

# DISCUS PROJECT

## Transnational conference

Marine Franssen  
LENTIC – HEC ULiège

Trade unions and workers' participation  
*Insights from the Belgian case studies*  
*5th March 2021*

# The building industry in Belgium

- Belgium is a federal state → local regulation, local public initiatives, etc.
- Building industry in Belgium
  - Mainly composed of SMEs
  - Low gross value added
  - At an early stage of digital transformation
  - Increase use of posted workforce
- Social dialogue
  - Belgium has one of the highest trade union membership rate of Europe (OECD, 2015)
  - Minimum thresholds related to the size of the company
    - Trade union delegation: 30 or 50 employees (according to the joint committee)
    - Prevention and Protection Committee: 50 employees
    - Work council: 100 employees

! Lower threshold exist depending on sectoral collective agreements

# Case studies - Overview

Innovations	Size	Social dialogue
Smart factory off-site <i>Robots</i>	SME	Trade union reps: No Work council: No Prevention and Protection Committee: No
BIM <i>Coordination Modelling</i>	Large enterprise French group subsidiary	Trade union reps: Yes Work council: Yes Prevention and Protection Committee: Yes
Smart devices on-site building <i>Tablets Software for managing construction assets</i>	SME	Trade unions reps: No Work council: No Prevention and Protection Committee: No

# Innovations and impacts on work

Innovations	Main impacts
Smart factory off-site <i>Robots</i>	Improvement of health and safety conditions Deskilling of basic operators Upskilling of expert operators and drafters Standardisation of processes
BIM <i>Coordination Modelling</i>	Increased remote coordination and telework Centrality of professional skills completed with digital skills
Smart devices on-site building <i>Tablets Software for managing construction assets</i>	Automation, simplification and systematisation of logistic or HR administrative tasks Focus on HR programs with greater autonomy (HR managers) supervision and exception (logistic manager), greater horizontal division (purchasing assistant) Standardisation and centralisation of information

# Innovations and industrial relations

Innovations	Implementation and effects of the innovations
Smart factory off-site <i>Robots</i>	Top-down initiative carried by direction, line management and technicians Informal and formal social dialogue at information level
BIM <i>Coordination</i> <i>Modelling</i>	Informal introduction via expertise from the Group Formal negotiations not BIM-related, mainly focused on safety and working time schemes
Smart devices on-site building <i>Tablets</i> <i>Software for managing construction assets</i>	<u>Tablets</u> Joint desire from HR and direction, final choice by direction Trial by one team leader with modification requests right  <u>Software</u> Line management initiative negotiated with the direction Information to workers

# Points of focus

Innovations	
Smart factory off-site <i>Robots</i>	Easier access to sub-contracting: number of workers kept low Threat of digitalisation to social dialogue structures
BIM <i>Coordination</i> <i>Modelling</i>	Lack of awareness of trade unions regarding technological innovations Risk of internationalisation of the labour force Issues of anticipation of skills and financial recognition of acquired skills
Smart devices on-site building <i>Tablets</i> <i>Software for managing</i> <i>construction assets</i>	Strengthening of control Further possibilities of control available Issue of reviewing the purposes for which digital innovations are used

# Conclusion

---

- Digitalisation is still at a low level in the Belgian construction enterprises
- However, it can already be seen that digitalisation has an impact on content, working and employment conditions → potential topic of social dialogue
- The legal framework for trade union delegation is linked to the size of the company
  - SME's are out of the scope of formal social dialogue though they make up the majority of companies in Belgium
  - This also questions other regulations threshold, such as the regulation on information and consultation on social consequences of the introduction of new technologies (CLA 39) in order to take account of this characteristic
- Even in the presence of formal social dialogue structures, social dialogue is ineffective if the actors do not internalise digital innovations' mechanisms and issues

# Contact

[marine.franssen@uliege.be](mailto:marine.franssen@uliege.be)