

IDE- INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE

by Thoralf Ulrik Qvale, Work Research Institute Oslo, Norway

Towards the end of the 1960's and into the 1970's there was growing unrest in industry, in society in general and also in the universities both in the US and probably more so in Europe. Radical students, critical scientists and left wing activists questioned the "establishment", some were fighting for radical change, even revolution. Many moderates saw the need for reform across many sectors of society to promote equality and democracy. This included social scientists with an interest in work life, union leaders and politicians. Many initiatives were taken and promoted through new legislation, collective agreements and enlightened management initiatives. Bernhard Wilpert with his background in Berkeley and now with basis in the International Institute of Management at the Science Center in Berlin had been in the middle of this turmoil, and was among the social scientists who were concerned about the human side of the development in work life and at the same time curious about the effects of the many different European schemes and approaches intending to improve the situation. Europe could be seen as a laboratory for "industrial democracy", which was the term commonly used at the time. It reflected the general interest among social scientist for the study of the distribution of power in society and work life.

Participative design of a study of participation: Bernhard took the initiative to the IDE study in 1972 at the First International Sociological Conference on Participation and Self-management in Dubrovnik in Yugoslavia and invited participants there to join. Teams from research centers in 12 European countries signed up through the following year, so that by the end of 1973 the IDE team had 17 members and another 10-12 as corresponding members and associate researchers. Bernhard's general idea was that the diversity in ideas, experiences and backgrounds should be exploited through the study, not suppressed. Hence the whole design of the study; theoretical foundations, methods, analysis and conclusions should be developed collaboratively. Bernhard took the modest title of "international coordinator". So through twice a year, week-long workshops the whole team met and worked together on the scheme. In the intervals we elaborated, tried to complete the sketches developed in the meetings, gradually tested the design in home base, collected information about the national context and reported back. It was painstaking work which lasted for more than 5 years. Lots of disagreement and different ideas, competing theories and political positions had to be dealt with. The main reason why we managed to get through this storming phase was Bernhard. As a genuinely democratic person, and a wise and competent social scientist he organized the process, had it accepted by the team and helped us progress together from the very fundamental, general discussions towards a complete, detailed and complex research design. In 1976 we published an article containing the general perspectives and design of the study. Then followed pilot testing in the different countries, joint assessment of the outcomes of these followed by full scale data collection in parallel in all 12 countries. At this stage we had as a team reached

a high degree of commitment and efficiency, we enjoyed working together and had become good friends. Close to 8000 random sample respondents and nearly 1000 key informants were covered. Then we analyzed the data together, allocated the task of writing the draft chapters across the team, and then finalized the manuscripts through another week-long session together. Then under the authorship of Industrial Democracy in Europe (IDE), International Research Group, we published the main results in two books in 1981. A large number of national and individual publications appeared afterwards building on the study, and a follow up of the remaining of the original 134 enterprises and adding of a number of companies in other (East European) countries was done collectively and published in 1993.

Through these 20 years of joint research the core team was largely kept intact, while a large number of fellows and assistants participated for periods.

I have written this in some way trivial account of our work in IDE to highlight the exceptional size and duration of this joint effort. 12 research teams from different countries working efficiently together, staying together and doing, we believe, good research over a period of 20 years with a scientific output of at least 80 scientific publications (IDE 1993). In addition a number of spin offs appeared through subsections of the core IDE team going together on related studies; like studies of decision making in organizations, the meaning of work and technology, safety in hazardous work systems, managerial decision making etc. Bernhard's general design and role are the main factor behind this productive cross disciplinary team of researchers. Yes, we were very different in outlook, ideas and research interests when we started, but we did share, - or perhaps more precisely, - uncover some shared democratic values which were strengthened through our joint efforts. I am, however, convinced that it would have been impossible to keep this large and diverse team together and producing for so long unless all members had a share in making and shaping the study. This was certainly not just an outcome of democratic attitudes among the team members, but very much the result of a careful design by our chief architect, Bernhard.

The first stage was Bernhard's first recruiting of team members; inviting some of the participants in the first Dubrovnik conference in 1972, and involving these first members in identifying other eligible members. The next stage was proposing some basic rules for the joint research work and inviting the members to discuss these; Joint authorship of the main publications (*IDE - International Research Group* as author), joint ownership of the data collected, an early publication of the research design (IDE 1976) to prevent others using it as their own before us. Further, no single national study or subset of national studies should be published before the joint 12 nation studies. Afterwards, however, the IDE members were free to publish results from their national studies. The contents of this *social contract* were also published (Drenth & Wilpert 1981), in full agreement across the IDE group of course, in order to live up to the group's ideal of transparency, to enforce its continued commitment to the details of the contract and as an important by-product of our joint efforts. The team members should have an equal share of the academic credits for the work, - and the economic rewards for that matter.

However, managing the balance between academic rigor and the diversity of the IDE team members was not just a question of having a participative process leading to a set of rules the members should follow. Yes, we did have some economic rewards in the sense that Bernhard was very skillful in securing the financing of the international overheads, i.e. the costs of bringing us together and covering the cost of the meetings. The national teams, however, had to find financing for their own work which of course amounted to much more. It is also true that being member of an international research team tended to make it easier to find financing from national research councils and similar. I still believe that motivation to participate in the study relatively quickly would have dwindled if the only factors holding us together were the social contract, a common research interests in the issue of democracy at work and free international meetings. Bernhard's social skills and friendly, including, style were very important in the start and all the way through, but I still believe his professionalism as a designer of the process was the most important factor. He raised the right issues at the right time, helped the IDE group deal with them, and listened attentively to what was being said, and was able to extract and make explicit the conclusions from our many, sometimes very lengthy and complicated, discussions. These were entered in the minutes of meetings he wrote and which he used systematically afterwards to make the process move ahead.

He also had a good sense for when compromises had to be struck. There certainly were compromises, and even some quite deep-going ones, but we learnt to live with them. I do think the readers of our joint publications find them quite coherent and integrated, - and pulling together different perspectives and approaches quite constructively.

I was invited to join the IDE team after the first Dubrovnik conference on self management, or rather; - I was nominated by the head of my institute, Einar Thorsrud, who was Bernhard's first choice for a Norwegian IDE-team member. Einar was too busy to join, but thought the experience from a large international study of industrial democracy and participation at work would fit well into my career as researcher. At the time I was on sabbatical leave working in London and trying to make sense of experience from 6 hectic years of involvement as action researcher in the Norwegian Industrial Democracy Programme. IDE certainly was very different conceptually and methodologically, gave me a needed break, and also enabled me to go back to action research later with new energy and a more coherent picture of a still complex field. I am also sure that my fellow IDE-researchers will agree that we did learn a lot not just about theoretical aspects of industrial democracy and participation, but largely, - due to Bernhard, - we learnt about how to work in a participative work organization and the importance of this for creativity, quality and productivity also in social science. Bernhard was a gifted social scientist, a truly democratic person and a great friend.

Some key IDE-publications

Industrial Democracy in Europe (IDE) (1976): "**Industrial Democracy in Europe. An International Comparative Study**". *Social Science Information*, 15: 173-203. *This is the outline article presenting the general model and key concepts to be used in the study.*

Industrial Democracy in Europe (IDE) (1981): ***Industrial Democracy in Europe***. Oxford: Clarendon Press. *This was the main report from the comparative study of schemes for participation in industry in 10 European countries and the effects of these on the distribution of power in the organizations. The main finding was that arrangements for workers participation indeed had some effect on the (equalization) of distribution of power and influence across individuals and hierarchical levels.*

Industrial Democracy in Europe (IDE) (1981): ***European Industrial Relations***. Oxford: Clarendon Press. *This book was published in parallel to the one above and provides a qualitative description of the various legal and socio-economic country contexts that were considered to be relevant in a study of industrial democracy.*

Drenth, P.J.D. and Wilpert, B. (1980): ***The Role of "Social Contracts" in Cross-cultural Research***. *International Review of Applied Psychology*, 29:293-305. *This article presents how we organized the IDE team and what kind of rules we applied in order to secure equality in participation in the study and in the sharing of its results.*

Industrial Democracy in Europe (IDE) (1993): ***Industrial Democracy in Europe Revisited***. Oxford University Press. *The IDE study was repeated with new data from as many of the original enterprises which were included in the first (1981) study supplemented by a few more in each of the original countries, plus data from enterprises in Eastern Europe. The general finding was that the turmoil in work life and society through the 1980's had created profound changes in industrial relations and in the distribution of power and influence in work organizations. This book also contains the most comprehensive list of the IDE-publications.*