

The significance of codetermination in EU

Ideas, debates and practices

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Revisiting worker representation on boards

The forgotten EU countries
in codetermination studies

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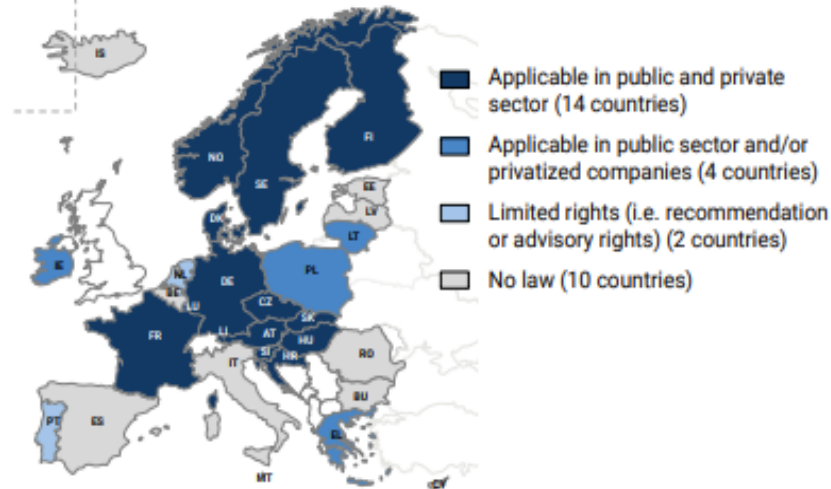
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¿Why this book?

▶ No EU harmonisation of codetermination (=BLER)

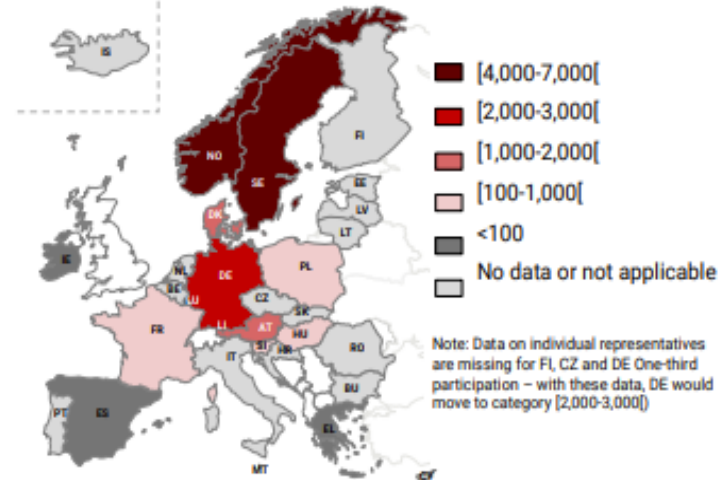
▶ Most EU states have rules **BUT** practice concentrates in Germanic and (some) Scandinavian countries : ¿why?

Figure 1: Legislation on worker representatives in company boards in the EEA



Source: Update 2023 from Kluge, Stollt and Conchon 2013.

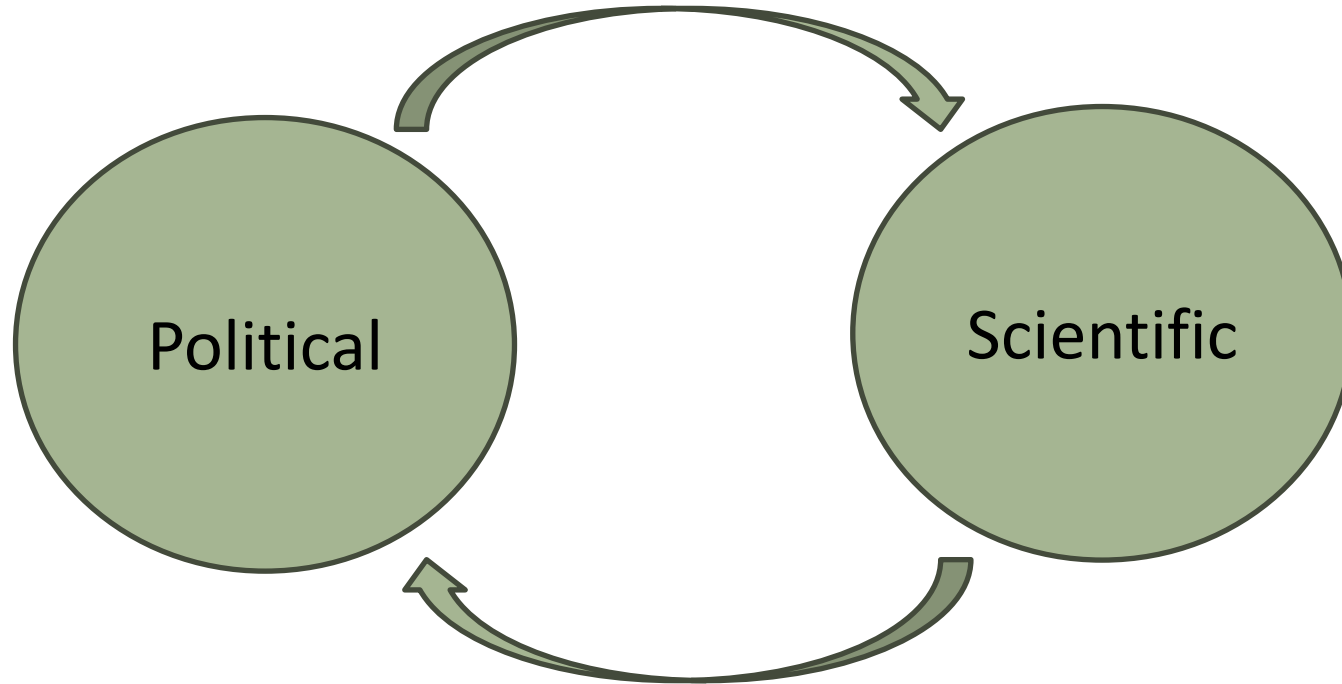
Figure 2: Worker representatives in company boards in EEA (2009 ETUI survey)



Source: Based on 2009 ETUI survey results published in Waddington and Conchon 2016.

Objectives

- polycrisis, academic debate and EU developments



- Revive democracy at work, local debates and public action
- Better understand significance, advocacy, opportunities and obstacles in context



- ▶ Geographical scope: 10 countries usually not covered in codetermination studies:

Belgium, Italy, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Czechia, Finland, Lithuania, Ireland, Poland

- ▶ Novel approach: ‘codetermination’/’BLER’ as *dependent*

- ▶ Research strategy: ‘slow and deep’ / contextualised

- Historic context
- Regulation
- Implementation / practice
- Public debate and actors’ positions (social partners and others)
- Assessment and prospects: opportunities and obstacles for policy

- ▶ **Regulation does not fully explain practice:** debates, negotiated cases (BE, IT) ; laws weakly implemented, fragmented, unstable (CZ, FI, LT); implementation without debate as a result of EU directives (BE, IT, ES, PT).
- ▶ **Privatisations:** aggravated already existing problems (IE, PL, ES, GR).
- ▶ **Actors' positions:** rhetoric support but no union priority, internal divergences; employers' rejection; other actors enter the scene.
- ▶ **'Foreign' idea:** neoliberal culture of ownership & collective bargaining prevail.
- ▶ **Prospects:** *Pessimism of the intellect:* dominant culture, conjunctural and structural conditions ("horror story", "mount Everest", "a curse" (IE, IT, etc)...); *Optimism of the will:* opportunities for legislation? (ES, FI?)



- Scope for public policy...

BUT:

- Research, governments' orientation, dominant employer culture and social mobilisation : decisive!
- Adapt to local realities and new world of work
- Alliances

Spanish case

The fuse that has not lit : attempts at board-level worker representation in Spain

Spanish version : Lafuente S. (2025) « La participación laboral en los consejos de administración en España: la mecha que aún no ha prendido », CIRIEC – España. Revista de economía pública, social y cooperativa nº115, p. 137-172

Article 129

(...)

2. Public powers shall effectively promote the diverse forms of participation in the company and promote cooperatives through adequate legislation. They shall also (...) facilitate workers' access to the property of the means of production.

(Very) limited experience

► **Saving Banks:** governing bodies included employees by law, but derogated in 2013 (banking sector restructuring + scandals)



► **State-owned enterprises:** social pact 1986 → company collective agreements (minimum trade union participation in boards OR supervisory commissions): only 9 keep TU reps in their boards today.

► **European 'back door':** More recent practice in foreign MNCs as a result of EU law (Fresenius SE) or foreign national legislations (France) or ad-hoc union decision (Germany: VW)

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- ▶ Main trade unions (CCOO and UGT): ambivalent. Formal support, 'keep it where it exists', not promote debate or action about it, other models as reference (Germany).
- ▶ Employers: ignore or oppose.
- ▶ Civil associations, activists, cooperative movement: push for participation at large (also financial)

- ▶ Waves in academic debate + mostly legal discussions
- ▶ Previous failed attempts: PSOE (2002); Catalunya Parliament (2013); more recent soft support in the Basque Country and Navarra
- ▶ Recently: PSOE-Sumar government agreement included participation + Ministry of labour announced intentions of legislation + (rejected) non-legislative proposal 2024
- ▶ → Experts Committee on Democracy at Work Report expected in January 2026

Conclusions

Dispersed and weak experiences: not evaluated or registered/ traceable
Academic or public debate missing,
Trade union inaction and employers against (power relations,
pragmatism, culture)
Political momentum, but cleavage left/right + too raw debate:
need for analysis, involve social actors, social mobilization

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