

Ten Years of WageIndicator Celebrated With Conference

In the afternoon of 12 May, 2011, 'The Next Decade', a conference on occasion of 10 years of the Wage Indicator was held in De Burcht in Amsterdam. About 60 invited guests joined this celebration. Paulien Osse, initiator of the Wage Indicator, director of the Wage Indicator Foundation and convener of the conference, in welcoming the participants referred to the start in 2001, with one Women's Wage Indicator site in the Netherlands (after an earlier paper-based survey in a women's magazine). The leading idea behind the Wage Indicator, she explained, was and is that wage information should be available for all kinds of working people, women and men alike, in all countries.

Subsequently, in 14 presentations backgrounds and milestones of the Wage Indicator were illuminated. In his opening address 'The Next Decade', Wiemer Salverda, director of the AIAS and chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Wage Indicator Foundation, reminded the audience that the very first Wage Indicator website, with questionnaire and Salary Check, was launched 17 May, 2001, in the Netherlands. Since then, the Wage Indicator has accomplished massive expansion: in May 2011 Sri Lanka got its own Wage Indicator, bringing the size of the 'family' to 60 national Wage Indicators. According to Salverda a brief look on what was accomplished over the past ten years learns that change is the rule. He added that, unless all dynamics, the basic concept itself continues to be highly attractive to work with: the idea that people out there leave their data behind and trust that the Wage Indicator team will give relevant wage information in return. The AIAS director ended in posing some intriguing questions on the future of Wage Indicator.

Biju Varkkey and Khushi Mehta, of the Regional Office Asia of the Wage Indicator and the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Ahmedabad, presented a short overview of the development of 'Wage Indicator as an Organisation'. They illuminated its expanding network, currently involving 120 people working with the Wage Indicator Foundation as well as partnerships with 12 academic institutes from all continents, trade unions in over 40 countries and 50 different media partners. They emphasized that a lot of work is being done by small entrepreneurs and freelancers, for whom in particular working in the virtual organisation that has developed has been beneficial. Varkkey and Mehta identified a number of challenges facing this organisation, like overcoming differences in communication, use of technology, approaches to time management, and remaining national stereotypes. As a continuous challenge they saw diminishing the financial dependence on project grants through selling tools and products Wage Indicator developed over the years, a potential in their view not yet fully exploited. The Indian team members argued that in order to keep the Wage Indicator system sustainable, management capabilities and coordinating mechanisms will have to be strengthened.

Reinhard Bispinck, project leader of the German Wage Indicator (Lohnspiegel.de) and researcher at the Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut (WSI) in Duesseldorf, briefed the audience on 'The impact of Lohnspiegel.de on the Trade Union Movement'. Bispinck argued that it turned out a wise decision back in 2004, for the WSI to join the Wage Indicator, notably because of this institute hosted a Collective Agreement Archive and because of its connection with the trade unions organized in the DGB confederation. In the course of years, over 180,000 visitors filled out the questionnaire. Based on the data derived from these answers, WSI undertakes research focusing on incomes in different occupations, like engineers, office staff, and wholesalers; on issues like the gender pay

gap and the economic crisis and its impact on employees, and on international comparisons including these and other issues.

Victor Beker, of the Regional Office Latin America of the Wage Indicator and the Centro de Estudios de la Nueva Economía (CENE) in Buenos Aires, went into 'The Effect of Elsalario.com.ar on the Argentine Labour Market'. Beker, a renowned economist, reminded that when he learned about the Wage Indicator project it was love at first sight. He argued that the Argentine Wage Indicator website in particular helps to make the country's labour market more transparent, as many people do not know what the market is paying for a position he/she is applying for. Also, at least in Argentina it is amazing how many do not know about their labour rights, and a second main contribution of Elsalario is to diminish this knowledge gap.

In his presentation 'Behind the Screen: same Backbone for Standard, Mobile and Partners', Huub Douma, one of the Wage Indicator developers of Groningen-based Wyldebeast and Wunderliebe, went into the system architecture, the choice for Plone as the Content Management System used, and the performance improvement to be expected from the latest Plone update. Taisa Bandarenka, Regional Office Wage Indicator for the CIS countries and manager of the Mojarzaplata websites (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Azerbaijan), explained her audience 'Why Mojarzaplata.by in Belarus is the best'. She showed high numbers of Wage Indicator surveys completed compared to the amount of site visitors. In explaining this success, she mentioned: planning and organization; marketing; recruiting the right professionals, and sticking to professional journalism. As Bandarenka already mentioned Search Engine Optimization (SEO) as an important internet marketing tool, it was a lucky shot that Irene van Beveren (Wage Indicator Office in London) followed up with her presentation 'Search Engine Optimization: Brains beat Money'. Van Beveren stressed that in order to be effective in attracting web visitors, SEO needs a lot of web pages of keyword-rich unique high quality content.

In the next three presentations, researchers connected with Wage Indicator treated research issues. Kea Tijdens, Research Coordinator of the Wage Indicator as well as at AIAS and jointly with Paulien Osse initiator of the Wage Indicator back in 2001, presented 'Online Surveys: towards a Global Standard'. She told the audience that in these ten years valid wage data have been collected from almost 900,000 individuals in 56 countries. Based on this database, the Wage Indicator team is able to prepare Salary Checks in almost 30 countries, with more to follow. The team carefully controls the international comparability of the data on wages, benefits, working hours, working conditions, and industrial relations at the workplace, hoping that this helps in setting the standard with regard to worldwide comparative analyses. Tijdens emphasized progress in questioning on and analyzing of occupations, based on the multi-country occupations database of about 1,700 occupations that has been developed.

In 'Potential for Global Wage Comparisons', Martin Guzi, Regional Office Wage Indicator Bratislava and Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI) in Bratislava, demonstrated that Wage Indicator data are an ideal foundation for wage comparisons across countries in different stages of development and economic conditions. He did so by comparing gross and net hourly wage rates for 27 countries and for three occupational groups. The outcomes confirmed that wage disparities remain high across the global, also within occupational groups such as occupations in the IT sector. In 'Bias in the Data: so what?', Stephanie Steinmetz, researcher at the AIAS, treated the

problem of selectivity bias in the Wage Indicator as a volunteer web survey. She argued that Wage Indicator follows several strategies to reduce this bias, through web marketing and through the development of different weights as to correct for differences between the (web) sample and the population under consideration. Moreover, researchers using the Wage Indicator data should try to contribute to a higher acceptance of this new data collection mode in the academic world.

The last four presentations concentrated on the use of Wage Indicator information in various national contexts. Maarten van Klaveren, researcher at the AIAS, and Biju Varkkey of the IIM Ahmedabad, jointly answered the question 'Why should Wage Indicator focus on Minimum Wage?' They argued that particularly in developing countries statutory minimum wages can be of crucial importance for living standards and perspectives in life of large parts of the population. Setting minimum wage levels is a balancing act, but a number of large countries is on the way from just providing a living wage to using minimum wages for the redistribution of income. Van Klaveren and Varkkey stressed that lack of transparency remains a problem especially in countries with multiple minimum wages. Here, like in India, Wage Indicator information has already proven to be of great help for many workers. Also, Wage Indicator analyses of compliance with minimum wages in practice put pressure on employers, government, and unions.

In his contribution 'Meusalario.org Campaign: Debates and Publicity', Egidio Vaz Raposo, Regional Office Wage Indicator in Maputo, outlined the current of the Wage Indicator in Mozambique, aimed at raising awareness among workers about labour law, labour rights and duties, minimum wage and working hours, all Decent Work issues. He pointed at the great impact that local meetings covering these issues had. Silvia Chimpampwe, director Gender and Women of the Zambia Union of Financial Institutions and Allied Workers, highlighted the 'Minimum Wage Trade Union Campaign in Zambia', in which her union had taken the lead, supported by information on the Zambian Wage Indicator, Mywage.org. Chimpampwe mentioned examples of successful union organizing throughout this campaign, through recruiting new members and starting actions at local level.

Saliem Patel, partner in Wage Indicator Southern Africa and director of Labour Research Services (LRS) in Cape Town, went into 'The Effect of Collective Bargaining Data Online'. He explained that LRS has built up the Actual Wage Rates Database (AWARD), capturing wage and benefits data. The partnership with Wage Indicator now allows LRS for South Africa to compare the minimum wages laid down in agreements or determinations with the actual wages paid. Patel presented a number of conclusions from this comparison, like that many workers are not catered for in existing agreements and are excluded from social dialogue, and that many women are very low paid. Interestingly, AWARD has been recently been introduced in a number of countries in the region.

After these presentations, with short debates in between stimulated by Paulien Osse, a video message was shown. This message of Richard Freeman, Harvard Law School, Cambridge, USA, and one of the world's leading labour economists, implied a testimony of the growing importance of the Wage Indicator in the research world. Freeman congratulated all with the 10 years' Wage Indicator celebration and hoped for a fruitful next decade of expanding activities.

Rike Wivel, Director of Marketing of Monster Benelux, handed over a present to Wiemer Salverda: the first issue of the Wage Index, a joint product of Wage Indicator Netherlands and Monster Netherlands. Finally, Paulien Osse took the opportunity to thank all participants that contributed to the success of the Wage Indicator for their great efforts and said to look forward to continuing the success in the next decade. The participants answered by applauding for in particular Paulien Osse.

See for pictures, movies, address Richard Freeman:

<http://www.wageindicator.org/main/projects/events/wage-indicator-conference-may-12-2011>. See also: <http://www.wageindicator.org/main/publications/2011/the-next-decade> from where the 10 years' jubilee booklet 'The next decade' (edited by Dirk Dragstra, 2011), including background texts by all presenters, can be downloaded.