

Editorial

In 2001, the TUTB set up a partnership research project with the Swedish SALTSA Programme. It had three main aims :

One was to bring the practices of trade union participation in standardization into the public arena ; two reports on the situation in Sweden and Germany have been posted on the TUTB website. Our *Newsletter* carries a summary.

Another was to look closely at where the globalization of technical standards might lead us, and particularly, what effects might flow from the agreement between CEN and ISO on European standards, especially those mandated under European directives. We published the findings of that analysis at the end of 2002 as *Globalizing technical standards. Impact and challenges for occupational health and safety*.

The third is to promote and put a focus on participatory approaches to equipment design. It shows what lessons not just standard developers, but also the European public authorities responsible for framing design rules and policing the work equipment market, can learn from it.

The outcomes of the different stages of the project were presented to the joint TUTB / SALTSA seminar held in June 2003, the centrepiece of which was the draft consolidated report bringing together and analysing nearly forty case studies on worker input into the design of their own work equipment. The consolidated report has just been published as *Developing a participatory approach to the design of work equipment. Assimilating lessons of workers' experience*.

These practices were garnered in a multi-stage process which produced thirty-eight case studies from seven EU countries, two-thirds of them previously unpublished.

Above all, what this enterprise does is to provide a showcase for the extensive but unseen knowledge base that final users possess on the processes and equipment that they work with. Knowledge that can be leveraged both in and outside the workplace to improve technical standards. The mine of information gathered from users can be used not just in devising technical solutions, but also putting them to work.

Workers and trade unions must be actively involved in systematically collecting information at the workplace, and in transferring and securing legitimacy for their knowledge in arenas outside the workplace.

The seminar was an opportunity for a more detailed examination of ways and means for feeding user information back to designers through an analysis of the role of different actors : user groups, national authorities and trade union industry federations. The scientific community's potential input into working out a common approach that is recognized at European level, as well as research needs and resources, were identified.

Taken as a whole, the project outcomes show that there is an urgent need to put in place European-level information resources that incorporate data from final users, as well as procedures so that CEN technical committees, especially when operating under the Vienna Agreements with the ISO, can initiate their own information collection so as to be certain, for instance, that risk assessments stand up in practice.

Marc Sapir,
Director of the TUTB

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