

A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Occupational Safety and Health

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This special issue of the *International Journal of Occupational Safety and Ergonomics (JOSE)* bears the title "Occupational safety and health: A cross-cultural comparison." Culture was defined by 19th-century anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tyler, 1871). When we relate this definition of culture to occupational safety and health (OSH), we can state that there exists a wide body of knowledge about OSH, not the least of which is published in this journal. To make work safe and ensure the health of working people is a moral obligation. So, laws exist in almost every country that affect OSH. Ranging from societies to small groups of people, there are established customs that influence OSH. However, there are different beliefs about OSH. And, last but not least, OSH has found its way into art and art often is used to promote OSH (e.g., Central Institute for Labour Protection [CIOP], 2000).

The definition of culture mentions society. Societies can be defined by time, by region or, in the case of science, by discipline.

Culture is not static, culture is changing over time. Change can be simply accepted, or change can be promoted by strategies. Hence, the first two sections of this special issue discuss strategies and changes.

The first section explores strategies and changes with a broader view of OSH. Even well developed systems currently face great challenges. Traditional working forms are changing, new forms of industrial relations arise, and new technologies emerge. Certain levels of protection can be achieved with the existing systems, but further reductions in the number of accidents and work-related diseases cannot be achieved with current recipes. New ideas have to be developed and are being developed. Brüggmann, Roetting, and Luczak report the results of a balance of occupational safety and health research. Whereas the focus of this study was on the German research community, an analysis of literature published internationally was conducted. The study documents changes over time in the focus of OSH research, points to worthwhile themes for future research and tries to portray how strategies employed by the different bodies funding research are reflected in the published research findings. The paper by Leamon describes the future of occupational safety and health. He believes that three common drivers exist, which will lead to improvements in safety and health in all societies. These drivers include regulation, economics, and corporate values. The actual nature of the developments and the balance between these three domains will remain an idiosyncrasy of particular societies at particular times. The third paper in this section sets the focus on one of these three domains, the company level. Aarås describes three periods of work environmental activity in a company. After the first period without either a work environmental organization or an environmental budget, the company established an organization and a budget during the second period. After the split-up of the original company into three companies, the third period describes the activities without a budget but with an environmental organization.

The three papers in the following section focus again on strategies and changes, but with a perspective on different greater regions of the world. Kawakami and Kogi describe three action-oriented support programs for occupational safety and health in some developing countries in Asia. Focusing on local initiatives, using local wisdom and resources, the programs proved successful in providing the local people with concrete, often low cost, means to promote safety and health. Knave and Ennals look into working life across cultures, into differences and similarities, and into the consequences this has for occupational health education. The activities they report in greater detail are related to a network established by the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) and set in different countries in Africa. The third paper in this section takes a European perspective. Horst describes the integrative efforts in occupational safety and health in the European Union

(EU). He describes the EU policies, programs, and institutions that are committed to the promotion of occupational safety and health under current new challenges and changes encountered in working life.

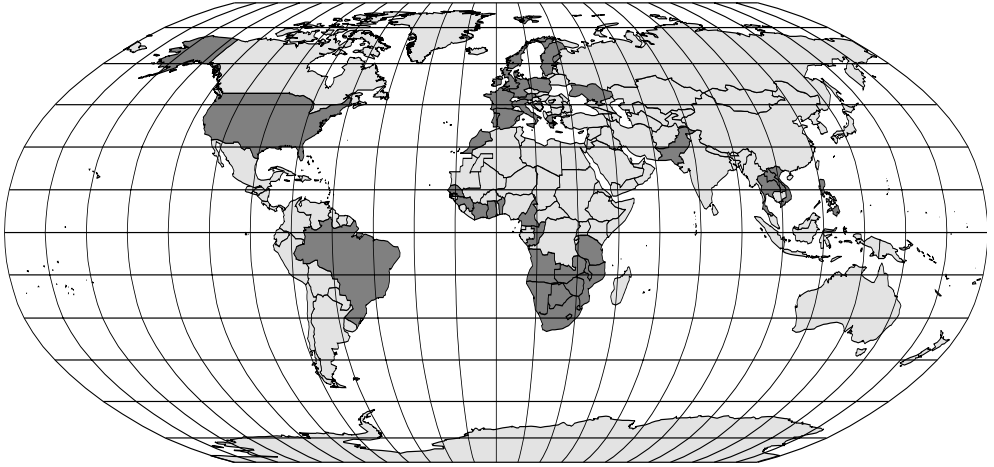


Figure 1. The countries focused on in the different papers of this Special Issue (approximately from west to east on the world map): *the USA* (Leamon; the Anglo-American language area is also covered in the literature review reported by Brüggmann, Roetting, & Luczak); *Brazil* (Facci); the 14 *Southern African Development Community (SADC) member countries* (Angola, Botswana, Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), the countries involved in the FORST project (*Senegal, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Morocco, and Benin*), *Ghana*, and *Cameroon* (Knave & Ennals), the 15 (Ireland, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Austria, Italy, and Greece) *European Union Member States* (Horst); *Norway* (Aarås); *Germany* (Brüggmann, Roetting, & Luczak; Scheuch & Kundiev; Roetting & Luczak; Scheuch, Haufe, & Khan; Cernavin & Lemke-Goliasch; Sonntag); *Poland* (Koradecka); *Ukraine* (Scheuch & Kundiev); *Pakistan*, *Thailand*, *Laos*, *Vietnam*, and the *Philippines* (Kawakami & Kogi).

The third section of papers again takes a regional perspective. Eastern and central European countries changed from communist to capitalist structures, and the OSH system had to adapt. Koradecka describes the transitions in Poland on its way to becoming a Member State of the EU and in the context of meeting standards in occupational safety and health. She reports the scientific and practical bases for a modern system of occupational risk prevention that were enabled by her government's decision to launch

a national strategic program "Occupational safety and health protection in the working environment." The following paper by Scheuch and Kundiev describes similar changes evoked by the change from communist to capitalist structures in the former East Germany and Ukraine. They point out that despite basic similarities among the socialistic nations, the OSH systems differed immensely. However, similarities are found in the effects the 1989/1990 changes had on the people: changes of attitude, views and needs as well as the changed work conditions. Based on these two facets, they report the developments of the last decade and sketch the future of occupational safety and health. The third paper in this section turns our view to a region not covered in the preceding papers. Facci describes the current situation regarding occupational safety and health in Brazil, by far the largest and most populous country in South America. He recalls his country's history and its special geographic situation before he elaborates on the current legal and economic situations. He focuses especially on the education of OSH professionals and the practice of occupational health.

The final section of this Special Issue of *JOSE* looks into cultural issues of a special group of societies: scientific disciplines. All four groups of authors collaborated in the multidisciplinary balance of occupational safety and health research in Germany (see the first paper of this special issue by Brueggmann, Roetting, & Luczak). The research was funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (see Scheuch, Haufe, & Weihrauch, 2000, and Luczak & Rötting, 2001). Roetting and Luczak describe the role of ergonomics as an integrating constituent of OSH, its past, present, and future. Based on the self-conception of ergonomics, they report the results of interviews conducted with about 120 experts involved in research projects of the last two decades. Their perception of what were the most important themes of the past is related to the results of a quantitative literature analysis. But perhaps more interesting is what these experts envision as the themes for future research. Roetting and Luczak integrate these future themes into the future contributions of ergonomics to the development of OSH management systems. The second paper by Scheuch, Haufe, and Khan takes the perspective of occupational medicine and its contribution to the protection and promotion of health at work. Based on an analysis of the special demands on occupational medicine due to the changes in work and workplaces, conclusions for research in occupational medicine are drawn. They also contrast their findings with the results of the literature review. Finally, future foci of research are developed and discussed in the interdisciplinary setting of occupational medicine and the close

relationship between science and practice. Cernavin and Lemke-Goliasch take the view of social science research in the third paper in this section. They describe the new quality of social resources in the changing world of work. They ascertain that occupational risk prevention research in Germany confirms the growing importance of occupational risk prevention for social resources. After a discussion of health as a social process they discuss the relation of occupational risk prevention and social resources as well as the development of social resources. In the outlook they describe three possible paths that the development of occupational risk prevention might take in the future, ranging from optimistic to pessimistic. The final paper by Sonntag evaluates 20 years of psychological research on industrial health and safety in Germany. The contents of 216 scientific projects in that period were evaluated and 32 experts were interviewed. Based on this analysis, he concludes that due to its sound methodological and theoretical approach work and organizational psychology could establish itself as a driving force in OSH. However, he diagnoses as well that major deficits exist regarding evaluation of the research results, the quality control of the developed diagnostic and devices regarding intervention.

As editors, we hope that you, as readers, enjoy as much as we did the different views on OSH expressed by authors coming from different cultures, its past, its current performance and the demands for its future.

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