dynamics of a social system are not always easy to detect, but they are put in action/motion when the system is disturbed. The argument for 'action' in AR (in **walqing's** WP9) is not necessarily in order to change or improve something, **but to get the system to show itself in order to understand it better**.

In order to develop and disseminate strategies for improving working conditions, one needs to understand better the gap between policy level/ EU level and company/organizational level as regards policy formation and its application at local level.

It may vary across the WP9 teams as to how far we have come action-wise, but this does not need to hinder us from making good use of AR for the purpose of meeting the WP9 (and thus **walqing** overall) objectives. To some degree, we can still interact with our fields, if we are experienced researchers and if we know our fields well enough. We shall use the argument of Donald Schön to make this point more clear.

In his *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983), Donald Schön develops a whole epistemology about how 'professionals' develop knowledge in their practices. As part of his book he presents case studies from various professional practices. One of these examples is the development of an architectural project. One of the points Schön is making is that the professional is having 'a reflective conversation with the field' even though the field is not present as one or several people in person, but only present as notes, drawings, maps, etc. The professional is conceiving of some sort of intervention in the field. Next, 'the situation talks back', and the professional 'reflective practitioner' is able to listen. Next, she makes some other type of intervention and gets a different feedback. This type of reflective conversation is of course in some sense a monologue more than a dialogue, but what enables it to resemble a real dialogue is:

- the professional reflective practitioner has an in-depth knowledge of the system she is to deal with
- she is well experienced and commands a whole repertoire of similar field situations 'on her hard disk
- through reflection on the unique situation at hand, she is able to 'see as': she can see the unique situation at hand as something already present in her repertoire
- Seeing this situation as that one, one may also do in this situation as in that one (p.139)

Such a reflective conversation with the field does not amount to the same as actually being directly engaged in discussions, problem solving or action planning together with live actors of the field. But still: does not our solid well-experienced field researcher background provide us with some set of repertoire of situations from practice? Have we not developed in-depth knowledge from the cases we have studied (WP6)? Are we not, in some sense, able to represent them? Is not this a fertile point of departure for a process of narrowing or bridging the gap between central policy making and local practice?

What we also can do to increase the reality of field interaction is to develop proposals, comments, reflections, etc. and have them sent to the field for review. Do they recognize this? Do they validate it? Do they find it important?

Increasing the connectedness between levels and the interactivity with the practice fields, may have several functions:

- strengthening **walqing's** practical relevance
- bringing stronger confirmation to research findings
- bringing the voice and argument of the field better and stronger into the **walqing** scene than where we left them once the case studies and the other work packages were done

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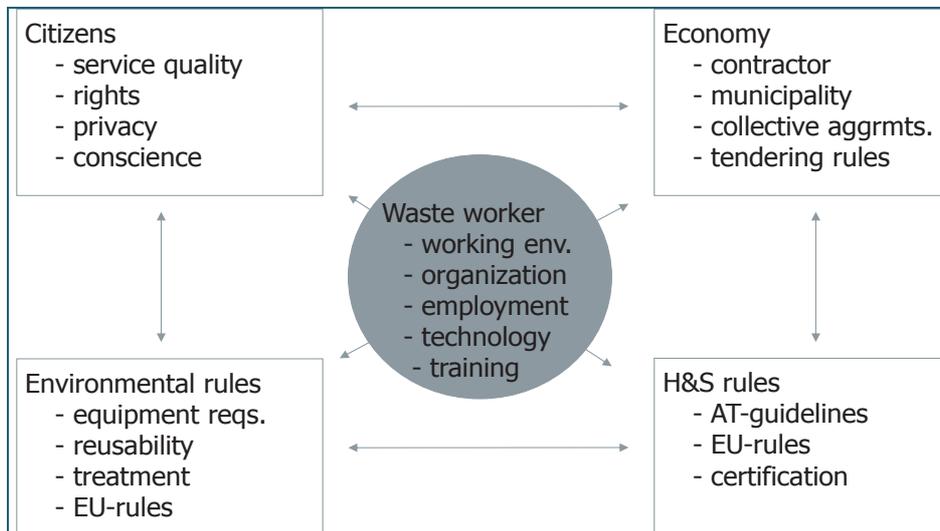
## Appendices

### Appendix A (DENMARK): Programme for the first seminar (translated and simplified)

<b>Seminar about the garbage collector of the future</b> <i>- working conditions in the light of future arrangements and technologies</i>	
09.00-09.30	Registration and coffee
09.30-09.55	Presentation of Walqing research in the garbage collection sector <i>Ole H. Sørensen and Peter Hasle, NFA</i>
09.55-10.25	Working environment conditions in the garbage sector - a historical perspective <i>Ole Busck, Associate Professor Aalborg University and Palle Nissen, former employee representative, R98</i>
10.25-10.50	Some suggestions for future structural conditions - law, arrangements, technologies <i>Mette Norengaard, Senior consultant, COWI</i>
11.10-12.00	Group work I: Developing the worst imaginable scenario
12.45-13.25	Group work II: Developing the best imaginable scenario
14.20-15.05	Group work III: Which actions are needed to avoid the worst and obtain the best
15.05-15.45	Presentations of group work III and discussion
15.45-16.00	Conclusion and outline of the future work <i>Ole H. Sørensen and Peter Hasle</i>

## Appendix B (DENMARK): Positive and negative tendencies

Figure X: Model for developing tendencies:  
Central determinants for working conditions



### *Examples of negative tendencies identified in the group work:*

**Citizens:** no demands for waste sorting at the source, reductions in citizen service, politicians are preoccupied with single-issues, etc.

**Economy:** short contract periods and price as predominant parameter, social clauses are too expensive, though union density increases risk of cheap foreign labour and increases access for 'cowboy' employers, etc.

**Environmental rules:** decreased possibilities for collection e.g. in summerhouse areas, increased traffic, limited technical developments, increased administrative burdens, etc.

**Health and safety rules:** no demands for material equipment, no clear legal demands, less control of tendering rules, working environment authorities do not follow-up on rules concerning tendering, etc.

### *Examples of positive tendencies identified in the group work:*

**Citizens:** citizen wants cartwheel containers and not bags, improved information, acceptance of higher charges, increased electronic self-service possibilities, etc.

**Economy:** rules are coordinated, waste becomes a resource and not a problem, quality and work environment conditions are part of tendering documents, etc.

**Environmental rules:** increased demands for waste sorting at the source, legal possibilities to fine citizens who do not cooperate, flexible rules about timing of collection, etc.

**Health and safety rules:** working environment authorities strengthens law enforcement, cooperation between stakeholders, improved training of employees, clearer rules, etc.

## Appendix C (DENMARK): Positive and negative scenarios

*Question: If the negative tendencies dominate, what will happen to the working conditions of waste collectors by 2020?*

- *Working environment:* Physical and psychosocial working environment will be pressed by conflict about rules and responsibilities. Few workers with age above 40. Worse standards and risk of losing workability
- *Employment conditions:* Many workers outside of collective agreements, more short term contracts, no security during contract changes. Shorter contract periods
- *Education:* None – only drivers' license. No economy for education. Training will be hard to get – or harder requirements for education that workers may not be able to fulfil
- *Management/organizing:* Concentration of sector. Lower resource and environmental consciousness at citizens. No sorting
- *Technology:* Fewer investments in technology. Fewer dedicated trucks. No training for specialized trucks. Fewer people and more trucks served by one worker only

*Question: If the positive tendencies dominate, what will happen to the working conditions of waste collectors by 2020?*

- *Working environment:* More women. Fewer accidents and lower strain. More variation, control and codetermination. Increased dialogue. Waste worker as environmental guardian
- *Employment conditions:* Longer contract. Sector based tenure. Social responsibility (dyslexics and other handicaps)
- *Education:* Vocational education – everyone gets a chance. Requirement in tendering contracts
- *Management/organizing:* Better dialogue. More work in self-managed groups. Partnership agreements
- *Technology:* IT support-systems (Smartphones). Technology alleviating strain. Citizen IT. Apps with sorting guides, etc.

Appendix D (DENMARK): Problem/solution matrix – an overview of the initiatives developed at the first workshop

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Solution</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Actor(s)</b>	<b>When</b>
<b>Unfair wage distribution (country vs. city)</b>	Amendment to collective agreements	Negotiation of collective agreements	Social partners	Now
<b>Too unclear H&amp;S rules</b>	Clearer rules. A new regulatory order	Pressure from stakeholders	Work environment authorities	As soon as possible
<b>Inflexible contracts (price focus only)</b>	Partnership between municipality and contractor	More flexibility concerning new ideas and initiatives	Municipalities	?
<b>Bad access ways Problem addresses</b>	Better collaboration: Municipality, citizens, contractors	Initiative from municipalities	Municipalities	Can be implemented soon
<b>No snow removal</b>	Clearer roles in contracts and dialogue	National: Clearer roles. Locally: Snow issues in contracts	Municipalities	Along the way
<b>Bad waste worker image</b>	More positive info and communication	Use many different channels/media	?	?
<b>Lack of citizen information</b>	Increased use of: SMS, e-mail, apps	Meeting about best practices in the area	DAKOFA with contractors	?
<b>The waste worker culture (Tarzan)</b>	Remove focus from finishing quickly	Management, measuring time on route. Follow-up	Worker/management collaboration	Now

## Appendix E (DENMARK): Program for the follow-up seminar (translated and simplified)

Seminar about the garbage collector of the future - <i>follow-up</i>	
13.00-13.05	Welcome
13.05-13.35	Presentation of the latest results of the Walqing research in the garbage collection sector <i>Ole H. Sørensen, NFA</i>
13.35-13.45	Report from the EPSU workshop on 'health and safety in the waste industry' <i>Kjeld H. Jensen, 3F</i>
13.45-14.30	Group work I: What has happened since last workshop?
14.45-15.15	Discussion of group work I
15.15-15.25	Group work II: What is needed in the future?
15.25-15.55	How can the identified initiatives be speeded up? Actions on local, national, and EU level. <i>Panel discussion with central stakeholders</i>

Appendix F (DENMARK): Initiative progress matrix – an overview of progress of the initiatives developed at the first workshop

Problem	Progress	Actor(s)	Future
<b>Unfair wage distribution</b>	Had been discussed during collective agreements but no agreement had been reached.	Social partners	Awaits new negotiations
<b>Too unclear H&amp;S rules</b>	No pressure had been put on the work environment authorities. No actions had been taken.	None	New redefined social partners initiative (BAR)
<b>Inflexible contracts (price focus only)</b>	Some municipalities had taken some action on this point, but no general changes had taken place	Municipalities	DAKOFA network
<b>No snow removal Bad access ways, Problem addresses</b>	One contractor had developed a 'winter contingency plan'. Communication between some municipalities and some contractors and citizens had improved. Snow-awareness-campaign developed by social partners with TV-spots and Web. Systems to deliver complaints to citizens had been improved (also by external changes such as mailbox placements). Easier access to communal recycling containers.	Municipalities Contractors Unions	No new actions defined
<b>Bad waste worker image</b>	Positive image commercials on waste trucks.	Contractors	Discussions on need for more employee training
<b>Lack of citizen information</b>	SMS service and apps to customers tested in one municipality	Municipalities Contractors	No actions defined
<b>The waste worker culture (Tarzan)</b>	Dialog in collective agreement negotiations, but no results yet. Goal: Agreement in April 2013.	Contractors Unions	Further negotiations already planned

Appendix G (DENMARK): Initiative revival matrix – an overview of renewed initiatives developed at the second workshop

Problem	Revived initiative	Responsible actor(s)
<b>Too unclear H&amp;S rules</b>	The representatives from the Working Environment Authority made it clear that they did not consider more precise rules possible from a practical or from a legal viewpoint. The discussion group therefore concluded that the initiative should instead aim at improving the dialog between the stakeholders. The groups decided to promote already existing material produces by the social partners.	Municipalities Employers Unions Sector working environment council (BAR)
<b>Inflexible contracts (price focus only)</b>	The group decided to build on and extend the knowledge of the good practices developed in some municipalities to focus on the most important issues in subcontracting and not only on price. It was decided to form a network in DAKOFA with the purpose to improve guidelines for tendering processes building on knowledge from a research project about working environment issues in subcontracting.	Representatives from municipalities unions and employers
<b>Lack of citizen information</b>	General agreement that the good practices should be disseminated. Suggestion for permanent DAKOFA network on working environment issues.	DAKOFA