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JOB QUALITY IN MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS. THE IMPACT OF THE INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

This work investigates *different institutional impacts on job quality for workers employed in a multinational corporation operating in the food retail sector.* Considering multinational corporations' increasing relevance and their high level of standardisation, investigating the role of different institutions represents a way to test whether they can play a role in defining working conditions.

Thus, the research takes into account specific institutional elements: *labour market regulations*, *industrial relations system* and *welfare regimes*, to analyse their impact on those aspects related to the *quality of employment* and *the quality of the work* - such as *the level of contingent employment, wages, working hours, careers' prospects.* Also, the research focuses on *service sector* and in particular on *retail*, which presents a series of peculiarities still not deeply investigated and relevant in the analysis of the job quality (for example, high turnover rate, high level of contingent employment, difficulties for trade unions).

To analyse these issues, the research adopts a comparative approach, investigating job quality *between different branches of the same multinational corporation* of the food retail sector, operating *in two different institutional contexts*, Italy and Denmark. Together with the quantitative secondary data analysis of the Labour Force Survey (Eurostat) and the European Working Conditions Survey (Eurofound), the research foresees qualitative semi-structured interviews to trade unions representatives, delegates and corporation's managers in both the countries.

The research aims to offer new theoretical and empirical contributions on the *convergence/divergence debate* on multinational corporations functioning in host countries – looking especially at the managers' autonomy dimension, considering the findings proposed by different literatures; also, the research investigates *industrial relations operating in service sector*, offering new perspectives on the possibly fundamental role of trade unions in this sector.

Most importantly, it deepens the impact that *welfare policies* have on the characteristics of the *labour supply*, which in return affect MNCs' strategies, and the perceived level of job quality. It is shown in here how it is fundamental to look more deeply at the social protections' systems when analysing the job quality in sector like the retail one, when the bargaining processes are more problematic. At the same time, the research shows how the workforce characteristics really play an essential role in the final perception of the job quality, and thus it is fundamental to take them into account. The results of the research want to underling how, from a theoretical perspectives, in the analysis of the job quality, the traditional studies of the Comparative Political Economy, focusing mainly on the variables of the industrial relations' systems and the labour regulations, risk to not really grasp the fundamental role played by the welfare policies. This finding takes even more relevance when taking into consideration the workforce characteriscts, that offer a fundamental analytical tool in the analysis of the job quality in different sectors.

Key-words

Job Quality – Multinational Corporations – Retail Sector – Comparative Political Economy – Comparative Case Study.

Index

I. 11

INTRODUCTION: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE JOB QUALITY 11

II. 20

JOB QUALITY BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL DIFFERENCES AND GLOBALIZED STANDARDIZATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW 20

2.1. Introduction 20

2.2. Job quality: a broad concept 21

2.2.1. Starting to conceptualize job quality 21

2.2.2. The distinction between employment quality and work quality 23

2.2.3. Analyse all the aspects of the job quality 24

2.3. Comparative Capitalisms: the role of the institutions 27

2.3.1. Traditional Varieties of Capitalism literature 27

2.3.2. New elements on the Varieties of Capitalism literature: new clusters of countries, supranational institutions and multinational corporations' role 33

2.4. Multinational corporations: the role of the companies 37

2.4.1. Multinational corporations' functioning in host countries: main theories 38

2.4.2. Multinational corporations functioning in human resources management, performance management and industrial relations 42

2.5. Sectors and labour supply: the peculiarities of the retail sector 48

2.6. Final considerations 51

III. 53

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS 53

3.1. Introduction 53

3.2. Research questions and comparison justification 53

3.3. Comparative case study methodology 57

3.4. Unit of analysis: why a MNC operating in the retail sector 59

3.5. Data collection: method and techniques 61

3.5.1. Quantitative secondary data analysis 61

3.5.2. Qualitative semi-structured interviews 61

IV. 67

ITALY AND DENMARK IN COMPARISON 67

4.1. Introduction 67

4.2. Labour market regulation and educational system 68

4.2.1. A fragmented deregulation: the Italian labour market 68

4.2.2. Investing on the work: the Danish labour market 72

4.3. Welfare systems and social protections 74

4.3.1. The "incomplete reformism": the Italian Welfare system 74

4.3.2. Universality and citizenship: the Danish Welfare system 76
4.4. Industrial relations' models and trade unions' role 77
4.4.1. Conflict and representativeness: the Italian industrial relations' model 80
4.4.2. Concertation and collaboration: the Danish industrial relations' model 83
4.5. Final considerations 87
V. 91
WORKFORCE CHARACTERICS AND JOB QUALITY INDICES IN THE RETAIL SECTOR: A CONTEXUAL ANALYSIS 91
5.1. Introduction 91
5.2. Workforce characteristics in the retail sector 91
5.3. Labour contracts and skill levels 95
5.4. Job quality indices in the retail sector 99
5.4.1. Eurofound job quality indices: structure and methodology 99
5.4.2. Job quality in Italy and Denmark 102
5.4.3. Job quality in the retail sector 105
5.5. Final consideration 109
VI. 112
INSIDE A MULTINATIONAL CORPORATION: STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION 112
6.1. Introduction 112
6.2. Welcome to *FoodForYou*: history and products 113
6.2.1. Same stores, same structure: in a word, standardization 114
6.2.2. Company's business model and marketing strategies 116
6.3. A centralized and pyramidal company 117
6.4. *FoodForYou*'s Human Resource Management 120
6.4.1. HRM managerial figures 121
6.4.2. Hiring procedures 122
6.4.3. Standard HRM or not? 124
6.5. Standardized policies vs. managers' autonomy 125
6.6. Consequences on the relation with Trade Unions 127
6.7. "We care about our workers": corporate welfare 129
6.8. Final considerations 132
VII. 134
WORKERS' VOICE IN THE COMPANY: THE ROLE OF THE TRADE UNIONS 134
7.1. Introduction 134
7.2. A long road to the unionisation 135
7.2.1. The second phase of industrial relations: still not a fairy tale 138
7.2.1.1. The introduction of the "social" manager 139
7.2.1.2. Italian Trade Unions' fragmentation: the new integrative contract as a breaking point 141

7.2.2. A long road still without an end 145
7.2.3. FoodForYou as part of an employers' association 147
7.2.4. Company's size: what are the consequence on the industrial relations? 148
7.3. Trade unions' role and perceptions 149
7.3.1. National and territorial trade unions' representatives' visions: FoodForYou as an example of the difficulties of the retail sector 150
7.3.1.1. Join the union! 151
7.3.1.2. When the strikes are not enough 153
7.3.1.3. From the problems to the solutions: useful actions according to trade unionists 154
7.3.2. Being a trade union delegate in FoodForYou 155
7.3.2.1. Many Italian delegates, few Danish shop stewards 156
7.3.2.2. Between the managers and the trade unionists: delegates' difficulties 157
7.3.2.3. Facing the obstacles: stores' delegates role and potentialities 159
7.4. Trade unions in a globalized labour market 161
7.5. Final considerations 165
VIII. 169
WORKING, BUT HOW? JOB QUALITY INSIDE AN INTERNATIONAL DISCOUNT RETAIL CHAIN 169
8.1. Introduction 169
8.2. Who are *FoodForYou*'s workers? Italian mothers vs. Danish young students 170
8.3. Why so flexible? 173
8.4. External flexibility: security or precariousness? 175
8.4.1. Types of contracts and hiring procedures: labour laws boundaries vs. managers' autonomy 176
8.4.2. Fixed-term contracts and (involuntary) turnover rate 178
8.4.3. The other side of the fixed-term contracts: other consequences of the involuntary turnover rate in the two countries 180
8.5. Internal flexibility: the use of part-time contracts 181
8.5.1. Part-time contracts and low salaries: a more functional picture in Denmark, more problems in Italy 182
8.5.2. Management of the work shifts and consequences on workers 183
8.5.3. (In)voluntary part-time and work-life balance: Danish welfare system vs. Italian burden on families 185
8.6. Job's tasks and workers' recognition 190
8.6.1. (Low)skilled workers, (un)recognized professional categories and voluntary turnover rate 190
8.6.2. "Horizontal" career prospects? 194
8.6.3. Male managers, female cashiers: gender gap 197
8.6.4. Relations with costumers 198
8.7. Finding the time to be trained 200

8.8. Final considerations 202
IX 205
FRONT-LINE WORKERS DURING THE PANDEMIC 205
9.1. Introduction 205
9.2. The challenge of the Covid-19 206
9.3. Working in a supermarket during the emergency: "We were in the front-line without weapons" 208
9.3.1. An organization under pressure 208
9.3.2. The impact of the pandemic on job 210
9.3.3. Be safe at the workplace 211
9.4. Trade unions' role at supranational, national and company level 213
9.5. Final considerations 216
X. 219
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: ESSENTIAL, BUT INVISIBLE WORKERS 219
Bibliography 233
Annexes 251
Annex I. The job quality indices 251
Annex II. Trade unions and managers' interviews' guidelines 256

Lists of tables and figures

Table 1 - LMEs and CMEs main features in Hall and Soskice 29
Table 2 - Five model of capitalism's main features in Amable 32
Table 3 - Five model of capitalism's main features in Myant and Drahokoupil 33
Table 4 - Forms of adaptation between MNCs and foreign institutions 42
Table 5 - Summary of the main institutional features in Italy and in Denmark 57
Table 6 - Comprehensive table of the interviews conducted, by countries and role 63
Table 7 - Main aspects covered by the national collective agreements in Denmark and Italy 78
Table 8 - Percentage of workers employed in Italy and Denmark, by sectors 92
Table 9 – Sectoral distribution by sex (% by column) 93
Table 10 – Sectoral distribution by sex (% by column) 93
Table 11 - Distribution by age in Italy (% by column) 93
Table 12 - Distribution by age in Denmark (% by column) 94
Table 13 - Distribution by country of birth in Italy (% by column) 94
Table 14 - Distribution by country of birth in Denmark (% by column) 94
Table 15 - Distribution by educational level in Italy (% by column) 95
Table 16 - Distribution by educational level in Denmark (% by column) 95
Table 17 - Distribution by type of contract (duration) in Italy (% by column) 96
Table 18 - Distribution by type of contract (duration) in Denmark (% by column) 96
Table 19 - Distribution by type of contract (part-time/full-time distinction) in Italy (% by column) 97
Table 20 - Distribution by type of contract (part-time/full-time distinction) in Denmark (% by column) 97
Table 21 - Distribution by skills level in Italy (% by column) 97
Table 22 - Distribution by skills level in Denmark (% by column) 98
Table 23 - Distribution by employee's occupation in Italy (% by column) 99
Table 24 - Distribution by employee's occupation in Denmark (% by column) 99

Table 25 - Items used in the construction of the indices 101
Table 26 - Synthesis of the Italian integrative contract signed with FoodForYou 142

Figure 1: Research design and theoretical framework 16
Figure 2 - Job quality indices in Italy and Denmark – graphics with confidence interval 102
Figure 3 - Monthly earnings in Italy and Denmark – graphics with confidence interval 103
Figure 4 - Job quality indices in relation to perception of precariousness in Italy and Denmark – graphics with confidence interval 104
Figure 5 - Monthly earnings in relation to perception of precariousness in Italy and Denmark – graphics with confidence interval 105
Figure 6 - Job quality indices compared to sectors in the EU countries – graphics with confidence interval 106
Figure 7 - Monthly earnings compared to sectors in the EU countries – graphics with confidence interval 106
Figure 8 - Job quality indices based on companies' size – graphics with confidence interval 108
Figure 9 - Monthly earnings based on companies' size – graphics with confidence interval 109
Figure 10 - FoodForYou flowchart 119
Figure 11 - Human Resource Management in FoodForYou 122
Figure 12 - Summary of the flexibility's consequences in both the countries 190

I.

INTRODUCTION: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE JOB QUALITY

Job quality has been investigated from different perspectives, being it a transversal concept which interests several field of studies. In order to analyse and measure it through a shared framework, there have been implemented some common indicators (Davoine, Erhel and Guergoat-Lariviere, 2008), usually taken into account among European countries.

Due to its multidimensional vein, job quality has been analysed with **different approaches** (Findlay, Kelleberg and Warhurst, 2013; Gallie, 2014), taking into account several aspects related not only to the sphere of the labour market and of the contractual terms **(quality of employment)** but also to the other aspects which can affect the workers well-being, such as the institutional contexts and the role of employers, the use of technology and the concept of alienation **(quality of work)** and the personal satisfaction, **(job satisfaction)** (Brown, Charlwood and Spencer, 2012; Westover, 2012; Reyneri, 2013). Thus, in literature it is possible to find many research which use different approaches and consider different dimensions (De Bustillo *et al.*, 2011; Lucchini, Negrelli and Zaccaria, 2014), confirming that, when analysing this theme, it is, so, necessary to precisely focus on *what* to observe and *with which approach*.

Despite the numerous approaches that define the dimensions of the job quality, however, it is not foregone *what is the role played by the institutions in relation to those dimensions.* Starting from this, this research wants in particular to focus on **the institutional impact on the quality of employment and the quality of work**, referring, for example, to dimensions such as skills levels, personal discretion, health and safety at work, level of contingent employment (and thus, precariousness and career's prospects, work organisation and work-life balance).

According to the *Comparative Political Economy* (Hall and Soskice, 2001; Amable, 2003; Burroni, 2016), in fact, specific institutional characteristics can affect in different ways the job quality among countries. Thus, the research wants to look in particular at ***different labour market regulations, industrial relations systems***, and ***the welfare policies***, to understand in which way specific institutional factors affect job quality.

Labour market regulations is the first element to take into consideration. On the one hand, in fact, there has been a common process of deregulation and flexibilization in the labour market among European countries (also as a way to face the financial crisis), which affected in particular the

outsiders (including young people entering in the labour market), thus increasing the level of segmentation and fragmentation between "protected" and "non protected" workers (Barbieri and Cutuli, 2014). However, it is also true that not in every country these policies have been implemented in the same way and for the same target of workers, and this is even truer if enlarging this reasoning including the fundamental (even if collateral) role of (different) welfare policies.

Industrial relations models' definitions and characteristics, secondly, are fundamental in the analysis of job quality: trade unions' presence can in fact greatly affect the quality of employment, especially in relations to the management of the work organization, complementary salaries and access to training policies. Plus, depending on the industrial relations' system (for example, looking at the relations occurring between the different social parts or at the level of fragmentation occurring between different unions) can help in understanding what can be done from trade unions' side in the relation with multinational corporations. Analysing them is important especially considering the common tendency to decentralised bargaining processes and the general decrease of trade unions density (Bordogna, 2012; OECD, 2020), while on the contrary the spread of multinational corporations has been increasing in the last decades.

Welfare systems affect job quality, too, even if less directly than labour regulations or trade unions' role. Welfare policies that provide monetary helps or integrative wages greatly affect jobs' security's perception, especially in situations of contingent employment, actively contributing to fulfil the precariousness deriving from the lack of a permanent contract. This is even truer if looking at different level of expenditures (in terms of GDP) dedicated to active labour market policies and to training systems, which consequently affect the possibility to fully express workers' capacity in the workplace and/or to (re) enter in the labour market (Westover, 2012). On the other hand, welfare systems can also affect work-life balance and thus the perception of shifts and working hours, especially considering the impact of childcare and eldest care services (Askenazy *et al.*, 2012).

Looking at these particular institutional elements is more interesting considering that, on the one hand, they are profoundly embedded with national and also historical contexts (Hall and Soskice, 2001; Amable, 2003), thus potentially being greatly different; but on the other hand, **the spread of globalisation and deregulation processes** which has been happening in the labour market (Benassi *et al.*, 2016), have contributed in creating more similarities among different institutional assets, especially considering the role of supranational institutions (above all, The European Union's bodies and the European Trade Unions) (Baccaro and Howell, 2011; Keune, Marginson, 2013; Pedersini, 2019). However, notwithstanding these potential similarities, differences still occur, and understating their impact on job quality can offer both theoretical but also practical implications.

The presence of similarities even among different countries/institutional contexts **is particularly notable in multinational corporations** (MNCs), **which are by definition highly standardised in their functioning** (Femer, 1997). In light of this, thus, the research wants to understand the institutional impact on job quality *between different branches of the same multinational corporation*, considering also that their functioning is still approached from various perspectives, and not always the potential role of the institutional contexts is taken into account; this is even truer considering the approach that different fields of literature have proposed on the theme. **This represents a limit from a theoretical perspective**, especially considering MNCs' increasing relevance in a globalised labour market. **Looking at MNCs, thus, is a way to test whether the institutional impact can play a role**, in particular in some of the aspects that can greatly affect job quality, like for example human resource management (Almond, 2011), or vocational and training policies.

MNCs' literature represents, in fact, the second field of studies of the conceptual framework of this research. On the one hand, approaching job quality in MNCs can offer new perspective in the convergence/divergence debate on MNCs' standardised managerial discretion: **thus, this literature represents the "counterpart" of the comparative political economy**. On the other hand, other research which have approached MNCs help in understanding how job quality is perceived inside them, and how it can change among different sectors. And also, there can be different ways through which MNCs manage their relations with the trade unions (Van Klaveren *et al.*, 2013), so investigating what unions can do it is relevant also to compare how they differently manage the bargaining processes - looking for example at the share of "power" in handling the bargaining itself (Bakir, 2015).

Considering what outlined so far, this research thus aims at investigating job quality in multinational corporations ***operating, in particular, in the retail sector.*** The choice to focus on the retail sector represents an interesting field of investigation, due to a set of peculiarities (Giaccone, Di Nunzio, 2012) which characterise its great group of low-skilled jobs, considering for example the spread of contingent employment or the presence, in some cases, of demanding shifts. Investigating job quality in the retail sector, also, is innovative and justified especially considering that several analysis conducted inside the field of the sociology of labour research are still dedicated to other sectors, like manufacturing or industry, despite the great increase of people employed in service (and retail) sector (Wren, 2013). Also, in the retail sector industrial relations present some disadvantages - for example, workplaces' fragmentation, high level of autonomous workers, high turnover rate and so forth - which make more difficult to adopt unions' strategies (Lehndorff, Steffen, 2002; Dølvik, Waddington, 2002). **Actually, industrial relations literature has also difficulty focused on this sector,** and thus

investigating job quality and the role of workers' representatives in this context might offer an innovative and not well-established theoretical contribution.

In order to really grasp potential and *different* institutional impacts, the research adopts a comparative approach, taking into account the same multinational corporation (named in here *FoodForYou*) operating in the food-retail. Thus, this "double level" of standardization (in a multinational corporation, firstly, *and* in the retail sector, secondly), represents a further test to grasp similarities or difference of the three institutional elements considered, and to see potential more functional patterns taking into account all of these elements together, **in countries that present different institutional contexts.** On the one hand, the research analyses **Italy**, which presents a fragmented labour market, familistic welfare system and quite strong industrial relations; on the other, it looks at **Denmark**, which presents, to date, a highly flexible labour market, but also a strong level of social protection.

This comparative research aims at contribute to a complementary view on multinational corporations' role, taking into account both **political economy and corporations' literature approaches,** offering a more complete theoretical framework, especially in the convergence/divergence debate on MNCs' functioning in host countries In this case, the convergence/divergence debate focuses especially on the host countries' managers' autonomy, in order to analyse both the similarities in the two countries and the effective relations occurring between managers and host countries' institutions. Secondly, from the labour market perspective, it aims at enlarge the knowledge on how the different characteristics of the workforce might play a role in the perception of working conditions and job quality; and also, at better investigating the relation between ***welfare policies, workforce characteristics*** **and** ***multinational corporations strategies***. This is particularly true, for example, for women, who can be more available to accept part-time jobs, diffuse in the retail sector.

Considering that the aim of the research is to understand the impact of the institutions on job quality inside multinational corporations, the analysis will be at *macro* level, and at institutional factors, as already outlined (Findlay, Kelleberg and Warhurst, 2013). However, considering that the research design is based on the analysis of a single company, also some *micro* dimensions are taken into account, even if to a lesser extent – such as the organisation and tasks' division (in the company).

For the reasons described so far, this work thus is based on the following questions: in what way the labour norms, despite the high level of standardization present both in the MNCs and in the retail sector, can have an impact on the job quality - especially concerning the indicators of the social security and the career prospects? What is the added value of the trade unions' agencies in a

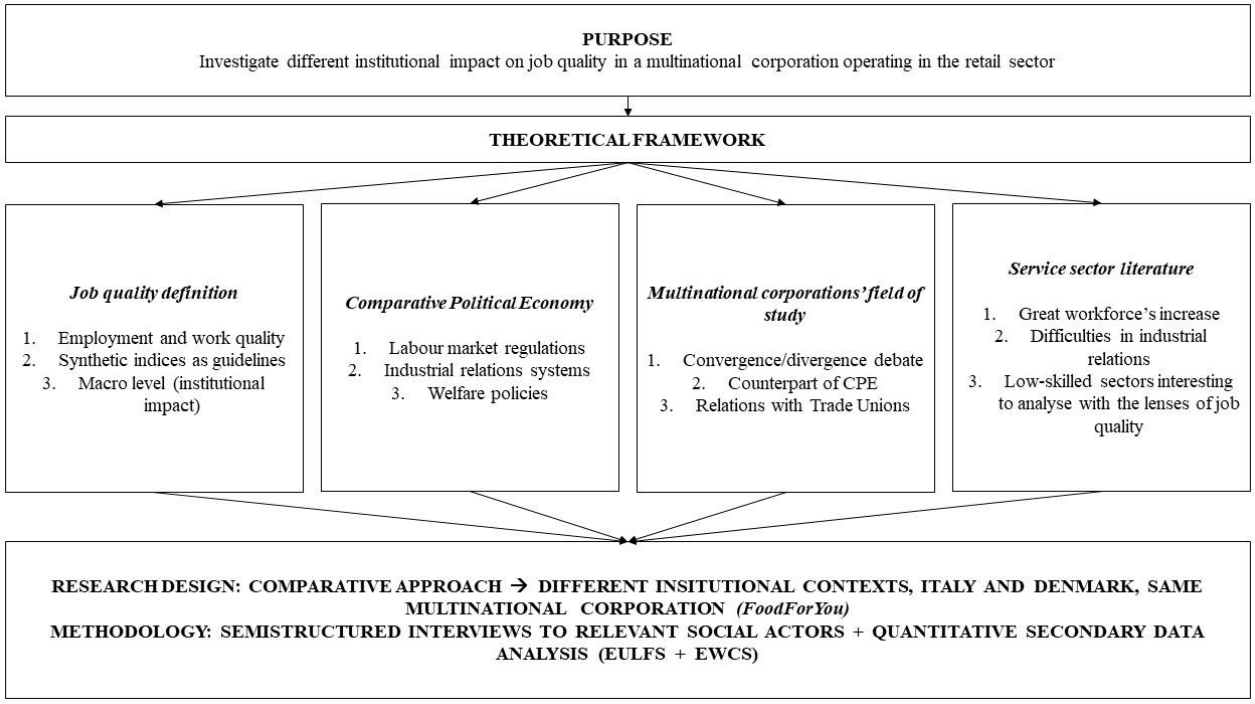
corporation operating in a difficult sector such as the retail one? How strong is the impact of the welfare policies in affecting the job quality, meant especially as quality of working life (Gosetti, 2012), and how much the workforce characteriscts play a role in the effect that the policies themselves have?

After having outlined the research problem and questions and their justification, it is worth in here to advance some preliminary hypothesis, based on the knowledge of the literature presented above.

1. It is known from the literature that retail sector has some characteriscts quite transversal across different countries, and this is true especially in relations to the spread of atypical contracts. Labour market features can play an important role especially through the regulations of the contingent emplyment: the expectation is to find, thus, better job quality indicators in relation to the security of the job and the careers' prospects in Italy, where the labour market is less liberal, in comparison to Denmark;
2. The choice to focus on the retail sector means to look at a sector where, due to a high level of turnover rate, fragmentation of the workplaces and a very flexible work-organization (that fuels individualism among workers), trade unions' actions have a limited impact on the job quality. However, different industrial relations' systems could in here play a role (for example, depending on the relations occurring between the social parts and the employers' associations): this is why, knowing *ex ante* that the Danish industrial relations' system is less fragmented (compared to the Italian one) the hypothesis is that unions, notwithstanding the similar difficulties that are present in Italy, could achieve more results in terms of job quality in Denmark;
3. In accordance with these two hypothesis and considering especially the characteriscts of the retail sector, the expectation is that welfare policies could help in affecting the job quality in a complementary way, especially in Denmark were they are structurally more diffused.

The research is built on qualitative methods of investigation, with interviews to both institutional actors and multinational corporations' representatives; however, in order to fully describe the characteristics of different labour markets, the research is also built on a quantitative secondary data analysis of two databases, the European Union Labour Force Survey (Eurostat) and the European Working Conditions Survey (Eurofound).

Figure 1: Research design and theoretical framework



Source: authors' own elaboration

This work is structured as follows.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the review of the literature mainly used as main theoretical framework. The first paragraph analyses the studies on the job quality, taking into consideration both the *employment quality* and the *work quality*, and finally describing the field of literature of the *job satisfaction*. Later, the chapter continues with the review of the literature of the Varieties of Capitalism, starting from the main theories and proposing, then, the new elements that these studies have been taken into account more recently (the supranational institutions, the globalization processes and so forth). This is the section useful in order to explain, later, the methodology applied in this work. The third paragraph on the contrary focuses on the literature that describes the multinational corporations' functioning – in particular in the host countries. This is because, as said, the unit of analysis is a multinational corporation operating in two different institutional contexts, in order to grasp the potentialities of different institutions in affecting the job quality in a very standardized contex. Finally, the last paragraph briefly reviews the characteristics of the retail sector, the one considered as particularly interesting to be analysed under the lenses of the job quality because of its peculiarities.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the methodology. Thus, it presents a brief theoretical justification, as well as the research questions, that are the guidelines to explain why Italy and Denmark are the two

countries selected for this work. After this, it is reported the methodology of the comparative case study research design, the units of analysis, the variables considered and finally the methods. The research is built on qualitative methods, specifically semi structured interviews to trade unions' representatives and company's managers; but also on the quantitative secondary data analysis on the two dataset of Eurostat (EULFS) and Eurofound (EWCS).

Chapter 4 is the one dedicated to the comparison of the two countries, Italy and Denmark. Thus, it presents the differences present in the labour market regulations, the welfare and the industrial relations' systems. In particular, in respect to the first dimension, the focus is on the presence/absence of the active labour market policies and the processes of deregulation in the labour market. Regarding the welfare, the focus is especially on the policies for the family care, while for the industrial relations the focus is on the level of institutionalisation and the relations between the trade unions and the other relevant institutional bodies. All of these specificities are in fact the most important for the purpose of this work, especially in terms of job quality.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to the quantitative secondary data analysis. The main core of all the analysis is the retail sector, taken into account as the one to compare between the two countries, Italy and Denmark. Thus, the first part focuses on the workforce characteristics, considering in particular the age, the gender, the educational level, the types of contracts and so on. The workforce characteriscts are in fact really important, because depending on them the job quality can really change – as well as the job satisfaction. The second paragraph, then, analyses the job quality indices proposed by Eurofound, in the two countries, comparing, in particular, the retail sector with the industry and the service sector (considered as a whole) and the companies' dimensions.

Chapter 6 reports the characteriscts and the functioning of the company selected for the analysis, *FoodForYou.* It describes its entrance in the two host countries, its human resource management, the way it faces with the trade unions. Analysing the company under the lenses of the multinational corporations' functioning is not only a way to focus on what are the aspects more standardized and what are, on the contrary, those more likely to be influenced by the host countries' institutions; but it also offers new perspectives in the theoretical debate on the processes of convergence/divergence of the corporations abroad, especially concerning the level of autonomy that host countries' managers have, in relation to the home country's guidelines. This is the first chapter that derives from the empirical fieldwork: in fact, it reports the main insights derived from the interviews with both trade unions representatives and most importantly with the management of the company.

Chapter 7 is dedicated to the industrial relations inside the company. It describe the unionisation processes, how the company posed to the trade unions when it arrived both in Italy and in Denmark and how the relations have been changed during the years. Then, it describes what are the main difficulties according to the trade unions representatives, the strategies they implement and their general perception of this company as an example of the retail sector. The same structure is then applied but looking at the trade unions' delegates, thus, considering their experiences as both members of the unions and as workers employed in the company. The last paragraph of this chapter is then dedicated to the relations between the trade unions and the multinational corporations, an most importantly it deepens the (potential) role played by the European trade unions.

Chapter 8 is the core of the thesis, and analyses the job quality inside the company. Each paragraph describes the different dimensions of the job quality taken into account in this work. Thus, the chapter starts from the description of the workforce characteriscts, and right after it describes one of the main issue that not only is present in this company (and in the retail sector in general), but that also affect the most the job quality: the flexibility. In particular, in this case, the comparison between the two countries becomes important, as better explained also in the conclusions. After this introduction, all the dimensions described later are analysed taking into account both the more "objective" aspects of the job quality, more related to the *employment quality*, and all the other aspects that partly also involve the *job satisfaction,* grasped through the testimonies of the trade unions' delegates, who see their workers' peers' every day at store level. So, this applies in regard to the training, the skills and discretions, the career prospects, the autonomy, the relations with the management, the relations with the costumers.

Chapter 9, finally, analyses what happened in the company during the pandemic. In order to do that, it proposes trade unions' opinions on what have been the institutional role during this period, what have been the protections applied for the workers employed in this sector (and in this company) and what have been, especially, trade unions' role in these processes. Of course, then the testimonies of the delegates are reported, focusing especially on the feelings of fear, of being exposed, of being "invisible".

Chapter 10, finally, is dedicated to the discussions and conclusions. In here, the aim is to answer to the initial research questions presented in chapter 3, looking thus at what have been the institutional impact on the job quality, taking into consideration all the stream of literatures presented in chapter 2 and focusing, especially, on the gaps and expectations derived from this work.

II.

JOB QUALITY BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL DIFFERENCES AND GLOBALIZED STANDARDIZATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter has the aim to propose a literature review of the main theories that had drove this research work. As underlined in the introduction (chapter 1), the aim of this work is to understand the institutional impact on the job quality for workers employed in a multinational corporation that operates in the retail sector. Having the research problem in mind, this review, notwithstanding the aim to be as complete as possible, contextualise in every sections those elements that represent the theoretical guides to analyse the empirical material.

Thus, the review concerns three field of study: the first one relates the research on the job quality – the core element investigated in this work; the second one regards the comparative political economy and the Varieties of Capitalism, in order to theoretically collocate and to define what are considered as *institutions* – the variables potentially affecting the job quality according to the research questions; and the last one is the field of study on the multinational corporations' functioning, to fully understand the unit of analysis considered in this work.

Despite the fact that these are three literatures greatly different between them, the tentative of this chapter is to present them in a more "connected way", and to report in here those elements that are necessary to comprehend and to collocate the empirical material presented in the following chapters inside the broader theoretical debate.

The chapter is thus structured as follows. Paragraph 2.2. **reviews the literature on the job quality**, starting from a first conceptualization of its dimensions (2.2.1.), then focusing on the distinction between the quality of employment and the quality of work (2.2.2.); while finally the next one (2.2.3.) focuses on what have been presented, in literature, as the more comprehensive and complementary approaches.

Paragraph 2.3. is then dedicated to the **description of the Varieties of Capitalism literature**, firstly presenting the "traditional" theories (2.3.1.) while later focusing the importance more recently given to the new clusters of countries or to the supranational institutions (2.3.2.).

Finally, paragraph 2.4. **reviews the literature on the multinational corporations**' functioning, looking in particular at their strategies in the host countries (2.4.1.) and on their incidence on the human resource management.

Paragraph 2.5., then, makes a point on the importance to look at the workforce characteriscts and at the match between the labour supply and the labour demands specifically in the retail sector: this is done in order, once again, to facilitate comprehension of the relation between the theoretical framework and the fieldwork. Paragraph 2.6. concludes the chapter.

2.2. Job quality: a broad concept

In recent years, the issue of increasing the occupational rate has been one of the main focus among the policy makers in the European countries. However, alongside with this evident necessity, the complementary debate has also being on finding an equilibrium **between the quantity and the quality of the work.** Because of this reason, in the last decades several studies have focused on finding a **proper definition of job quality**, considering different indicators, lenses of analysis and methods to study and clarify it. However, it is still true that the focus of policymakers is still very much on the issue of employment creation, disregarding the significance of its quality. This is related, in part, to how difficult it is to define job quality in general (Cazes *et al.*, 2015).

Defining the job quality has represented a sociological interest since the beginning. According to Findlay, Kelleberg, and Warhurst (2013) and Gallie (2014), job quality has always been examined **from a multidisciplinary perspective, taking into account a number of factors that are not only relevant in relation to the labour market but also to human satisfaction, institutional contexts, the function of employers, and how these factors relate to technology use and the concept of alienation.** Because of these various viewpoints and the challenges that typically surround the definition of job quality, this section, as stated in the introduction, has the aim of presenting the most important studies on the subject.

2.2.1. Starting to conceptualize job quality

Luciano Gallino (1978) defined the job quality in his Dictionary of Sociology focusing on some specific dimensions. The first one is defined as the ***dimension of ergonomic***, related to the psychophysical needs of the workers. Secondly, Gallino defined the ***dimension of complexity***, that relates to the workers' needs to be involved in the work difficulties, the processes of creativity and professional training (as well as of the accumulation of the expertise gained during the time) and so forth. The necessity for employees to set their own norms to follow when performing a task is described by the third dimension, named ***autonomy***; finally, the dimension of ***control*** refers to

workers' demands to manage not only their own activities but also the overall organization of their job and the tasks that they are assigned (personal or of their peers).

After the presentation of the dimensions more related specifically to the job, Gallino describes how these dimensions can be affected also by external factors, in particular **the use of the technology, the work organization, the labour market features, the degree of unionisation and trade unions' organization, political system and labour value.**

Being a topic strictly dependent on what are the characteristics not only of the jobs, but also the general labour market features, job quality indicators can change and of course be (re)adapted; thus, successive studies had enlarged both the definition of the job quality dimensions and the analysis of the external factors.

According to the 2015 OECD publication "Measuring and assessing job quality: the OECD job quality framework" (Cazes *et al.,* 2015) some variables have become increasingly significant throughout time and must be taken into account when analysing job quality in the present. This is particularly true regarding the importance given to the ***earnings****:* many researches had in fact emphasised a clear **link between income and subjective well-being, as well as between income and life satisfaction** (Deaton and Kahneman, 2010; Sacks et al., 2012; Stevenson and Wolfers, 2008 and 2013). However, it is not by chance that, particularly in the modern era, the importance given to the earnings as an important (even if not sufficient) proxy to measure the quality of the job has increased; in addition, the importance and "role" played by the earnings and their margin of action varies depending on some institutional assets, particularly the access to some services (that can be public and state funded or private). **The question of money has also become more and more crucial in modern times, also in the public discourse** (for example, on the minimum wage laws at the European level).

The second element proposed in the OECD report regards **something somehow external to the job *per se*, but more dependent on the institutional assets: the *labour market security***. According to this report, mainly in all the surveys on the quality of job workers underline how they rank at a very high level this element: in fact, labour market security is something that not only affects the job, but that in a larger scale also affect life satisfaction and even health issues (Green, 2011).

A third element proposed in this report is the ***work environment***. There is ample research demonstrating that the many aspects of the working environment's quality have significant effects on employees' wellbeing. Numerous studies on occupational health, management, and sociology have looked into the ways that workplace dynamics and work organization might affect employees' well-

being (physical and mental health, job satisfaction, etc.). Examples of such challenges include meeting deadlines and hefty workloads, juggling competing demands, or carrying out physically taxing tasks. Workers also have various (and variable) resources available to them, including physical, organizational, and social resources (for example, work autonomy, opportunities to learn, and support from colleagues and managers). These "employment resources" support employees in meeting challenging demands, achieving work objectives, and promoting learning and personal growth. The fundamental tenet of occupational health models is that, while job demands aren't always bad, they might become stressors if the individual doesn't have enough resources at work to meet them.

Also in Reyneri (2013) the importance to look at *other* indicators to measure the job quality is strongly underlined. In fact, the author highlights how, traditionally, the sociology of labour focused especially on the industrial sector, an aspect that lead to pay attention especially on the **ergonomic dimensions** of the job quality. However, according to the author, in the last decades the labour market had profoundly change, especially for three reasons: the **spread of the service sectors**, that comprehends new and differentiated jobs; the increase of the female occupational rate; and the general increased of the instability of the labour market.

The author proposed four further aspects to take into account: **the stability of the job; the working hours; the salary; and the professional qualification**. Plus, and coherently especially with the tertiarization of the labour market and the female participation, other important indicators that gained visibility in assessing the quality of the employment **regards the part-time rate (and its distinction between being voluntary or involuntary); the work-life balance; and the issue of the compatibility, for the women, between work and possible motherhood**.

Also, other changes had affected the labour market: the increase of the "intellectual jobs" and of the long distance between the workplaces and workers' homes. From here, **the importance to look at the diffusion of the asocial shifts** (like night or weekend shifts) and **the long time needed to physically go to the workplaces** (especially in the metropolitan city).

As outlined, thus, changes occurring in the labour market significantly affects the definition of the job quality dimension. Because of this, in literature further and more precise analysis have been implemented, as explained in the next paragraph.

2.2.2. The distinction between employment quality and work quality

With the increase of the indicators considered useful in order to *fully define the job quality*, it has emerged how these dimensions can somehow **be grouped in two sub-categories.** This further

distinction is particularly useful to underline, especially considering the different characteristics of the various sectors (De Bustillo *et al.*, 2011), and it relates **to the quality of the employment** and **quality of the work**: the first one refers to all the aspects related to the **employment contract**, (remuneration, types of contract, working hours, career development – meant also as training policies and so forth); **the second refers to how the activity of work itself and the conditions under which it takes place can affect the well-being of workers** (thus, in this group there are the dimension of autonomy, intensity, social environment, physical environment etc).

Reyneri (2013) underlines the importance to also consider **two further indicators**. The first one **concerns the security of the employment**, that could be measured, also according to Eurofound, evaluating the perceived risk of losing the job (cognitive security) and the risk of being unable to re-enter in the labour market with an occupation similar to the lost one (labour market security).

The second element underlined by the author is, finally, **the job satisfaction**: even if less intuitively, also the personal and the subjective dimensions are pivotal if the aim is to carry a more complete analysis of the job quality.

In fact, the satisfaction is determined also by workers aspirations, norms and expectations. For this reason it is important to consider **two factors: personal characteriscts (including gender, educational level, age) combined with workers' expectations and job characteristics (**Brown, *et al.*, 2012; Westover, 2012), (e.g. wages, working hours, level of autonomy etc.) and workers' capacity to adapt to unexpected situations, as well as to the socio-economic conditions (Hebson *et al.*, 2015; Knox *et al.*, 2015; Lenè, 2018).

2.2.3. Analyse all the aspects of the job quality

In literature, thus, it is possible to find many researches which use different approach and consider different dimensions confirming that, when approaching the theme of the job quality, it is necessary to precisely focus on *what* to observe and *with which approach.* In fact, job quality is a multi-dimensional concept, and in order to fully understand it is necessary to study and comprehend all the elements, thus those concerning the quality of employment, the quality of work and the job satisfaction (Lucchini, Negrelli and Zaccaria, 2014).

In the paper by De Bustillo *et al.* (2011), the authors try to furnish some answers on how to use an approach that looks at all the dimensions of the job quality, taking thus into account all the three analysis related to the quality of the employment, the quality of the work and the job satisfaction. In particular, they underline how all of these approaches have some shortcomings, and thus, from here,

the importance **to adapt the research methodology** in order to grasp as much as possible all the aspects useful for the analysis.

The authors contend that there are factors that require special consideration when determining how to evaluate a strategy that best describes the job quality. The first one relates the decision to look at a **static or a dynamic dimension**, that can change depending whether the aim is to analyse the *jobs* (first option) or the *workers* (second options); the second distinction regards the construction of the job quality indices at *individual* or *aggregate* level, and in here the authors underline how the second has the advantage to being able to look at different sources (surveys, for example), even if, on the other hand, only indications created at the individual level can be used to grasp the intersection of the various job quality dimensions or the existence of compensation mechanisms between them.

Finally, the authors underline how all of these different approaches gain a different significance also depending on the importance that the researcher gives (or not) **to the *institutional sphere*** (an approach followed also in this work, as seen in chapter 1). If this is the aim, it is not only important to maintain and underline the **national specificities,** but also to look at **the same variables** in order to facilitate the comparability between different countries (and/or years of observation).

Gallie (2014) reminds the importance of taking into account all the dimension of the job quality. He points how the main difference between the various approaches relies on the fact that the indicators measuring the **quality of employment and the quality of the work focus especially on "the opportunities for personal development at work" (p. 388), while the subjective approach/the analysis of the job satisfaction favours the evaluation of the work by the workers themselves**. Gallie underlines, in particular, how the dimension of the ***discretion*** is the one that, more than others, represents somehow a "bridge" between the quality of work (more related to objective factors, such as the training policies offered by the company) and subjective factors, such as the satisfaction that workers feel when completing a task by their own (or in any case without too much control). Taking the discretion as an example, thus**,** according to the author, the more complete approach would have been one that comprehends both the lenses of analysis.

An approach of this kind is observable in the work of Gosetti (2012). He offers, in his contribution, a theoretical framework that is capable to somehow combine all the main aspects presented so far. His premises is that **job quality is the result of a match between the workers' needs and the work organization feature –** something that this research consider to a high extent, especially looking *inside* a multinational corporation. Gosetti recognizes that this premises explained why it is important to consider both subjective, objective and social indicators, meant as workers' individual needs, economic and environmental working conditions and social features of the work. For this reason, he

gives particularly importance to the new and *transversal* elements that are occurring in the labour market, namely the **standardization of the work processes and most importantly the deregulation of the working activity**, that had notably increased their flexibilization: in the broader terms of the job quality, this means putting major attention to issues such as the work life balance, the career prospects and so forth.

This is particularly true when looking at the service sector, where the flexibility results to be a key concept. This is why the author looks not only at the quality of the work and at the quality of the employment, as others scholars already did, but he focuses on a complementary approach that looks at **both this aspect *and* at the consequences on life, defining this framework as "quality of the working life"**, that has the aim to read the relations occurring between the workers' need and the work organization in light of the changes occurred at a macro and institutional level.

The author underlines how analysing job quality through the lenses of the quality of the working life is useful because it includes, as said, all the useful dimensions considered so far. First of all, it comprehends both the subjective perspective (that is composed more in particular by the components of the i) satisfaction and the ii) self-evaluation) and the objective perspective (meant as behaviours and conditions). Then, the approach of the quality of working life looks at both the "traditional" indicators used in the literature – including the economic, ergonomic, complexity, autonomy, control and symbolic dimensions; and at the (newer) indicators related to the **quality of the work-life balance**, that also includes the **social protections** and the **social participations** (a dimension that is related to the aim insert the work life in a broader picture that contributes to the general social development and to a democratic society).

As highlighted in this concisely analysis of the literature, job quality has been studied from a variety of angles because it is a notion that crosses several academic fields. As previously said, several common indicators have been introduced in order to analyse and measure it using a common framework (Davoine, Erhel, and Guergoat-Lariviere, 2008). These indicators are typically taken into consideration among European countries. In defining various aspects of job quality, such as skills and lifelong learning, health and safety at work, contingent employment (including flexibility and flexicurity processes), work organization, and work-life balance, it is unclear, however, what the real impact of various institutional contexts will be. This research wants to analyse, in particular, the institutional impact on workers' job quality employed in a multinational corporation. Thus, the aim is to see how and if **job quality, meant especially as employment and work quality,** changes due to different policies - labour marker regulations, industrial relations system and welfare policies - that however play their role in a very standardized context. In order to fully understand the empirical part

of the research, the next paragraphs offer an overview on the main theories of both the literatures of the comparative political economy and the varieties of capitalism and the multinational corporations functioning literature.

2.3. Comparative Capitalisms: the role of the institutions

This paragraph presents a review on the VoC literature, presenting both its milestones, and more recent developments, which include an attention to supranational institutions and to the changes occurred among the more traditional clusters of countries. In particular, in approaching this revision, a focus has been put on the elements more interesting for the analysis of MNCs. This choice is justified not only because this literature is huge per se, but also because it helps to look at the contact points between the two fields, in order to explain how (and if) they are related.

2.3.1. Traditional Varieties of Capitalism literature

VoC literature finds its milestone especially in the work of Hall and Soskice (2001). In here, the role of the *institutions* is the main core of their analysis, and starting from their functioning, authors express the **impossibility (or, at least, the great difficulties) of convergence processes**, even if capitalism' features develop and change. However, among a long range of factors and actors, a special attention is put on the role of *firms and their comparative advantages.* In the introduction, in fact, authors refers to a *relational view of the firm:* understating institutions' role can be a key point to deepen the processes of mutual trust, strategic interaction, reciprocal expectations for strategic purpose. **This relational view of the firms is important in this work, because these different types of interactions can influence to a great extent the MNCs' functioning, as will be analysed later on in the chapter**.

Authors' analysis is developed from the observation of five elements. The first concerns the *industrial relations* (bargaining processes, wages policies and working conditions, relations with the interested actors). The second regards *vocational training and education* (firms' investment in skilled labour force). The third is the sphere of *corporate governance* (firms' involvements with financial processes, relations with the investors, access to assurances and management of the returns on their investments). The fourth sphere is related to the *inter-firms' relations* (between the firms and between clients and suppliers). The last element regards the *relations between firms and their employees* (firms' capacity to manage employees' competences and to maintain a good level of cooperation to reach firm's main goals).

Some elements are in particular very relevant in shaping MNCs' functioning in host countries. *Industrial relations,* in fact, significantly affect employment protection, contracts regulation, active

role of workers inside the company, and are very embedded both to legislative framework and "historical" paths. **In fact, as will be seen later on, their role in the different *comparative advantages* of certain economies is fundamental**. The same is true for *inter-firms relations* assets: depending on their features, in fact, there will be different consequences in terms of products' demand, access to technology, research and development's investments and human resources management (HRM): **these elements are strongly taken into account by a MNC in its cost-benefits decision about entering or not in a new (foreign) labour market**, starting, however, from a perspective hinged on a conception of these differences as elements which can affect firms' advantage, more than as elements embedded with cultural and well-established contexts. *Finance assets* too are relevant, because depending on them, firms (and MNCs) encounter different levels of contraints in accessing to funds and in the processes of re-investment.

According to the authors, in some countries these elements interact in a very similar way. Thus, it is possible to observe two main groups: *liberal market economies* (LMEs), with *Britain* as main model of the Anglo-Saxon countries, and *coordinated market economies* (CMEs), which take Germany as exemplification of continental countries.

LMEs are in general structured on an advanced level of liberalism, which implies a lower level of state's interventions. Vocational training and education systems rely more on a generalist approach than on a specific one. In these systems *the industrial relations* are mostly decentralised, and present weaker forms of associations at national level; this is an important aspect to take into account, because it affects to a great extent firms' functioning. They are usually structured on a voluntary base, and can vary depending on the relations inside the firms, and to a lesser extent on national set of common backgrounds. **This creates processes of cooperation more between employers and employees than on a larger scale. This is very relevant for a foreign company, because the lack of a national and centralised model of bargaining leaves more freedom in its management**: it should be easier, eventually, to replicate the home model. In LMEs firms have strong relations with shareholders, quite easy access to funds and a high level of freedom in managing them: *business plans can be easily favoured by this feature*. Firms look competitive and with not many rooms for a high level of coordination with others' actors, which leads to a low degree of mutually beneficial relations. Finally, coherently with what has been already outlined about industrial relations and corporate governance, there is not a high shove in encouraging *employees' participation* and in building high consensus among workers, because the decisional power is concentrated between few managers: even this aspect is relevant, *especially in HRM*, which is an element strongly considered by MNCs, if they aim *to maintain the most possible level of standardisation* among several firms.

On the other hand, CMEs rely more on a non-market-based structure, and on a stronger role of the state. Differently from the previous model, thus, in CMEs vocational training and education system are structured on a higher level of coordination between firms and institutions, developing specific training programs, suitable to firms' priorities. *Industrial relations* present more centralised bargaining processes, at national level (Sweden), or at sectoral level (as in Germany, where authors use the word *corporativism*). Corporate governance sphere, also, presents a higher level of coordination with shareholders, managing the financial investments not singularly (managers), but in a more strategic and coordinated way. Thus, the *access to funds' sources is arranged with institutions*, a factor that influence firms' choices and policies, and which also shapes their business plan: the level of freedom is lower than in LMEs, and firms have to be aware and in line with these kind of policies. This is true also for foreign companies, which will encounter these set of regulations. *Inter-firms' relations, too, present a strong dialogue between the parts*, and especially a high level of coordination among employment' s associations: in general, in these economies firms try to search for employees' consensus and cooperation, both at firms' level (an example is represented by German Works Councils) and at national level (coherently with the management of the industrial relations): **following this reasoning, a firm or a MNC not much open to these high level of workers' involvement and unions' presence should find more difficulties when operating in these countries.**

The following table summarises the main features of liberal market economies and coordinated market economies.

Table 1 - LMEs and CMEs main features in Hall and Soskice

	LMEs	**CMEs**
Industrial relations	Decentralisation, firms-level	Centralisation, national level
Vocational training and education	General, weak apprenticeship programmes	Specific, coordination between firms and governments
Corporate governance	Strong hierarchies	Coordinated and shared management
Inter-firms' relations	Competition, low coordination with other actors	High coordination and higher level of similarities
Relations with employees	Weak	Strong

Source: author's own elaboration

Following authors' reasoning, states' strategies and firms' strategic interests are bound together in a reciprocal and self-reinforcing way, leading *to highly path-dependent economies*. The presence of these path dependences are, thus, quite in contrast with the possibilities of some convergence's processes among countries. On the contrary, these differences lead to diverse economic *comparative advantages*. LMEs will be based on what the authors call *radical innovation:* being less embedded with institutions, it is easier to start new projects, also not related with what has been developed before. On the other hand, CMEs will be based on *incremental innovation:* being

strongly embedded with several actors, the innovation will be gradual, but based on the improvement of the (already existent) quality.

Hall and Soskice's approach, as outlined, is mainly focused on the five above-mentioned dimensions, and considers two clusters of countries. **Amable's analysis (2003) should be taken into consideration, because it offers a broader point of view, adding *three new clusters of countries*. Also, he considers other factors, and this leads to a more complex picture than the one based on the dichotomy presented before.** The factors at which Amable looks at are: *product-market competition* (firms' size's average, type of technology used, variation in competition regulation); *the wage–labour nexus and labour-market institutions* (employment protection and policies, wage bargaining and industrial relations); the *financial intermediation sector and corporate governance* (sources of funds, dynamics of financial markets, corporate governance, venture capital); *social protection and the welfare state* (typology and extent of welfare policies); and the *education sector* (services, connection with firms' needs, *general* or *vocational* training programmes, sources of funding)**.** From the way these elements interacts, the five principle clusters of countries (geographically based) are: *the market-based model, the social-democratic model, the Continental European model, the Mediterranean model and the Asian model*.

Market-based model is the more similar to Hall and Soskice's LMEs, being the more liberal and less embedded with state's regulation in all the elements analysed; consequently, similarities with the previous model are present also on firms' decisional freedom. The same logic is valid in the *continental European model,* which mainly presents the characteristics of the already outlined coordinated market economies. **However, it is important to underline that, despite the similarities with CMEs, in here a particular attention is put to the *corporativist* general asset. In fact, in this cluster state's protection (welfare polices) and unions' involvement can vary depending on the labour sectors.** A cluster in which is possible to observe a high presence of institutions and protection, but at a *general* level, is present in the *social-democratic model,* as will be explained. In any case, in this model, as in CMEs, state's coordination in firms' decisional process is a factor which can influence firms and MNCs' policies, because their level of freedom is lower than in market-based (or LM) economies.

What is relevant in Amable's work is, however, the introduction of the *social-democratic, Mediterranean and Asiatic* models. In fact, Hall and Soskice's model foresees the two groups of countries as clusters capable to collect the majority (if not all) of the countries, while enlarging the theoretical framework allows to grasp several others shades and characteristics of institutional assets,

all potentially being *host country* in a MNC's perspective. Thus, having in mind the characteristic of these countries is really important.

The ***social-democratic model***, as outlined, presents a high presence of the state at all level and in a very diffuse way. Welfare policies and education system are universal and public funded. But, most importantly in this analysis, **firms and state dialogue in a context of high coordination and put strong attention to a quality (more than a price) competition**, and bargaining processes are managed at a centralised level, with high participation of (strong) trade unions. Institutions are present as investors also in the finance sector. A foreign company, thus, also in this model might encounter a higher level of difficulty in replicating very different norms in its management.

Moving forward, what is particularly relevant of the ***Mediterranean model*** is the presence of a sort of **dualism in its labour market: on the one hand, there is high employment protection in the large firms, but also a high presence of temporary or part-time work and flexibility. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs), moreover, are very diffuse**. Nonetheless, bargaining are managed mainly at centralised level. For a foreign firm, the decision to enter in these kind of labour markets might presents some *disadvantages, from the VoC perspective.* In fact, on the one hand, financial system is based on a low protection for external shareholders and, most importantly, despite the great differences between labour sectors, bargaining processes are mainly centralised and trade unions still count on a quite high level of relevance, which can lead to difficulties when relating to non-unionised firms.

Also in the *Asian model*, state is strongly present. Similarly to continental European model, industrial relation system is mainly corporativist, and, as in continental and Mediterranean models, financial system presents low protection of external shareholders. Even in this case, thus, the entrance of a foreign firm might be difficult. However, in here it is worth to mention that *Asian model presents a labour cost much lower than in western countries*, a factor that had greatly pushed to delocalization's processes (Amighini et al, 2010).

Table 2 - Five model of capitalism's main features in Amable

	Market-based model	Social-democratic model	Continental-European model	Mediterranean model	Asian model
Product-market competition	High flexibility; absence of the state	High presence and coordination with the state, firms' quality competition	Both price and quality competition, public involvement	Price competition, presence of the State, presence of SMEs	Price and quality competition, strong presence of the state
Wage-labour nexus	Flexibility, weak unions and employment protection, decentralised bargaining	Strong trade unions, high level of active labour market policies, centralised bargaining	High employment protection, corporativist bargaining, unions' medium-strength	Dualism between employment protection in large firms and temporary and part-time work, centralised bargaining	Corporativist industrial relations, unions' strength at firms' level, decentralised bargaining
Financial system	High importance to shareholders, high presence of venture capital	Presence of institutional investors and banking concentration	Low protection on external shareholder, moderate venture capital, high banking concentration	Low protection on external shareholders, low venture capital, bank-based corporate governance	Low protection on external shareholders, banking concentration, low venture capital
Social protection and welfare state	Low social protection, monetary helps, presence of private sector	Highly developed and mostly public	Employment-based social protection, mainly public-funded welfare policies	Not developed, welfare policies focused on poverty relieves and pensions	Low, mixed-funded welfare policies, poverty relives
Education sector	Competitive, low vocational training, presence of private sector	Mainly public, high attention on vocational training and life-long learning policies	Public-funded, high vocational training, specific skills	Low vocational training policies, general skills	Public-funded, company-oriented, specific skills, corporate life-long learning policies

Source: author's own elaboration

The two approaches outlined so far can[1] be considered as milestones in the literature of the Varieties of Capitalism, having contributed to the shape of all the successive studies in this field. However, these studies have been considered later on also from a more critique point of view, which underlines how VoC put too much emphasis on the strength of the institutions, with **the risk to *underestimate the possibility of convergence processes*, and most importantly to "crystallise" these models** (Crouch, 2005; Hay, 2019).

[1] To be thorough, it is worth to mention Coates (2000), who proposes another traditional classification focusing on the relations between state and labour market, in line with the above-mentioned, including: the *market-led capitalism* model (Hall and Soskice's LMEs and Amable's market-based model); the *State-led capitalism* model (Amable's Asiatic model), and the *negotiated or consensual capitalism* model, (including the continental and social-democratic models, taken as ideal type Germany and Sweden).

This might explain the presence of several developments in this fields. In the following paragraph other contributes are analysed. They have in particular investigated elements such as the *Eastern European countries' models* and the other *hybrid* forms that emerged in the recent years; the major importance gained by *European institutions*, and their (possible?) consequences in the traditional clusters' functioning; and the dynamics related to the spread of MNCs, in particular regarding the *HRM and the industrial relations (IR).*

2.3.2. New elements on the Varieties of Capitalism literature: new clusters of countries, supranational institutions and multinational corporations' role

As above-mentioned, differences in traditional clusters are important because they enlarge the framework of a global labour market, potentially involving foreign MNCs.

First of all, greater attention has been dedicated in describing the main features of the emergent economies of *Eastern European countries*. Myant and Drahokoupil (2011) describe five models: *foreign direct investment (FDI) market economies, peripheral market economies, oligarchic market economies, order states,* and *remittance and aid-based economies.* **The main features of these models are summarised in the next table, presenting in particular the relations with the external market economies.** This last aspect is put into attention under the light of MNCs' increase, and to look at the Eastern European countries as potential *host countries*, even if the attention given to them change in the two fields of literature.

Table 3 - Five model of capitalism's main features in Myant and Drahokoupil

	Countries	Main features	Relation with external labour market
FDI market economies	Czech Republic and Poland	Independence from politics, non-complex financial system, state helps in building infrastructures	Export-oriented FDI, favourable conditions for and MNCs' presence
Peripheral market economies	Bulgaria and Latvia	Subcontracted manufacturing companies, independence from politics	Manufacturing sector possibly subcontracted to foreign MNCs
Oligarchic market economies	Russia and Ukraine	Embeddedness with state's protection and funding for key sectors	Commodity exports and semi-manufacturing
Order states	Belarus and Uzbekistan	Export-oriented, state's protection and funding	Strategic export-oriented companies without FDI
Remittance and aid-based economies	Armenia and Tajikistan	State not relevant	Dependence between remittances and financial aids

Source: Author's own elaboration

It is important to underline that, differently from the clusters previously described, the ones related to the ex-socialist and emergent economies of Eastern Europe *are much more "flexible" and subject to changes.* **This might represent a countertendency from the traditional approach of the VoC**

literature, especially if looking at the role of MNCs. For this reason, this should be a field to monitor under the light of the presence of possible convergences, especially because despite the enlargement of the clusters taken into consideration, even if Eastern European countries seem to be more flexible, VoC literature does not take in consideration the possibility of great convergences.

A second crucial point is represented by the increasing importance gained by Europeans institutions in the last decades, especially if considering the economic actors, such as the *Troika* (Burroni, 2016). Regarding the national institutions, on the other hand, countries still show several differences, and it would be misleading to talk about convergence processes *tout court*. **The difference in the speed and in the ways *economical* actors and *political* actors change are important to understand the convergence processes, especially in relation to MNCs functioning and their possible decision to enter a foreign labour market or not.**

In relation to this, as outlined by Bruff and Horne (2012) and Hall (2014) the presence of differences among countries could be notable since the entrance in the European Monetary Union (EMU). **In fact, countries from social democratic and continental models encountered less difficulties in adapting their economies, while the opposite happened in the Mediterranean countries**, which had to face high transitional costs, wage restraints and processes of rethinking the demand-led growth strategies. Differences have been present also in facing the crises. In fact, despite some common policies implemented at European level, countries' strategies varied. Mediterranean countries, for example, had to face with public deficit, not anymore accepted by European rules (Italy, Spain, Greece), with a stagnation of the labour productivity (Italy and Spain in particular) and with high levels of lend to private sectors (Spain and Portugal).

These differences are related not only to different economic models, but also to the different roles covered by the major *actors* involved (Bohle, 2009). **Actors' role contributes in maintaining differences across countries, because their behaviour tends to change in a *gradual* rather than *radical* way**. This is especially true at a more political level, but looking at the labour market there are different level of "adjustment", actually faster (due to a greater advantage for entrepreneurs and firms). These **"different speeds" between labour and non-labour institutions have diverse consequences on MNCs' behaviour**: if on the one hand the greater push to a more liberalised labour market can be noticed, on the other, IR, employment policies, HRM and so on are more embedded with social and political actors, which (if) change, they do it much slower and to a less extent.

On the possibility of some form of hybridisation and on the role played by the *actors*, Burroni and Scalise (2017) have proposed a deepen and very recent work in order to analyse possible convergences' paths. They describe six models of capitalism (in line with and enlarging the models

already described so far): Anglo-Saxon model (Ireland, UK), continental model (Belgium, Germany, France, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Austria), Mediterranean model (Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal), Nordic model (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Norway), Baltic model (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and *Visegrad*[2] model (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia). This analysis is still in line with the models described so far, and the differences among countries are still present. But most importantly, authors look at three actors' role, in particular. The first is the *state* (looking at its investments in research and development areas, active and passive labour market policies investments per capita, social protections investments per capita, percentage of GNP in education policies, efficacy of development, social and redistributive policies). The second concerns the *representative associations* (looking at their strengths, coverage of collective bargaining, unionisation rate, influence and inclusion in policy-making processes). The third actor is represented by the *firms* (research and development investments, percentage of employment in R&D sectors, labour productivity, FDI, medium firm's dimension and patent's rate). *The role played by actors create important differences*. For example, it is possible to observe how Nordic model is characterised by a strategic state's intervention (high investments in research and development, education, active labour market policies), while the opposite happen in Mediterranean countries. Or looking at IR system, a generalist approach, compared to a corporativist one, results to be more efficient in terms of inclusion and lack of segmentation in workers' rights and guarantees (Nordic model on the one hand, continental on the other). These differences define to a great extent very diverse models of capitalism, even in a context in which globalisation and supranational institutions are increasing.

What underlined so far should has shown that the hypothesis of some convergence processes is lacking in this literature. Most importantly, on the contrary, differences in the *comparative advantages* have emerged. Witt and Jackson (2016), in fact, following Hall and Soskice, underline that the advantages related to LMEs are associated to their capacity to overcome the sometimes too rigid settings of the CMEs (*radical innovation*) and, vice-versa, coordinated capitalisms are capable to better overcome the failures of liberal market (*incremental innovation*). But, **even in countries more embedded with governmental institutions, a major level of liberalisation has been noticed.** Nevertheless, the "American" model, more structured around liberal processes and less state's intervention, has not to be necessary the only capable to bring innovation: VoC underlines this aspect in particular, rejecting the hypothesis of a single "winning" model, finding in the institutional power different strategies to face globalisation, even remaining differentiated (Boyer, 2004). It is in any case

[2] "Visegrad group" originated in occasion of the summit meeting of the leaders of (ex)Czechoslovakia in the Hungarian city of Visegrad, on the 15th of February 1991. In this meeting the leaders agreed to cooperate in creating a new commercial route to bypass Vienna.

true that , since the spread of the crisis (following also supranational policies indications), great attention is visible also on the theme of social protection, looking especially – and in *all* the models – at the more or less strong role of the state. To overcome these difficulties, great focus has been given to the role of *economic growth, competitiveness and investments in research and development***.** Thus, an **hypothesis might be that the production processes that involve the radical innovation can be now present in all the models, also the coordinated ones**, in particular if looking at the spread of venture capital, globalised market, deregulation, flexibility of labour, modern and highly developed universities, dynamic research systems, dense links to the business world and tax systems that encourages entrepreneurship, as already outlined (Amable, 2016). This does not mean that the differences between countries have completely disappeared, but VoC perspective underlines that, in order to understand these changes, it would be worth to rely on a *structured political economy definition of complementarity*.

Following this reasoning, some works inside the field of the VoC have approached MNCs, looking in particular at the elements of human resource management and industrial relations, and with the aim of understanding how the diverse institutional settings affect multinational corporations.

On the one hand, in fact, a set of standardised HRM policies means a standardisation in employee's skills and attitude requirements, in their recruitment and selection, commitment and participation of the workforce and so on. But these elements still remain embedded with *labour regulations, level of employment protection, vocational training systems,* which differ among countries, and which are *unlikely taken into consideration by MNCs' literature*, as will be seen. VoC literature, on the contrary, underlines how the *strong connection with these well-established institutions explain why HRM seems to remain quite different* in the different countries (Pedrini, 2016).

In social democratic and continental models HRM is based on an intermediate role of the vocational training system, and strong incentives from the state in skills-updating policies, based on concertation processes between actors. **On the other hand, Mediterranean variety presents a low match between labour demand and supply**, and this also affects HRM, which results to be less structured. These different ways of HRM affect MNCs decisions and functioning in host countries. So far, what seems to emerge is that, on the one hand, in the models characterised by a stronger coordination with the state and by cooperation processes in the management of the firms, MNCs' HRM will be more similar to national companies' HRM, being both strongly subjected to national regulation, while the opposite should happen in models in which firms are freer to regulate their internal management (Farndale, Brewster, Poutsma, 2008; Detomasi, 2015). Thus, at least looking at

HR management, it would seem plausible to expect a not such standardised facility in replicating MNCs own policies in *all* the system.

Human resources management has been analysed at a lesser extent by VoC in comparison to industrial relations system, which is much more strongly embedded in the analysis of different institutional contexts. Notwithstanding that IR rely on another very wide literature, that in this paper will not be deepened, it is anyway important to look at it in order to comprehend the importance that unions might have in shaping MNCs' functioning in host countries.

Looking at IR system is also important, anyway, to underline the different perspectives of these two fields of literature: **VoC, in fact, sees industrial relations system as part of and dependent on different institutional settings; MNCs literature, on the other hand, looks at the industrial relations as possible constraints for firms' advantages**, or as actors with which relate when defining winning strategies. For the purpose of this work and to investigate possible processes of convergence, it is worth to mention that on the other hand, a common trend among different industrial relations' systems is the *general lowering of unionisations rate* and a *tendency to decentralised bargaining processes*, especially due to the spread of deregulation policies, as underlined by Baccaro and Howell (2011) and Bordogna (2012). If this fact can push to imagine that MNCs will find a higher level of freedom when managing factors like wages, employment protections and HRM, it is however true that IR, much more than HRM, present differences still observable, affecting MNCs functioning in host countries. IR, thus, play a crucial role that should be analysed, both by VoC, considering the spread of globalisation and the possibility of contaminations among systems, and by MNCs literature not merely as a factor leading to a more or less level of standardisation but, on the contrary, deeply rooted with institutional and cultural factors.

2.4. Multinational corporations: the role of the companies

In this section the focus is on multinational corporations' main characteristics, at both internal and international levels. The first paragraph describes the main theories on MNCs strategies, while a second part looks in particular at three aspects: human resources management, performance management and industrial relations. In here, the main theories related to country of origin's effect and processes of convergence/divergence will be underlined; the aim is to maintain a connection with the literature on the Varieties of Capitalism in order to try to grasp, then, some conclusions on *how these two fields relate.*

2.4.1. Multinational corporations' functioning in host countries: main theories

It is not possible to underestimate the great spread of MNCs, especially considering their role in a globalised labour market. In the debate on *globalisation* MNCs invest an important role, being considered, together with the spread of technology and the reduction of geographical distances, one of its main consequences (Whelan, 2012). **MNCs' literature, however, looks especially at *the companies' perspective,* more focusing on the possible advantages of operating in host countries. The approach, thus, is much more *globalised* than in the VoC**, giving lower importance to *all the institutional spheres*, but focusing especially on that elements that might represent benefits and/or constraints.

To understand MNCs' functioning abroad, it is important to underline that, as Edwards, Marginson and Ferner (2013) have described, integration's processes can vary depending on multiple levels. The first level is related to **firms' *general strategy and configuration,* and looks at the similarities and the differences of business activities among countries**. In here, it is possible to distinguish processes of *segmentation* or *replication*. In the first case, **subsidiaries have a higher level of flexibility from the headquarters**, because adapting at local environments creates advantage in terms of, for example, lower labour costs. Segmentation processes are most notable in manufacturing, but they are increasing also in some kind of services like call centres, medical transcription and typesetting in publishing – underlining that the features of the sectors of the labour market considered affect MNCs' functioning, as will be seen later. In this case, there will be synergies for ***vertical integration.*** *Replication,* on the contrary, implies the adaptation of the same functioning at every local subsidiaries; this creates **synergies for *horizontal integration,* with subsidiaries acting in same way also in different countries**. The second level relates to ***internal operating structures,* including forms of international management organisation**. In relation to this point, it is easy to imagine that similarities with the home country will be more likely observable where there are replication processes, more than segmentations' ones. Finally, the third level concerns how ***all* the main MNCs' features are organized *internationally***, and in here there are several strategies a MNC can implement.

Edwards and Ferner (2002) offer an explanation on this last point. **They look especially at US MNCs, due to their rapid growth and spread (also abroad) in a relatively brief period, during the 1990s. US MNCs have been considered so far as particularly standardised, especially in terms of internal and external policies**. To explain this, two have been the main approaches underlined by the literature so far (Almond *et al.,* 2005). The first is known as ***culturalist approach***, and focuses, as expected, on US' values and attitudes, and on how **they shape managers' decisions**,

also in host countries. The second approach is known as ***national business system approach***, and describes **national economies as sets of embedded institutions and structures**, in different spheres of economic activities. This second and broader approach *does takes into account institutions,* but in order to understand why *some of these sets "resist" when exported abroad* (in this case, US' one), thus, to grasp which (and why) are the winning models. To answer this question, there are *four key influences* to look at to understand MNCs' functioning in a host country.

The first key functioning is the ***country of origin effect***. It describes all the elements, observable in a foreign country, that can be explained looking at the home sets of values and practices (for example, relations with trade unions, inter and intrafirm coordination, roles' management, finance system and so forth). It implies that the most important organisational processes are made in the home country, and that MNCs' management style in the host countries will be as similar as possible to the home country. This connection with home country will be visible also in the financial system.

The second key functioning is known as ***dominance effect.*** It is attributable to dominant or hegemonic states in a certain period, and implies that countries in dominant position will be able to shape the labour market management also internationally, because of the tendency of other countries to replicate some "winning" models. **Dominance effect, in literature, has often been associated with US MNCs, in particular, but looking at certain aspects also to Japanese manufacturing, or Chinese model.** For the reasoning of this work, however, it is important to underline that dominance effect includes two subgroups of fields. On the one hand, in fact, it is possible to look at technological elements, easier to try to replicate. On the other, regarding organisational elements, as has been explained, institutions' strength plays an important role in permitting, facilitating or hindering this replication. In fact, dominant state do not always replicate their internal model, if the host countries' institutions greatly differ, *or if it is not convenient in terms of economic advantages: this last aspect is strongly related to the possible strategies to adapt to local functioning*, as will be seen in a while.

The third key functioning is the ***globalisation of markets***. In fact, during the last decades and with the increase of a more and more globalised and integrated labour market, economies of scale had increased, and the tendency to manage the subsidiaries in the same way as in the home countries has led to advantages for the companies; and at the same time, especially in some sectors of the labour market, also consumers' preferences have changed, becoming more similar among different countries, helping the already present advantage deriving from standardisation processes.

The fourth key functioning relates to the *level of openness of the host countries*, intended as the level of institutional interventions in firms' functioning, especially if they aim to introduce new practices and managerial methods. Literature on MNCs underline how the more a host country is

open in this sense, the more will be easier to replicate home country's processes, or to introduce new hybrid methods that in any case are differentiated from the local ones.

The four key functioning presented, by the way, often interact. For example, country of origin effects and dominance effects can reinforce each other, as in the case of Japanese's firms' boom in the 80', or can present tensions due to *strong diversity in the institutional assets*, as in the case of German companies operating in UK (where German companies had to reshape some business model in order to be more in line with Anglo-Saxon system). **Or, dominance effect can interact with the push for an integrated internationalisation of the market: the more internationally integrated a MNC will be, the more it will tend to replicate its home set of norms and rules**, and the higher will be its comparative advantage, deriving from being relevant in an international labour market.

Given the differences in the institutional settings, **MNCs can opt for three strategies** (Femer, 1997). On the one hand, they can push for *cross-national isomorphism*, mainly exporting their own models, in line with the country of origin effect. Or, MNCs can *adapt at the local environment*, if it is more profitable: for example, Japanese firms rely on a system of lifetime employment and seniority-based promotion, which might be redundant (and useless in terms of costs) in systems which do not provide them. The third strategy is known as *internal isomorphism*, **where there can be created some hybrid forms** which include both home and host countries regulations. As will be seen, this is most likely to happen especially looking at HRM. Literature on MNCs underlines how the choice between these different levels of isomorphism are *principally dependent on MNCs strategies*; on the other hand, this is the specific situation in which it is worth to ask whether *institutions are capable to influence MNCs' functioning* and to drive this decision.

Starting from the assumption that the processes of convergence or divergence find their principal explanation on MNCs' strategies, literature on this field have usually relied on three major theoretical explanations (Smith and Meiksins, 1995; Kostova, 1999; Edwards *et al.*, 2013): the *neo-institutionalist analysis of regimes*, the *comparative capitalism* (CC) *approach* and the *system, societal and dominance* (SSD) *approach.* The main core of the first one is that the extent of transfer of practices by MNCs will be greater the shorter the institutional distance, thus forecasting processes of convergence only among similar countries. One possible limitation of this approach is to underestimate the processes of globalisation which might shorten the distances between different institutional assets. **On the contrary, both CC and SSD approaches look at the comparative institutional advantages of different institutional strengths and weaknesses**. As underlined by Jackson and Deeg (2008) the main difference from International Business literature relies on the fact that MNCs' functioning depends on the *whole* institutional configuration, while International

Business looks at single institutional effects *ceteris paribus*. These approaches go further the dichotomous possibility to find perfect replication or not, and to explain this variable only looking at country of origin or dominance effect, rejecting the possibility to observe perfect convergence or divergence tendencies. This is because, in this case, ***institutions and MNCs are both seen as "active" elements*, capable to re-shape several and different functioning despite the main characteristics of the MNC itself, opening, thus, to a wider set of possibilities and relying more on the importance of the institutions.** VoC, on the contrary, sees the institutions as the main core of the analysis, while in these case, both MNCs and institutions can influence the processes of integration.

These approaches, thus, consider MNCs as a very important part in defining their functioning in host countries, more than as passive actors which follow foreign institutional rules (Dunning, 2009; Cantwell, Dunning, Lundan, 2010). Not only firms might change their functioning depending on the environment in which they operate, but also they change and shape that environment in return, creating new models later on reproducible. This possibility is *rarely taken into account by VoC literature*, which on the contrary gives much more importance at the pre-existent systems present in host countries. On the contrary, MNCs literature considers the companies **as potential engine for the creation of new networks and embeddedness with institutions**. This is even truer if considering the increasing spread of autonomous subsidiary networks, something that pushes MNCs to adapt to local institutions or to try to create some new elements of connections, if it is not possible to perfectly replicate the home functioning. **This becomes important also in order to spread a set of *best practices*, possible replicable.** Considering this active role of MNCs, it is possible to look at their functioning not only focusing on the four keyways underlined before, but looking in particular at the relations with the institutions. These forms of engagement are known as institutional *avoidance, adaptation* and *co-evolution.* Their main characteristics are summarised in the table below.

Table 4 - Forms of adaptation between MNCs and foreign institutions

Form of adaptation	Main features
Institutional avoidance	Institutional environment is exogenous to firms; Firms choose between different institutional environments; Firms react to poor institutional quality by adjusting their entry mode
Institutional adaptation	Institutional environment is exogenous, but firms adapt their own behaviour to achieve a better fit; Firms may try to influence local institutions, but only to a limited extent; Firms seek legitimacy by adapting to local isomorphic pressures; As a result of local learning and adaptation, firms gain strategic options; Embeddedness in an institutional context
Institutional co-evolution	Institutional environment is partly endogenous; Firms adjust to different institutional environments by a process of co-evolution; Unintentional institutional spill-overs occur as a result of local imitation; Active agency and institutional entrepreneurship

Source: Cantwell* et al.*, 2010.

These three types of adaptation are not mutually exclusive, leading to the possibility of finding some mixed processes, again depending on countries, institutions and MNCs themselves. So maybe it is worth to take into consideration the hypothesis of some form of contamination which unifies the country of origin effect and the role of the institutions, more than speak about certainty in some processes of convergence.

Anyway, the reasoning underlined so far can change depending on what aspect of MNC's functioning is analysed. For this reason, the next section focuses in particular on three different elements: the human resources management, the performance management (PM) and the industrial relations.

2.4.2. Multinational corporations functioning in human resources management, performance management and industrial relations

When looking at MNCs' functioning, literature has focused in particular on three aspects: human resource management, performance management and industrial relations (Wright *et al.,* 2005). Focusing on HRM in particular can give to the researches on MNCs much more consistency by sharpening the object of the analysis (Walker, 1980), especially if looking at them not as a separate element but as a key variable of the firms' strategies (Devanna *et al.,* 1981).

From a wide range of works in the literature, the definition of *employment relationships* looks at unequal relationships between the buyers and the sellers of labour, in which HRM becomes more important in order to maintain *control* and *commitment* by the employers. The construction of a positive relation is beneficial, because it leads to a high level of mutual trust, and consequently to profitable outcomes. The way this relationship is developed can vary depending on the type of firm;

anyway, literature has underlined how, at all level, an effort from the employer to gain power from this relation will usually be present (Almond, 2011). Also, **the owners of the capital often delegate part of the decisional power to some selected managers. This delegation can assume diverse forms, leading to *horizontal* or *vertical* organisation of the MNCs and of the HRM**, built on different levels of combination between power, control and commitment decisions. MNCs' HRM is strongly embedded also on their competitive power. In fact, on the one hand MNCs confront in the attempt to reproduce the same HRM practices, following standardisation; on the other, the possible differences emerging in these practices can lead to different level of *competitive differentiation*.

Following Farndale and Paauwe (2007), when approaching an analysis on MNCs functioning, it is worth to explain what are the main *strategies about HRM* they can implement. The *ethnocentric* or *global strategy* sees MNCs gaining control at a centralised level, and subsidiaries following the main company, while in *polycentric* or *multi-domestic strategy*, MNCs decentralise the control over the firms to the local partners; finally, *geocentric* or *transnational strategy* sees both headquarters and subsidiaries adhere to worldwide (or regional) standards, part of an organisational network. **Depending on which strategy a MNC decides to implement, the major differences will be in aspects such as the regulatory management and the role of the workers inside the company. This literature underlines how deciding among these strategies mostly depend, thus, *on MNCs' decisions***. Of course, by the way, it depends also on the host countries context. This last point is more stressed in works based on SDD approach, which tend to consider more the role of institutions, even if the starting point remains the one related to firms' decisional power; on the other hand, VoC tends to *explain the differences occurring among countries* not considering to a greater extent the MNCs as active actor, but more as *outcomes of the existent institutional contexts*.

Again in Femer (1997), depending on the type of *isomorphism* created, also in the HRM the MNCs might put high importance on the homogenisation and standardisation of the same policies (among all the MNCs), trying to follow a set of some *best practices*, but with the risk to loose comparative advantages in the long term; or they can adapt *some* aspects of HRM to local institutions, especially when operating in countries deeply different from the home one, and with a stronger presence of the institutions in the regulation of the labour market. Also, this is because inside HRM there are two fields of sectors, differently influenceable by national institutions: in fact, they can more easily intervene in factors like **wage determination, hours of work, forms of job contract and redundancy procedures, while, on the contrary, management development or employee communication's strategies are more subject to the home country set of norms and regulations**. In other words, in the case of *internal isomorphism* the scope is to achieve legitimacy within host

country's organisations fields (Farndale, Paauwe, 2007). This level of acceptance might derive, anyway, also by the *economic performance* of a firm. An example of this is the Japanese manufacturing environments that, being successful, had permitted to replicate the set of HR practices also abroad and to opt for expatriate in foreign countries, to achieve a delocalised control. Japanese system is an example of how, depending on the factor the firm looks at (HRM, PM or IR), there can be implemented different strategies when operating in a host country, creating some form of mixed methods in a single firm set of decisions (Kostova, 1999). On the contrary, as outlined, US MNCs seem to be very homogeneous. In there, HRM is quite centralised, and their headquarters try to influence it, the wage system, the collective bargaining process, union recognition and even welfare and training policies. This US MNCs' propensity to centralisation is easily recognisable abroad, especially looking at some aspect deeply embedded in US cultural attitude, like the tendency to oppose to unionisations.

Edwards *et al.* (2013) have proposed a work looking at HRM as a variable to check among the four case studies selected (Canada, Ireland, Spain, and UK). Their aim was to investigate the presence of possible processes of convergence, putting at the *centre of the analysis firms' decisional process*, more than the possible contraints of host countries' institutions. Authors look in particular at three factors: *abilities* (workers' skills and competences), *motivations* (firms' propensity to workers' incentives) *and opportunities* (practical realisation of workers' commitment)[3]. What emerge from their analysis is that, on the one hand, similarities in the approaches are more present in countries more similar at institutional interventions level, but on the other, even among them several differences emerge (for example, Canada presents a different system from US home firm, or, in the case of Spain, it can be noticed a great level of flexibility among firms in HRM). This findings underline how, on the one hand, VoC traditional descriptions of countries functioning *might not be sufficient* to explain a complex phenomenon such as the presence of MNCs; on the other, it points that strategic *MNCs choices cannot alone explain* the real outcomes in HRM observable among different countries. Also this literature, in any case, accepts the idea that it is not possible to speak about a complete convergence on HRM, but it explains this as the consequences of different MNCs' choices. In fact, the differences authors found among the selected countries are explained as the outcomes of different combination between standardisation processes, organisation structure, size of the company, labour industries but, also, trade unions recognition.

The analysis of the processes of convergence underlined by literature, so far, has been based looking especially at the US' models. On the other side, as in Nikandrou *et al.* (2005), **in Europe there seems**

[3] This is known as *AMO framework.*

to be more differences in HR management, differences that, as underlined by the VoC literature, depends on factors like economic asset, technological level, political and social structures and so on. However, push for globalised markets has shaped also European models. In the fields of HRM, it is possible to find in Europe three main models, the *Latin model,* the *Nordic model* and the *Anglo-Irish model,* which, according to the authors, vary depending on the extent of their legal requirements for information, consultation and participation: higher in the Nordic model, medium in the Latin model and lower in the Anglo-Irish model. Thus, despite the fact that the trend is to try to replicate the so-called *best practice theory*, other elements play a role in the attempt of this replication, like national culture, nationality of ownership, country of origin and branch of industry, and national institutions and business systems (Budhwar and Sparrow, 2002). These elements, however, are analysed under the light that MNCs are seen as *active actors, capable to shape or modify national institutions following their strategic needs*. Following Bonache *et al.* (2012), in HRM it is possible to speak about *culturally-animated universalism,* in which the aim is to balance the push for universalism (standardisation, country of origin and dominance effect) with the push for culturalism (differentiation, local isomorphism, role of institutions).

Another important aspect to look at when analysing MNCs' functioning in host countries is related to the performance management (PM) practices. Edwards *et al.* (2016) proposed a work mainly focused on this, looking at UK, Ireland, Canada, Spain, Denmark and Norway. PM includes the practices due to which individual performance is assessed, whether these assessments are ranked in a 'forced distribution' and whether employees' pay is linked to their individual performance. They refer to two elements. The first concerns *the level of inequality*. The (also) monetary recognition present in some MNCs functioning is easier to replicate in that contexts characterised by a major and general level of inequalities, and vice-versa. The second concerns the *influence of employees' representations* and role of trade unions, and their consequent power in influencing the replication of these practices. The more this power is present, the more replicating them will be difficult. This is an area *strategically important for MNCs*, requiring an internationally coordinated approach, particularly for managers. In fact, literature has outlined that the **processes of standardisation may represent for MNCs a *specific firms' advantages***, even if the possibility of a replication depends not only on the host countries set of rules and on the presence and the effect of the dominance effect, but also at the internal management of the MNC itself, (presence of replication or segmentation processes)**.** Relating to this, the main hypotheses in here are that, on the one hand, both for MNCs and indigenous firms, the higher the power of institutions, the lower the flexibility in managing individual appraisal, forced distribution and variable pay; at the same time, however, what it is expected is that there will be greater differences between MNCs and indigenous firms in countries with strong institutional

constraints, because native firms already rely on a higher level of trust and connections with institutions. From the analysis conducted by the authors, what emerged is that looking at PM practices, institutions seem to be less relevant than in HRM, especially when facing US MNCs. PM practices in fact do not seem to vary so much among the countries selected for the study *and* between foreign and national companies. In any case, **the still present cross-national differences are explained looking at the *role of the actors,* underlining the importance of the *decision-making processes* and of the relations established with local institutions** (Jackson, 2010)**.**

Finally, the last element to look at in this analysis relates to the industrial relations systems, one of the main factors in which MNCs may find a higher level of difficulties, as outlined. **Depending on IR systems, national and multinational corporations have to adapt their strategies and their relations with other actors.** In US MNCs' case, for example, the replication of a "anti-unions" system, is more difficult in that countries in which unions are strongly embedded in the decisional processes (Almond, 2011). Different industrial relation systems, also, affect firms' competition, which relies also on workforce skills (Edwards and Kuruvilla, 2005). Thus, MNCs' investment in training and development practices will be lower in that countries in which, due to a weaker level of collective bargaining, turnover rate can be higher; **so, the advantages will not be in acquiring new competences (or increase the already present ones), but on the fixed-term form of contracts, the labour mobility and the lower labour costs.** A major element to consider in here and which had a great impact among the countries relates to recent high push for *flexibility* and *flexicurity* processes. MNCs, as underlined, even when attempting to replicate home country practices, will face host countries ones, and thus the policies related to flexibility will be affected by both levels (Edwards *et al*., 2016; Meardi *et al.*, 2009). **When referring to flexibility and flexicurity processes, it is worth to put attention also to the spread of the so-called *contingent employment* (defined as any arrangement that differs from full-time, permanent, wage and salary employment)** (Tregaskis and Brewster, 2006). To observe the presence of processes of convergence or divergence, authors focused on Germany, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK, observing the industrial relation processes in relation to contingent employment policies in 1991, 1995, 2000. Following the authors, in countries in which there is a supportive national context and trade unions participation to decisional processes, part-time employment will be proposed as flexible alternatives with mutual benefits for both employers and employees (like in the Netherlands and Sweden), and the use of these kind of contracts will be more present than in those countries in which part-time is not well-structured, and it is mostly a mean to reduce employers' costs. Also, from this study emerged that it is not possible to note great differences between foreign MNCs and national firms, confirming that the strong bond

that industrial relations have with institutions and legislation *is more difficult to overcome*, in respect for example to PM (and, to a lesser extent, to HRM).

As underlined by Pulignano and Keune (2015), however, the setting at **macro-level can provide a framework, but differences are observable at micro (firms) level, considering especially subsidiaries**. When subsidiaries produce *different* product, it will be more likely to observe a higher level of autonomy in engaging *local* negotiations, involving with a greater extent unions, work councils (as in Germany), and creating more space for local bargains also in flexibility and flexicurity processes. Then, **again the results will strongly depend on the role of the actors**, because unions or local councils can use this higher level of involvement in different ways; they can try to define, together with representative of the foreign MNCs, the extent and the type of these flexicurity policies, or they can push for a trade-off between flexibility and improved security, or finally they can try to refuse any form of flexibilization, pushing for a confirmed level of security. This last option, however, is strongly dependent on the level of market competition, which itself affects the level of flexibility (or flexicurity). What is particularly relevant in here, **as will be deepen in the next section, is that industrial relations depend not only on the host countries' features, as largely already outlined, but also on the labour sectors looked at, as explained also by** Royle (2006); the author underlines that, for example, in food service sector, US MNCs remain dominant, mining the strength of host countries institutions and pushing for processes of standardisation. It is worth to remember that the different levels of standardisation observable among the sectors depends also on consumers' preferences: Edwards and Ferner (2002) have outlined that the pressure for homogeneity is observable in management consultancy, automotive and electronics, while on the contrary in food and clothing sectors consumers' tastes differ significantly, limiting the extent to which firms can be integrated internationally. Thus, the importance of the sector can really affect industrial relations: even the most powerful union could surrender to pressures for increased flexibility in an MNC with highly standardized products, when operating in a very competitive market.

This last aspect introduces the next paragraph. So far, what emerged is that, in both literature, it is difficult to talk about real and dominant processes of convergence when looking at MNCs' functioning in host countries. At the same time, it has been underlined that the level through which there is a particular push to convergence varies depending on host countries institutions, home country's power in the international market (see USA), the processes looked at (HRM, IR, PM), MNCs' strategic choices and labour industries. The different consequences on MNCs' functioning in host countries depending on this last element will be explained in next section.

2.5. Sectors and labour supply: the peculiarities of the retail sector

In order to understand the relation occurring between institutional assets and MNCs influences, several researches had adopted a *sector-based* approach. As outlined in the previous section, Pulignano and Keune (2015) have underlined how, **depending on the sector, MNCs' functioning in host countries can change, as well as their relations with institutions**. This is especially true if considering the variable of the *financialization* that, in particular in some sectors, tends to devaluate long-term investments, thus pushing, on the one hand, to avoid investments in research and development policies, or training for workers, and on the other, to compete on the market by cutting the labour costs (Carré, Tilly, 2017). This makes think about possible processes of convergence more likely to happen, reducing institutional power. Because of this set of common features, it is not hard to find in the literature questions related to *the quality* of these particular jobs.

Carré and Tilly (2017) have recently proposed a work in which they look especially at *retail* sector (in particular, food retail and consumer electronics), comparing different institutional contexts (US, UK, Germany, France, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Mexico City)[4]. They offer a very wide and differentiated comparison: between different companies within subsector in a single country (US, Mexico); between subsectors (food retail and consumer electronics) within one country (US); on retail as a whole in seven countries; on a single job in one subsector (grocery casher jobs) between US and France; and comparing jobs in one company (Wal-Mart) across twelve countries (Carré and Tilly, 2017; introduction, page 12).

Their work provides an important analysis in relation to the common points observable in the same sectors. From authors' analysis emerges that **retail (considered at a subsector level but also as whole, mainly because the high degree of similarities) presents a set of common characteristics recognisable also in different countries**. In fact, in **retail workers are usually low-skilled, and perceive low wages, especially in comparison with other industries. Also, working in retail usually means that the access to some forms of social protection are lower, especially in those countries based on corporativist system. Retail presents, also, a high percentage of *part-time workers*, which usually have to deal with schedules' management, and a *higher level of turnover***. High turnover, also, weights on trade unions power and coverage, which in this particular industries have to face with more obstacles than in others. Retail also represents a sort of laboratory for the other industries, especially on the theme of the *quality of jobs* (Carré *et al.*, 2010). Also, supranational factors like cost-competition (rather that quality competition) and attempts to cut labour costs seems

[4] Authors conducted 195 interviews with frontline service workers, managers and unions representative in eight electronic retailers and ten grocery chains between 2005 and 2007.

to be a constant in here, despite the country of observations; nonetheless, looking at the *quality of job in a comparative perspective* reveals differences among countries, **underlining that despite the high standardisation of this particular industry, institutions can play a very important role. This is true especially in some aspects. Work schedules, for example, results to be much more flexible in the US rather than European countries**, because of the substantial absence of national regulations (while for example in Germany and Denmark schedules must be set months in advance).

State's intervention affecting policies on **minimum wages influences the quality of job**, too, leading countries like France and UK to boost for higher wages, while on the contrary US minimum wages laws set for a lower minimum level; and finally, of course different wages policies result to be much more efficient in countries in which unions representatives have more power in the bargaining processes (hugh differences are observable, in this respect, between US and European countries, notwithstanding the differences among them: unions capacity in norther countries, for example, is higher than in liberal ones and so forth).

In Askenazy *et al.* (2012) it is shown that in France, minimum wage is higher than in US; low wages in US are also affected by the fact that this country does not present ordered hourly pay and benefit balance between full and part time workers. Role of unions change, too, to a great extent: on the one hand, in France industrial relations are based on collective agreement practices, which in turn affect sectorial agreements and that cover the majority of the workers, even if in retail the level of unionisation is not so high; on the other hand, US retail unions are less powerful, and do not look at the sector as a whole. **Different employment regulations also affect open hours and the consequent level of flexibility required** (in US food retail, the tendency is to find stores open in the weekend and up to late night, while in France, due to a stronger regulation, usually stores will be open five Sundays a year, and close earlier).

Investigating some institutional features such as industrial regulation systems, minimum wage laws and social benefits (health insurances, pensions and so forth) is particularly interesting to grasp the effects of different institutional settings **on the *labour supply*, which in return can shape MNCs behaviour, especially in some sectors that, due to their intrinsic characteristic, can easly led to *low wages and bad jobs*, such as retail** (Gautié, Schmitt, 2010). A first point to remind is that, despite countries, low wages jobs mostly find their labour supply in young people, women, immigrants, lower educated people and older workers. **Nevertheless, institutions shape differently some aspects of this types of jobs, especially education system and welfare policies, two variables *that MNCs literature tends to underestimate*.**

Gautié and Schmitt's comparative work (2010) on *low wage jobs* across US, Denmark, France, UK, the Netherlands and Germany looks at the institutional features that can affect more or less positively low wage jobs. A first element to take into account is the national *tax and benefits systems.* **In fact, the lower is the level of the public childcare services, the higher will be the possibility to find women available and willing to work part-time and to accept jobs' conditions which usually comprehend low wages;** or, again related to the tax system, for example in Germany and in the Netherlands the joint taxation system pushes women to accept this kind of jobs. **Active and passive labour market polices shape the labour supply available to work in these sectors** (and at lower wages) as well. For example, in the US and in the UK (and, following the authors, in Germany, even if at a lesser extent), the level of unemployment benefits is low, and the active labour market policies are meant to be a work-first strategy – with the principal objective to push unemployed people to return to work as soon as possible, thus pushing to the acceptance to be employed in low wages works; while the opposite happens in Denmark, where a higher extent of welfare policies and active labour market policies based on training leads to a higher level of human capital and of bargaining power. Finally, the education system in the US requires students to spend much less time in school than in France, making them potential part-time workers with flexible scheduling. Plus, in US it is not unusual to see young students working, being that a phenomenon culturally accepted (Askenazy *et al*., 2012).

So far, it has been seen how **in some sectors there are rooms for convergence processes, giving** the similarities observable in the workers' skills' requirement, the impact of financialization and the general push for liberalisation processes that have affected transversally labour markets, and retail in particular. **This similarities also imply a *lower level in the job quality sphere***, in comparison with other sectors, across all the countries analysed in these works. Nevertheless, some institutional features can greatly have a role also in these industries, despite the higher level of standardisation. **The importance of *welfare policies* or *educational system* are usually not taken into account at all by multinational corporations literature,** while it should be worth to further investigate their impact on MNCs in different countries; on the other hand, it is not deniable that, despite the differences institutions can contribute to, standardised works attitudes and requirement are increasing, also among different countries. The well-fixed and unlikely changeable schemes of the *VoC literature seems to be insufficient to explain these similarities* and the disappear (or high decrease) of the different comparative advantages: in some industries, it is quite difficult to look at incremental forms of innovation, again, especially due to liberalisation and financialization tendency.

Look at the industries can be a way to understand *where* processes of convergence are more unavoidable and *which kind of policies and which actors* can more affect MNCs' strategies.

2.6. Final considerations

This chapter had the aim to insert the literature of the job quality inside the comparison between two different literatures that usually do not share many common points.

It has emerged that the most different perspective of these two field of literature is that, on the one hand, VoC *sees institutional context as deeply rooted, unlikely inclined to change* – or at least, which changes particularly slowly and not in an uniform way; in this framework, *firms and multinational corporations are recognised as products of the internal system.* As a matter of fact, it is quite difficult even to find references to the role of MNCs in this kind of literature, a fact that can lead to *important gaps in the comprehension of a globalised labour market*. On the other hand, MNCs' literature main core looks at the corporations *first of all as active actors, independently from the institutions*: or, better, considers *the proactive nature of MNCs – and their strategic choices – as explanation of the similar trends observable among countries, in a complementary, even if different, way with the institutions.* This approach, however, *tends to underestimate the power of national and of the host countries institutions,* that can instead play an important role in defining firms' functioning. For these reasons, what is actually relevant to analyse, in here, is how these two fields of literature interact, which are their limitations, their contact points and their distances.

These gaps between these literatures are not useful in terms of a fully understanding of the job quality, especially if the aim is to analyse it under the lenses of the institutional impact. For these reasons, the empirical data proposed in the next chapters, are analysed following all the three literatures presented in here, in order to fully comprehend the data *and* to facilitate the connection between them and the theoretical debate.

III.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

3.1. Introduction

This section focuses on the research design, highlighting in particular the research questions, the research approach and the units of analysis taken into account. The aim is to enlarge what already proposed by the current literature on the institutional impact on job quality – meant, as seen, as the quality of the employment and the quality of the work - inside multinational corporations and on multinational corporations functioning in host countries, looking in particular at the host countries' managers' level of autonomy.

The project uses both quantitative and qualitative techniques. First of all, the research relies on analysis of statistical data concerning labour market and retail workforce; secondly, the main sources of empirical data derive from the use of qualitative methods, namely the collection of interviews to specific key informants: the trade unions' representatives and delegates the and managerial figures of the company selected. The interviews focused on the main topic of investigation: to understand how different cases (the institutional elements chosen for the analysis) affect a specific issue (job quality inside a multinational corporation) (Creswell *et al.*, 2007; Fullin, 2021). Finally, the analysis of the new empirical material has been analysed under the lenses of the theoretical framework described in the introduction.

3.2. Research questions and comparison justification

As already explained in the introduction (chapter 1) and in the chapter dedicated to the literature review (2), the research wants to investigate the impact of the institutions on the job quality inside a multinational corporation operating in the retail sector. Thus, the principal lenses of analysis concern the definition of **job quality** used in here that, as explained, focuses especially on those elements that concern the employment quality, thus the ones related to the contractual forms, the salary, the access to training policies (De Bustillo *et al.*, 2011) and, those elements that refer, for example, to the work-life balance (Reyneri, 2013; Gosetti, 2012).

As said, the three macro institutions taken into account as *contextual factors potentially intervenient* (Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016) are *the labour market regulations, the industrial relations systems and the welfare systems.* It has already been explained why these institutions can play a role on the job

quality, but it is useful to briefly remind the reasons also in here, especially referring to the hypothesis presented in chapter 1

Labour market regulations can greatly affect the dimensions of the **quality of employment (for example, considering laws regulating the spread of atypical contracts)**, but also the salary, if there are regulations concerning a minimum wage. The industrial relations models and consequently the role of the **trade unions** of course also impact on the job quality, both from a residual way point of view, if the collective agreements cover aspects not taken into account by the labour market laws; but most importantly, trade unions' actions can be more or less effective in obtaining store-level contracts and, most importantly, due to the role of the trade unions' delegates, in controlling that the agreements are fully respected in the every-day work activities' management, something related to the **pressure towards the company** (Bechter *et al.*, 2012). Plus, as will be seen, if the collective bargaining system also foresees the possibility to sign a secondary level contract (company level), the consequences on the job quality could be even broader. Finally, **welfare policies** play a role on the dimensions of **the work-life balance** and the exit from the labour market (pensions' system), as well as in the social protection in case of unemployment. In **the retail sector**, as will be explained later, especially **the policies concerning the family care** can play even a more important role than the trade unions' strategies.

Thus, the first macro group of research question relating to the institutional impact on the job quality includes the following questions:

I. ***Institutional impact on working conditions in multinational corporations***

a) Impact of different labour market laws and regulations:

i. In which way the different labour market regulations (both active and passive policies) affect *working conditions* (meant as wages, working hours, labour contracts – part-time, apprenticeships, fixed-term, on-call)?

b) Impact of industrial relations:

ii. What is the relevance of the different industrial relations regulations (meant as trade unions institutional recognition, industrial relations structure) in affecting working conditions inside multinational corporations?

iii. Which are – if present – the supranational trade unions role?

c) Welfare policies:

iv. What is the impact of welfare policies (meant as child and eldest care and parental leave) on job quality for multinational corporations' workers?

But this research also wants to take into consideration the relation occurring between **the workforce characteristics and the perceived job quality**, something not much taken into account in the literature (see Askenazy *et al.*, 2012). Thus, another question that is part of the additional aspect to analyse is the following:

d) Labour supply characteristics:

v. In which way the differences in the labour supply characteristics (age, gender, education) change the perception of the working conditions?

Finally, the research wants also to offer **insights on the multinational corporations strategies and functioning**, once again, however, under the lenses of the job quality analysis and the relations with the institutions, especially the ones of the host countries. This is because this works aims to offer new insights on the debate on the **convergence/divergence of the players of the globalizations process (such as the multinational corporations)**, declined in here as the analysis on the level of autonomy of the host countries' managers, as better explained later. But also because it aims at taking into account two fields of studies that usually are considered separately (the comparative political economy and the varieties of capitalism and the multinational corporations' literature, as seen in chapter 2). Thus, the next groups of research questions is the one that guides the research regarding this aspect:

II. ***Multinational corporations' role***

e) National branches autonomy:

vi. How much autonomy do national branches have in the human resource management (meant as processes of recruiting and eventual training) and do this have consequences in terms of working conditions?

vii. How much autonomy do national branches have in managing their relations with national trade unions, and do this have consequences in terms of working conditions?

These questions take relevance and become challenging especially looking at the comparative aspect of the research. In particular, also, the strength of this comparison relies on the fact that the countries chosen for the analyses are *representative cases* (Hague *et al*., 1998) of the **models of capitalisms**

present in Europe: Italy, representing the Mediterranean countries, and Denmark representing the Northern European countries. In other words, the choice of the selected countries is justified by an already well-known and established literature on the Varieties of Capitalism (Hall and Soskice, 2001; Amable, 2003). This literature, starting from its milestones, has proposed two main models of capitalisms in Europe (liberal and coordinated economies), arriving nowadays at enlarging the analysis including the Mediterranean countries, the Nordic countries and even the eastern European countries (Pavolini, Burroni, Regini, 2022).

The comparison, thus, is principally related to the three institutional elements which can affect working conditions and job quality; however, **the comparison also looks at the characteristics of the *labour supply* of the two countries, analysing their similarities and/or differences**. This is because, depending on them, the practical effects on the job quality can greatly vary; at the same time, labour supply characteristics can match differently with multinational corporations' needs, and consequently MNCs have to adapt their strategies. Thus, analysing their composition it is important for the purpose of this research.

The Italian case is interesting because it comprehends a fragmented labour market but a (still) strong presence of trade unions. At the same time, the almost absence of **targeted welfare policies (especially for working parents) makes the situation even more difficult** (Pavolini, Ascoli, 2012), especially in comparison with other European countries. On the other hand, what is interesting of the Danish case is, first of all, its "historical shift", especially in the labour market regulations, making wondering about the diffusion of deregulation policies even in countries typically part of the "Scandinavian model" (Kongshøj, Madsen, 2006; Bredgaard, Madsen, 2015). However, **the well-known "flexicurity" of Denmark relies on the fact that Danish system still almost keeps its traditional form of welfare system**, thus mainly public funded and universalistic, giving to this new deregulation of the market a strong framework of protection.

What is maybe the most interesting aspect regards trade unions features. In fact, trade unions' power has been affected by the general deregulation of the labour market (Baccaro and Howell, 2017; Lopez-Andreu, 2019), but they rely on institutional systems which can be different under certain aspects. Also, as said, service sector and retail presents more difficulties in unionise workers (Ikeler, 2016; Faioli, 2020), due to fragmented and dislocated workplaces, very heterogeneous labour force and high turnover rate (Fellini, 2017), all aspects interesting to analyse, in terms of voice and agency, in a highly standardized context (such as a multinational corporation).

In here it is reported a summary table of the characteristics of the two countries, in relations to the variables observed, even if chapter 4 is dedicated to deepen their institutional features: this helps to better understand also the hypothesis proposed in the introduction.

Table 5 - Summary of the main institutional features in Italy and in Denmark

	LABOUR MARKET REGULATIONS	INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS' SYSTEM	WELFARE SYSTEM
IT	▪ Increase of the gap between *insiders* and *outsiders* (high fragmentation) ▪ Passive labour market policies ▪ "Uncomplete" processes of deregulation	▪ High fragmentation (in the most representative unions) ▪ Present in society for other services ▪ Strong relation with politics	▪ *Familistic* model and employment fragmentation ▪ Incremental cuts in public provisions and increase of private provisions ▪ Lack of a universalistic system of protection and targeted policies
DK	▪ Employment security rather than job security → *flexicurity* ▪ Active labour market policies ▪ *Structural employment*	▪ *Consensual democracy* and social protections (Ghent system) ▪ Strong relation with politics ▪ Bargaining: from general framework to organised sector-level	▪ *Universalistic* model → Strong taxation system and creation of public jobs ▪ Diffuse child and eldest care and social inclusion policies ▪ From *welfare* to *workfare* (ALMP)

Source: author's own elaboration

3.3. Comparative case study methodology

This research, as outlined, is built on a comparative case study research design that wants to understand the impact of different institutional settings on job quality for workers employed in a multinational corporation, looking at the nature of the social phenomenon to be explored (Morgan and Smircich, 1980).

In particular, in this framework Italy and Denmark represent *maximum variation cases* due to their strong differences, especially looking at some of the variables taken into account in this research. The choice to focus on one country which is representative of a larger group, thus, helps in creating *representativeness*, strengthening the theoretical framework of the research and justifying a comparative case study approach.

In particular, considering the representativeness of these two countries, this comparative case study approach is both *theory confirming and disconfirming*. On the one hand, in fact, **the expectation is to see different ways through which institutions affect working conditions in multinational corporations**, differences that can be explained looking at the institutional characteristics taken into account. As explained in the first hypothesis presented in the introduction, this is particularly true in the case of the labour regulations, and their impact, among all, on the level of contingent employment. However, on the other hand, analysing these potential impacts inside multinational corporations, which are highly standardised, might reveal that **there is not a great level of differences between the countries**, thus disconfirming the main theoretical assumption of the comparative political economy.

Looking at these two countries, thus, means that the comparative case study research approach relies on the *most different model design* (Gerring 2004; Gerring and Cojocaru, 2016), because it looks at the **same phenomenon – working conditions and job quality in multinational corporations – taking into consideration different institutional contexts**, as described by current literature; on this, others works have implemented the same approach, justifying the comparison of a case study underlining especially the importance of the *context* (an example of a comparison of the same factory in two deeply different institutional context is the well-known *British Factory - Japanese Factory: The Origins of National Diversity in Industrial Relations*, by Ronald Dore, 1973).

However, the choice to focus on a single case to look at the specific phenomenon selected for the research (Lijphart, 1971; Bennett, 2015) can led to possible limitations, because the research looks **at few units (the two local branches of the corporation selected in the two countries) observing a high number of variables (labour market regulations, trade unions systems and welfare policies)**. But these limits also offer some remedies. On the one hand, it is possible to somehow *enlarge the observations*, adapting the research design to a higher use of statistics and quantitative data. However, this choice presents the risk to loose part of the *specificity* obtained through a smaller number of cases. On the contrary, another solution is to *reduce the number of the variables to observe*, trying to maintain, at the same time, their most important characteristics. In order to do this, a possible solution is to *group some of the variables together*, rather than eliminating them, through the use of some specific and selected *indicators* (Gerring, 2004). In the case of this research, in particular, it is necessary to deeply understand the context of the analysis, in order to choose and precisely select which variables to observe: in order to do this, the study of the literature it is fundamental, as well as the analysis of some of the synthetic indicators already proposed (for example, Eurofound's job quality indices, as explained in detail in chapter 5). However, despite this possible limitation, the

choice to focus on a ***unique case*** **is justified by the fact that focusing on two countries allows to really deepen the theme chosen for this research**, looking at an intensive study of a unit which can help in understanding broader class of similar units (Gerring, 2004).

3.4. Unit of analysis: why a MNC operating in the retail sector

In this research design, as outlined, the unit of the analysis is analysed following a comparative approach, thus referring, as a ***macro level framework***, to the two countries object of the comparison, Italy and Denmark.

After this, in order to better specify the unit of the analysis, it is important to specify which will be the subsector in which the multinational corporation operates. As outlined in the introduction, the choice is to focus on service sector, and in particular on *retail*. Retail presents a series of peculiarities, described in chapter 2, particularly interesting to investigate in a comparative approach (Carré *et al.*, 2010; Carré and Tilly, 2017): in particular, what seems to be quite constant is the presence of **low-skilled workers, specifically women, young people and immigrants, high percentage of part-time contracts, hight turnover rate and fixed-term contracts, and low wages and low social protection** (Fellini, 2017; Fullin, 2021).

In this case, as multinational corporation operating in retail, the research takes into account specifically a company named in here as "*FoodForYou". FoodForYou* is a German grocery **discount supermarket chain**, that sells food and beverages and household products, and that operates since 1930; at the end of the eighties, it counted, in Germany, 450 stores and 5000 employees. From the nineties, *FoodForYou* had expanded abroad, and today it is present in 32 countries counting more than 10,500 stores and more than 287,000 workers, and with a revenue of almost 86 billion.

It is important to underline in here a methodological note. As will be better explained later (especially in chapter 5) it is not possible to think and analyse the large scale distribution, the sub-sector in which *FoodForYou* operates, as perfectly representative of the retail sector, especially in Italy. In Denmark, on the contrary, the presence of big chains is much more spread. This underlines the presence of intra-inequalities in the retail sector, where the variable that makes the difference is the company's size.

Looking at this company is particularly interesting because it represents a foreign MNC both in Italy and Denmark: thus, this makes possible **not only to understand the different institutional impacts of the two countries, but also to see in which way the company relates to host countries**.

However, the choice to focus on a single corporation can affect the inference of the findings offered by this research. In order to present more consistent and generalisable results starting from a single

case study, thus, the choice of the indicators for the analysis of secondary data is fundamental, especially the ones related to service sector's characteristics. Considering the characteristics of retail, the research aims in particular at focusing on those variables of the job quality as described in chapter 1, 2 and in the previous paragraph: focusing thus especially on the employment quality and partly on the work quality, looking at aspects such as the *types of contracts, working hours and shifts management and workers' training* inside this company.

Finally, the research wants to understand the impact of some specific institutions in multinational corporations. In particular, for what concerns *trade unions*, for the Italian case have been involved **representatives – at supranational, national/centralised level and local level – of the most representative trade unions operating in the trade and tourism sector (thus focused also on the retail),** namely FILCAMS - CGIL (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*), FISASCAT - CISL (*Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori*) and UILTUCS - UIL (*Unione Italiana del Lavoro*). For the Danish case, the union is the HK HANDEL Denmark (*Handels-og Kontorfunktionærernes Forbund)*, the confederation that represents clerical, retail and industries workers, in public and private workers.

Considering the international nature of the corporation selected for the research, another important object of study to take into consideration is represented by *supranational (European level) trade unions representatives*. This choice is justified by two reasons: on the one hand, in fact, due to the very same nature of **the multinational corporations, understanding if there are common strategies implemented, or how different trade unions communicate** and share information among them, is relevant especially to analyse if there are more efficient model to follow. On the other hand, establishing a contact with European trade unions has represented a way to facilitate the communication with *FoodForYou*'s managers.

The last unit of analysis to consider is the MNC itself, investigating, specifically, the role of the *stores managers* and of the *Human Resource Management representatives*. In fact, as better explained in the next paragraph, part of the interviews have been conducted with *FoodForYou*'s managers. The research in fact looks at a German corporation, but considers as host countries Italy and Denmark. Thus, it does not apply the typical convergence/divergence debate lenses of analysis, because the comparison is not between the home and the host countries policies. In fact, for the purpose of this work, the choice to focus on two further countries is justified in order to grasp how much the standardization is present in a *horizontal* way, so, in *different countries;* this allows to see whether there are differences in the managers' autonomy and work organization in Italy and in Denmark, and eventually if these differences are the consequences of different institutional impacts.

3.5. Data collection: method and techniques

In here it is described the process through which the data useful for the research have been collected and analysed. The method of this research mainly involves **qualitative techniques, but also a quantitative analysis based on descriptive statistics** carried out on two datasets, necessary to fully describe a broader picture of the two countries considered in the research (as better explained in the following sub paragraphs but in particular in chapter 5): the European Union Labour Force Survey (EULFS), form Eurostat, and the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) from Eurofound.

Mainly, the same techniques have been adopted in both the countries object of observation.

The data collection phase has started in Italy, for a period of six months, and it then continued in Denmark, for the same amount of time. In both cases, thus, these months have been used to deepen the useful literature, to analyse the descriptive statistics but especially to conduct the interviews with trade unions representatives and *FoodForYou*'s managers: starting from their knowledge of the phenomenon investigated, it has been possible to identify patterns and themes, as well as to confirm/disconfirm what already know by the analysis of the literature (Gill *et al.,* 2008; Creswell and Poth, 2012).

3.5.1. Quantitative secondary data analysis

As outlined, the data used come from two different sources (Vartanian, 2010):

▪ First of all, the analysis of **the European Union Labour Force Survey (Eurostat)** wants to examine the *workforce characteristics*. The aim is to investigate, on the one hand, how differences of the workforce of the two countries affect the perception of job quality; on the other, it wants to see how different welfare policies influence labour supply (Askenazy *et al.,* 2012). For these reasons, the analysis of descriptive statistics on workforce characteristics (participation and unemployment rate by age, gender, education and so forth) has been necessary.

▪ Secondly, the analysis of the **European Working Conditions Survey (Eurofound)** allows to propose a broader framework about *the job quality indices* in service sector (looking in particular at employment quality - for example, at the dimensions of contracts, wages, training, shifts and so forth). This analysis also allow to compare the two countries, but also the retail sector in comparison with the other sectors, and finally the differences in the job quality looking at the company's size.

3.5.2. Qualitative semi-structured interviews

Together with the data analysis, qualitative interviews have been collected. **This method consents to really deepen the phenomenon selected for the investigation, but is implies to advance very**

much cautious more generalised results (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Mayring, 2014; Bennet, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful for their flexibility and because they leave the possibilities to propose, eventually, follow-up questions (Rubin and Rubin, 2005; Gill *et al.,* 2008).

Considering that the research approach is a qualitative one, it is necessary to clearly define the interviewees through a ***purposive selection procedure,*** **that identifies the actors to interview thanks to some specific inclusion and exclusion criteria**, coherent with the purpose of the research (Daniel, 2012a). In this case, in particular, the selection criteria have looked at *the specialised knowledge* on the topic and at *the variability of the elements* – meant as the differences, considered relevant, occurring between the interviewees: for example, the three Italian trade unions confederations can be really different in their position (Leonardi, Ambra, 2017), thus it is important to try to collect as much as possible different positions.

In fact, during the research the interviews have been conducted to trade unions representatives (covering different roles, from the supranational and national to the territorial level, as well as to the stores' level with the unions' delegates), and the company's managers (also in this case, both at national Head Quarter level and at territorial level, and covering different roles, such as Industrial Relations' delegate, or Human Resource Management Director and so forth).

The element of the ***variability*** **has been particularly relevant in the case of trade unions representatives,** considering that there can be differences among the majorly representative unions, and consequently different points of view to take into account, considering the heterogeneity/homogeneity of the interviewees (Daniel, 2012b). The same reasoning is valid considering the different tasks and roles that several unions representatives might have in the relation to the corporation.

To construct the interviews guidelines[5], a profound review of the previous knowledge of the topic of investigation has been necessary to reach a comprehensive understanding of the subject (Kallio *et al.,* 2016), namely the role of trade unionists, the functioning and institutionalisation of the unions, the role of the managers, the responsibility of the managers and so forth.

The interviews have been conducted in Italian in Italy and in English in Denmark, and all of them have been recorded. It is worth to mention that considering that the Italian fieldwork started on February 2021, due to the restrictions and the situation caused by the pandemic, all the interviews

[5] The list of the questions proposed to the interviewees is presented in the Annex I.

have been conducted **online.** While, in the Danish fieldwork, all the interviews have been conducted **in person**. All the interviewees agreed in participated to the interviews and agree to be recorded. The total amount of the interviews is of **45** (see Table 6), distributed as follows: 23 interviews to Italian Trade Unions' representatives; 3 interviews to UniEuropa and Uniglobal representatives; 2 interviews to one Italian Employers' association representatives; 8 interviews to *FoodForYou* Italy managerial figures; 6 interviews to Danish Trade Unions' representatives and delegate; 1 interview to the Director of a private educational agency; 1 interview to the Danish Chamber of Commerce representative; 1 interview to *FoodForYou* Denmark Head Quarter manager.

Table 6 - Comprehensive table of the interviews conducted, by countries and role

ITALY		**DENMARK**	
Role of the interviewees	***Number of interviews***	***Role of the interviewees***	***Number of interviews***
National Secretaires	6	HK Forbundet (National Secretaries TU)	2
Territorial trade unions representatives	8	HK Karrieretelefonen (National responsible for the counselling career service, TU)	1
Trade unions' delegates	9	HK Afdelingssektorformand Sjaelland (Territorial TU representative)	1
Supranational TU (UniEuropa&UniGlobal)	3	HK Hovedstaden – organisation team (TU Department in charge of workers' recruiting and workers' organisation)	1
Confcommercio, responsible for digitalization	1	HK shop steward (TU delegate in several stores)	1
Confcommercio, responsible for industrial relations	1	Secretariat Director Uddannelsesnaevnet (private agency co-managed by TUs, Chamber of Commerce and Ministry of Labour, in charge of VET	1
National HQ responsible for industrial relations	1	Dansk Erhverv (Chamber of Commerce)	1
National HQ responsible for HRM	1	*FoodForYou*' HQ responsible for the branding and the marketing Department	1
Macro Area directors	5		
Macro area selling responsible	1		
tot	36	**tot**	9

Source: author's own elaboration

In here it is worth to mention the – partly unexpected – difficulties encountered in the access to the fieldwork in Denmark. In fact, considering that the preliminary expectations was to find a stronger and more articulated trade union in Denmark, compared to the Italian one, what was particularly unexpected relates a smaller number of interviews from which derives a scarcer material to be analysed. This is particularly true regarding the interviews to the trade unions' delegates ("Shop Steward") inside the company**: HK HANDEL only has 3 shop steward in all the country**, for *FoodForYou:* having such a small number of delegates it is not necessarily the standard, while on the contrary almost an exception; and plus, one of whom refused to participate in the interview, the second was on sick leave and the third one participated.

The same is true regarding the interviews with the managerial figures: only the responsible of the branding policies' department from the Head Quarter Denmark agreed to be interviewed. **Thus, the empirical material is richer in the Italian case, as emerges in the next chapters of this work.**

Actually, these difficulties partly already disconfirms one of the initial hypothesis presented in the introduction (chapter 1), namely that, due to the already well-known industrial relations' systems present in Denmark, the access to the fieldwork would have be helped by the strong relation of collaboration between the trade unions, the employers' associations and the company. However, despite the six months spent in Denmark in order to collect the interviews, unexpected obstacles arose.

First of all, as already outlined, the shop stewards present in *FoodForYou* were only three, and despite several attempts, the one who was on sick leave never agreed to participate to the interview – as well as the one who refused since the beginning. Secondly, despite having also interviewed an employers' association representative, establishing a flourish contact with the company was in any case very difficult: in fact, it was possible to interview only the branding responsible manager of *FoodForYou*, as shown in table n. 6. And finally, even the attempt to reach the store managers in the city of Copenhagen was not useful, due to the fact that, according to the managers themselves, in order to be interviewed they would have needed an approval from the Head Quarter management. Also the workers present in the stores felt uncomfortable to answer to some questions when the managers were present in the stores.

However, a smaller amount of interviews to trade unions' representatives can be justified by the fact that Danish trade unions' operating in the retail sector are less fragmented (looking at the "institutionalised" one, thus, not considering the "yellow trade unions" or the less representatives). While in Italy, of course the number of the interviews increases just starting from the fact that there are three majorly representative confederations.

All the recorded interviews have been transcribed. The thematic analysis of the interviews have been conducted with the help of the software Nvivo, using the techniques of the categorisation of the themes and the subthemes (coding hierarchy) (Creswell and Poth, 2012), looking again at crucial points related to the research questions and to eventual similarities and differences between the two contexts; and with the aim to enlarge the theory developed so far (Weber, 1990; Yin, 2011) and maintaining a continuity with the secondary data analysis phase of the work (Gibbs, 2007).

IV.

ITALY AND DENMARK IN COMPARISON

4.1. Introduction

This chapter wants to offer an outline of the institutional settings of the two countries. In fact, as explained in the introduction (chapter 1) and in the chapter dedicated to the methodology (3), the aim of this research is to analyse **job quality inside one multinational corporation in two different countries**, for two reasons: test the level of standardization of the company itself and, most importantly, understand what can be the institutional impact on the job quality perceived by the workers employed in the company.

This chapter thus wants to describe Italy and Denmark following the analyses provided by the Comparative Political Economy and the Varieties of Capitalism literature, that classify Italy as a Mediterranean country, while Denmark as North European/Social-democratic country (Hall and Soskice, 2001; Amable, 2003; Molina and Rhodes, 2007; Regini, 2015; Burroni, 2016). Following this classification, the two countries present different characteristics in terms of labour market regulations, industrial relations' systems and welfare systems – the three elements taken into account as possible variables that can affect job quality.

In fact, first of all, **labour market regulations** can play a role in terms of workers' prospects and sense of precariousness, depending on the presence of **active and passive labour market policies** (especially in terms of entrance - or re-entrance - in the labour market and forms of sustain in period of unemployment). Secondly, labour regulations **can affect the work-life balance** (looking, for example, at the deregulation of the working hours).

The second element relates to the welfare policies. Considering the increasing number of women who entered in the labour market, the reduction of families' size, and the increase of divorce rates and of single-parent families, welfare policies represent the ones that, if properly structured, could play a fundamental role in relation to the new (and different) families' needs (D'Apice and Fadda, 2003). This is also true in relation to their impact on the job quality. In fact, welfare policies play a role, first of all, **in terms of full participation in the labour market, especially for women** (and especially in those countries where the family care relies on them, as see in later), because **policies concerning the family care affect workers' work-life balance**. A second reason why welfare policies can affect the final perception of the job quality is because, depending on the presence/absence of determined policies, **the labour supply can change**, as well as workers' *occupational status*: for example, the

presence of targeted services for children care can allow workers to be employed with full-time contracts (Atzenaky, 2012).

Finally, the **industrial relations system** are very important in terms of **workers' voice and participation**, but even more importantly in terms of what trade unions can do in order to contribute in improving the working conditions. Depending on the industrial relations' system, in fact, unions can more or less affect the regulations of the working hours, the wages, the access to training policies, the election of a trade union's representatives in the workplaces and so forth. Plus, depending on the level of *institutionalisation* of the trade unions (Cella, Treu, 2009; Bordogna, Pedersini, 2019), these organizations can intervene also on the implementations of the labour market regulations, or even have a voice on the educational and the pensions systems.

The description of these three elements, both in Italy and in Denmark, is then amplified also by what has emerged from the interviews conducted with the trade unions representatives in both the countries.

Every paragraph of this chapter is thus focused on each of these elements, respectively in Italy and in Denmark: paragraph 4.2. focuses on the labour market regulation, paragraph 4.3. on the welfare systems and paragraph 4.4. on the industrial relations' models; while paragraph 4.5. concludes with a summary of the three, comparing the two countries.

4.2. Labour market regulation and educational system

4.2.1. A fragmented deregulation: the Italian labour market

Italian labour market, since before the financial crisis of 2009, was characterised by a high percentage of full-time and permanent contracts, but most importantly by **a strong protection of the employment status** (Lucidi, Raitano, 2009). This features led to a picture in which the so called ***insiders*** **(in particular, public and unionised and medium-large firms employees) were highly protected and the *outsiders* were excluded from regular employment,** being at the same time excluded from a series of social protections (Martini, Trivellato, 2011; Vesan, 2012; Colombo, Regalia, 2016).

After the financial crisis, Italy, as well as other European countries, **has started a process of deregulation in the labour market**. The principal aim of this kind of policies was to facilitate the *entrance* in the labour market that in Italy was particularly difficult especially for some categories, such as women, young people, and also southern citizens (Pintaldi *et al.*, 2013). In order to do that, also following the European push, what was considered as a solution related the increase of the flexibilization of the working agreements, as well as of the working hours management (Gualmini,

Rizza, 2013). Thus, to decrease the high unemployment rate, these reforms wanted especially to remove what were defined as the typical "rigidities" of the Italian labour market (Raitano, Fana, 2019).

This process had included several reforms implemented in the course of the past decades (Barbieri, 2009; Barbieri, Scherer, 2009; Liotti, 2020). Thus, gradually in the Italian scenario the labour market started to **foresee new types of employment contracts**, as well as new policies that had the aim to (re)connect the educational system to the labour market (increasing the match between labour demand and supply) (Battisti, Vallanti, 2013). "Work-and-training" contracts, for example, were introduced, while at the same time, following the reasoning that the "rigidity" of the labour market was the main cause of the unemployment rate, successive laws further facilitated the use of fixed-term contracts. At the end of the 90s, the so called "Treu Package" (1997) foresaw cuts in the employment protections, facilitations in the dismissal procedures, lowering of wages and push for decentralised bargaining processes, as well as the introduction of temporary work agencies. In the successive decades, further (and more and more deregulated) forms of employment agreements were introduced, especially through the so called "Legge Biagi". It foresaw, among other reforms, the "job on call" contracts, that allows the employers to contact workers "when needed". **All of these reforms had led to an increasing substitution of the typical jobs to the "atypical" ones and to a weakening of the Employment Protection Legislation for the short-term contracts**, arriving, in 2015, to the law known as "Jobs Act", that, also, facilitated the firing procedures for non-autonomous workers due to the elimination of the so called "fair justification" clause (article number 18 of the Workers' Statute) (Menegotto, 2016; Cirillo, Fana and Guarascio, 2017; Raitano, Fana, 2019).

The deregulation of the labour market did not only affect the employment contractual terms, but also the work organization and the regulation of the product markets, looking in particular at the opening hours of the workplaces and the work on festive days (Fullin, 2018). With the passage of Law 214 of 2011, also known as "Decreto Salva Italia", rigidity regarding Sunday opening hours and weekday closing hours regulations have virtually disappeared. This, along with the rise in atypical and unprotected contracts, paints a picture in which job quality is unavoidably impacted negatively.

This deregulation process happened in Italy results particularly problematic in light of the lack of **adequate active labour market policies (ALMP)** that could help the (re)entrance in the labour market in the case workers lose their jobs – also due to the expire of the current atypical contract. Italian ALMP in fact only comprehends extracurricular traineeships, targeted to young people who have finished their academic path within a year, unemployed workers or workers who perceive

income supports and disadvantaged people (like disables) (ANPAL, INAPP, 2021); and **the work done from the employment centres**, the main bodies designated to the implementation of those policies capable to (re)insert people in the labour market (CNEL, 2020).

On the contrary, Italian labour market is characterised by a strong prominence of passive labour market policies (Mise, Istat, Inps *et al.*, 2020). These comprehend *forms of wage sustains for workers who lost their jobs* (for example, the one known as "NASPI" offers the 75% of the previous perceived wage for a period equal to the half of the worked weeks in the last four years. The monetary amount, however, decreases through time, and it is no longer furnished if the worker finds another job).

In order to better comprehend the Italian labour market picture it is also useful to briefly describe its educational system, especially because, on its bases, the "transition from school to work" can change. **The Italian educational system has in general been characterised by a lack of connection with the labour market, being, on the contrary, the teaching programs mainly based on general courses, structured more on the theories than on the practical application** (Pastore, 2012). Also, following the typology proposed by Busemeyer and Trampusch (2012), Italy might seem to be more similar to the systems categorized as **"liberal":** a system, thus, characterized by few investments on the professional skills both from the schools and the firms (even if with some exceptions, based, in any case, on short-term investment strategies) being on the contrary much more oriented to the production of generalist and theoretical knowledge (Ballarino, 2013).

However, in the last decades some reforms wanted to push the Italian educational system in a direction more similar to the well-known "**dual system", typical, for example, of Germany: a system where the connection between schools and university and labour market is more structured**, with the firms and the enterprises offering in a more active way temporary periods of work while still studying. Among these reforms, the more important has been the Law 107/2017, known as "Buona Scuola", that among other things regulated the so called "Alternanza Scuola lavoro" (ASL). The ASL had **the aim especially to reduce the traditional long years occurring in between the end of the educational paths** (especially after the tertiary degree, as explained by Pastore, Quintano, Rocca, 2021) and the entrance in the labour market.

Thus, the Italian educational system, that foresees a transition from school to work that is one of the longest among the other European countries (Pastore, 2012), together with the increased deregulation in the labour market and a scarcity of active labour market policies, has of course consequences in terms on the job quality. This is true for two reason.

The first one, more understandable, relates the impact on some job quality indicators, **such as salaries** (lower when hired with atypical contracts), **lack of career prospects** (lower when in front a high level of turnover rate), **risk of poverty** (that increases in the case of loss of job without being re-inserted in the labour market quickly and efficiently).

The consequences of this picture on workers' job quality also emerged several times in the interviews with the trade unions' representatives. **According to them, one of the main effect of the deregulation has been on the opening hours of the stores** – something that has hit the **retail sector** in particular:

> "The liberalisation was one of the most relevant element considered useful to make the system more competitive… actually, one of the few liberalisation process that had an immediate effect was on the working hours in the shops […]. A complete liberalisation of the working hours, the possibility, for the shops, to stay open h24, 365 days per year, including holidays, Sundays… […]. This was a confirmation of our fears: this did not help working conditions." (National Secretary, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

According to the perspectives of the trade unions representatives of the service and the retail sector, this deregulation happened in the labour market did not have the same consequences in all the sectors; on the contrary, those that require by definition *to offer a service to the costumers* were the ones that, in terms of job quality, suffered the most – especially in terms of management of the working hours and work-life balance (Jany-Catrice, Lehndorff, 2002). **This deregulation has been particularly evident though the use of part-time contracts, that also have an impact on the salaries** (because employees work fewer hours) (see also chapter 8).

> "In my opinion, the real issue here is about the organization of the work. And of course the quality of life […]. As well as the rise of the working hours and consequently the wages. Because this will answer to the need to having guaranteed a sufficient income." (National Secretary, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

Secondly, this institutional assets related to the labour market also affect and somehow shape the workforce and the labour supply. **The more the years needed to the enter the labour market, the more the new workers will be older, with other types of needs, for example related to the family care, or the work-life balance.**

This last passage is strictly related to what the welfare system offers: it is exactly when considering this element that the Italian case becomes peculiar. **In fact, these reforms, together with the lack of other social "pillars", especially family-care welfare policies, makes Italian case particularly**

inefficient (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Jessoula, Graziano and Madama, 2010), as better explained in paragraph 4.3.1.

4.2.2. Investing on the work: the Danish labour market

Deregulation processes in the labour market has been present also in Denmark, a country that, as well as others part of the Scandinavian model, was characterised by its focus on **diffuse social inclusion and collectivistic.**

One of the most distinguishing aspect related to the Danish labour **market is the almost complete absence of any forms of labour market regulations, being the labour market system mostly connected to the bargaining processes made by trade unions** (Andersen *et al.*, 2012). Thus, aspects related to working hours, vacation, wages, workers' representations in the workplaces, organization of the work are regulated by the contracts; while, aspects concerning holidays, parental leaves, dismissal procedures (in terms of period of notice) are regulated by the legislation (Mailand, Hansen, 2016).

Notwithstanding the strong role covered by trade unions, thus, it is still worth to underlined that the already very liberal Danish labour market became even more deregulated since the growing of the general processes of deregulation happened in all the European countries.

This deregulation increased especially in the types and forms of contracts and **with the privatisation of some sectors that were previously public** (Kananen, 2012); also, some reforms decreased the power of trade unions, for example introducing new forms of unemployment insurances available for the workers (Klitgaard, Nørgaard, 2014); this somehow contributed in weakening trade union's representation because, due to the presence of the so-called **Ghent system**, unemployment insurances have always been a prerogative of the trade unions, that helped in guarenteeng a high unions' density rate and consequently empowering unions' themselves. Introducing other forms of these insurances, so, contributes to the risk of losing members – at least, those who tend to join the labour organization only in order to get them.

Danish labour market can be considered, so, as more deregulated in comparison to the Italian one, something that can particularly affect employment protections. At the state of the art, Denmark presents, among the European countries, **very low employment protections**, intended, for example, as notice periods in the dismissal procedures (Piasna, Myant, 2017).

However, the presence of the well-known system of *flexicurity* (Bredgaard, Madsen, 2015) makes the Danish case peculiar, and, for the purpose of this work, an important variable when analysing job

quality. In fact, part of the strength of the Danish model **relies on the strong presence of active labour market policies**.

Active labour market policies have been introduced in the mid of the 1990s, under the main goal to especially push the education and the entrance in the market of young people, something that led to the implementation of the Municipal Youth Guidance Centres (Helms Jørgensen, Järvinen, Lundahl, 2019).

Denmark, in particular, invested a lot in the so called ***workfare:*** through a series of reform (in particular the *Act on active labour market policies* of 1993) the monetary benefits become more and more related to the participation to activation measures (Kananen, 2012). Thus, starting in particular from the beginning of the 90' the concept of "structural employment" became central in the policy making debate, with investments, differently from Italy, especially in the active labour market policies. **The main reforms looked at increasing workers' personal responsibility** (greatly investing in new local agencies for job seekers) gradually reducing at the same time the duration of monetary coverage in period of unemployment**, pushing workers' active participation**, concretely splitting the period of earnings-related benefit in two different "tranches" (passive and active).

Despite the retrenchment of the generosity of the income support, both in term of time (from four to two years) and in terms of eligibility, however, the system of the social protections still remain strong, looking especially at the **training policies offered both while employed (long-life learning) and while looking for a new job.** This system contributes in maintaining the Danish unemployment rate among the lowest in Europe.

Thus, the low level of employment security is largely compensated by both income protections and a strong implementation of active labour market policies – something that creates the most significant difference with Italy where, as seen, employment protection is higher, but the match made by the deregulation processes happened in the last decades and the lack of adequate policies targeted for the re-entrance in the labour market makes the Italian scenario much more instable than the Danish one.

Another reason why Danish labour market "works well" is due to **the educational system.** The educational system and the transition system can be defined, following Walther's (2006), as **universalistic** and strongly targeted on the growth of the young people. However, together with this universalistic vein, Denmark also presents a **VET system**, on the line of the German approach, that helps in creating a connection between the world of the education and the world of the work: VET presents in fact a series of **models based on apprenticeships**, strongly closed to the labour market (Helms Jørgensen, Järvinen, Lundahl, 2019).This education system combines, so, a period on

schools and then an apprenticeship in a company, firm, or other workplaces, and this goes on for two years.

Most of the implementation and regulation of the educational system and of these apprenticeships is managed with the strong presence of social parts, including **trade unions -** who have much more voice on this topic, compared to Italy.

> "We have a very important role in the education system. And this is true at all level. Because, you see… We talk all the time with the government, we have a voice on the educational reforms. But also… We collaborate with the agency that follows the Vocational Educational System… And we also visit the schools, even the Universities sometime, to explain to the students the charatcteristics of the job…" (Career Counselling, HK HANDEL, DK)

This educational system, together with the presences of the already described flexicurity model, makes Danish young people being involved in the labour market also while still studying.

4.3. Welfare systems and social protections

4.3.1. The "incomplete reformism": the Italian Welfare system

Italy, categorised as part of the Mediterranean model, together with Spain, Greece and Portugal (Ferrera, 1996), presents a peculiar welfare system.

According to Burroni (2016), Italian welfare system can be described as a mixed coverage regime, where some elements, such as the educational and the health care systems can be considered as universalistic, while others, such as some fiscal adjustments or to monetary "bonuses", strongly depend on the occupational status, something that increases the gaps between the already cited insiders and outsiders. Most importantly, this is a system that foresees a **strong family (women) participation in the family care**. This means that, in general, Italy has been always characterised by an insufficient number of instruments in relation, for example, to childcare (kindergartens) or eldest care (targeted facilities) (Da Roit *et al.,* 2007).

This framework somehow worsened after the implementation of a series of **retrench policies/public expenditures' cuts**, not properly followed by a new management or customisation to both new needs and new recipients (Pavolini, Ascoli, 2012). Plus, in the years between the 1992-93 and 1995, important reforms in the pensions systems have been implemented. Those reforms regarded the change from a retributive system (that foresaw a calculation based on the income gained during the working years) to a contributive one (that on the contrary was based also on the total amount of

worked years and in particular on the amount of money destinated to the pension itself, something that, for example, does not happen if a worker is not employed with a regular contract). Plus, the years considered as sufficient to have access to the pensions increased, as well as the years of contributions. These reforms and the progressive cuts in the health care system and in the educational system happened between 2008 and 2011 contributed to a **restriction of the social services**, while at the same time, together with the decentralisation of the public services, new and "private" social services have spread, increasing the dualization in social protection (Ferrera and Maino, 2010).

This trend, during the years, has been accompanied by the general perception of the lack of a universalistic system of protection, more focused on the contrary on labour differentiation and on the **role of the families**. **The lack of specific and new targeted policies lead to the definition of "incomplete revolution" of these policies** (Esping-Andersen, 2011).

The main consequences of this picture especially rely on **women, who, in particular, often remain excluded from the labour market or tend to opt for solutions that let them take care of children or elderly people – such as part-time contracts.**

Because of this, and in general because of the new needs required from the changes occurred in the labour market (for example, as said, working with shifts that requires difficulties in their management), **the dimension of the work-life balance becomes extremely important in the analysis of the job quality**, thus, all the policies that can be considered as useful in this sense play a positive role in workers' final working conditions.

Italy, among the total of 6% of GDP dedicated to welfare policies, allocates 1,7% for family care. Among the principle policies related to the issue of work-life balance, there are four major areas of interest (Maino, Razetti, Santoni, 2019), each favouring the establishment of the models presented above: **measures promoting work-flexibility**, which actually increase the presence of the male bread winner/female part-time earner; **measures promoting the extension of (external) family services**, on the direction of the dual earner model; **measures based on monetary transfers** and **measures promoting fiscal helps**. At the state of the art, Italy presents a propensity on the first group of policies (Gaiaschi, Mallone, 2017), which does not represent the best option in term of gender balance and equal opportunity, as seen, but where women tend to opt for part-time/reduced hours jobs to take care of family or not to work at all, leading to the picture of the "male bread winner/female care giver" or "male bread winner/female part-time earner" (Gornick, Meyers, 2004). The Work Life Balance Report of ISTAT (2018) underlines how the remodulation of working schedule to take care of families is chosen much more by women than men.

In the interviews with trade unions' representatives, the issue of the welfare system has emerged many times. **The lack of sufficient child and eldest care policies, combined with the deregulation of the working hours and the low salaries, according to unions' representatives definitely affect working conditions.**

> "If you receive 500, 600 euros per month… you won't pay a rent, you won't protect your family… and if you have children, unless you cannot rely on grandparents... It becomes very difficult." (National Secretary, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

Once again, as will deepened later, these aspects are particularly true and relevant in some sectors, including retail, where the work-life balance results to be tough due to unpredictable work schedules (and asocial shifts):

> "These workers are the ones who suffer most by public welfare lacks, especially on the theme of work-life balance, and who perceive low wages with which it is not possible to face costs in the private sector for the family care, precisely because most of them work part-time… it is a vicious circle." (National Secretary, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

4.3.2. Universality and citizenship: the Danish Welfare system

The Danish welfare system is characterised by its universalistic vein and by a strong fiscal contribution, fuelling a system based on a mutual insurance (Christensen, 2005). **This means that the majority of social services are provided by public institutions**, an aspect that, also, contributes to the creation of public jobs.

This universalistic aspect of the Scandinavian countries has particularly developed since the second half of the last century, also due to the presence of social democratic parties that strongly invested in it (Høgedahl, Kongshøj, 2017).

However, as outlined, also in Denmark there have been public expenditures' cuts, especially in the "granted" income protections, slowly substituted by a stronger investments in active labour market policies (Andersen, Mailand, 2005; Ibsen, Mailand, 2009). Despite this, still the system guarantees a high level of protections in period of unemployment and, in general, in respect to some services provided by the State.

In fact, Danish welfare system relies on a series of granted and universalistic policies that makes it very different from the Italian case. **Childcare relies on public policies more than on families, including a great diffusion of nursery school's provisions**, monetary helps provided for children until their age of consent and public funded education system for all the educational levels, university

included (Gulløv, 2012). Plus, something that is also strictly connected to the issue of the work-life balance regards **the generous policies that regulate the parental leave**, that is paid up to 32 weeks (De la Porte, Larsen, Szelewa, 2020). Parental leave is, differently from the Italian case, mainly regulated by trade unions' bargaining at sectoral and company level (Due, Madsen, 2008). Thus, in relation to the work-life balance policies, Denmark applies, differently from Italy, **measures promoting the extension of (external) public family services**, on the direction of the dual earner model (Abrahamson, 2007; Gaiaschi, Mallone, 2017). Also the eldest care in Denmark is highly guaranteed, including home caring services and targeted measures for determined pathologies (Bianchi, 2018).

For these reasons, differently than the Italian case, Danish trade unions' have not pointed in a particular way the **issue of being "trapped" in part-time contract**s (in the retail sector) due to the family-care duties. This is also because, as deepened in the next chapter (5) the majority of employees working part-time is made by (very) young people, and union' representatives themselves are well aware of the fact that those types of jobs are only transitory, especially if that young people are highly educated.

More in general, the issue of the lack of social protections did not emerge almost at all in the interviews. For example, a major difference with Italy in respect to the welfare system regards the contents of the integrative contracts – that most of the time in Italy cover aspects related to the **"corporate welfare", like bonuses for children or in the most virtuous cases even kindergarten** (see chapter 7 and 8). In Denmark, when asked about integrative contracts, the extra advantages reported never implied aspect related to "substitutions" of what is notably public (and free):

> "[…] I don't have any children, but people get extra support [from the State] for it, like nursery, day-care time and all of that. So yeah, we don't… but that's not a thing that the company doesn't want to do, we do not need it, no one does." (Shop Steward, HK HANDEL, DK)

4.4. Industrial relations' models and trade unions' role

Before introducing the next paragraphs, it is useful to proposes, in here, a table that summarizes the aspects covered by the National Collective Agreements in Italy and in Denmark. While in the next pages are better explained the main features of the industrial relations' models in both the countries.

Table 7 - Main aspects covered by the national collective agreements in Denmark and Italy

THEMATIC	DENMARK	ITALY
Duration	3-4 years (decided at the moment of the signature)	Four years, possibility of renewal
Working hours	Full time: 37 hours	Full-time: 40 hours
% of increase of the salary for extra-ordinary work	Calculated at the hourly rate + 50 per cent for the first three overtime hours and then at the hourly rate + 100 per cent for all overtime worked on Sundays and weekday holidays	From 15% to 20% depending on the amount of extraordinary work (up to or more than 48 hours per week); 30% for Sunday work or holidays; 50% for night shifts
Vacation and leaves	The Danish Holiday Act applies; 25 days of vacation per year in total, but employees who have been continuously employed in the enterprise for nine months are entitled to five extra holiday days (30 days in total in this case)	26 days of vacation, 56 hours of leaves
Probation period	The probationary period for trainees is three months, cf. the Danish Act on Vocational Training. Any time spent at college is not included in the probationary period, which is extended accordingly, and the trainee should be notified in writing of the new last day of the probationary period as soon as possible	Firsts categories levels: six months; 2-3-4-5 levels: 2 months; 6-7 levels: 1 and a half month
Firing procedure	30 days if employed up to five months; 90 days if employed between 6 months up to 2 years and 9 months; 120 days if employed between 3 years and 5 years and 9 months; 150 days if employed between six years and 8 years and 7 months; 180 days if employed for a longer period	Through official written documents, with a notice of: 60-90-120 days (higher category levels); 30-45-60 days (2-3 levels); 20-30-45 days (4-5 levels); 15-20 days (6-7 levels) – to be noticed only on the 1st or on the 15th of the current month
Resignation procedures	/	Through official written documents, with a notice of: 45-60-90 days (higher category levels); 20-30-45 days (2-3 levels); 15-20-30 days (4-5 levels); 10-15 days (6-7 levels) – to be noticed only on the 1st or on the 15th of the current month
Sick leave	The enterprise must be informed of illness as soon as possible; The enterprise may request documentation of illness in the form of either a doctor's note or a solemn declaration. The enterprise will pay for the doctor's note in accordance with the applicable rules; However, a doctor's note may only be issued for illness lasting more than three days. A doctor's note may also be requested for frequent absences lasting one or two days	180 days – possibility of extension of 120 days – up to 12 months for severe illness; 100% of the salary up to the third day; 75% from the fourth to the 20th; 100% from the 21st day – integrative to the National Institute for the Social Security (INPS)
Accidents at work	Under the EU Parental Leave Directive, the employee is entitled to time off work without pay as a result of a force majeure situation in accordance with national practice when compelling family reasons	180 days of maintenance of the job; integrative to the INPS income from the company: 100% -first day; 60% from the second to the fourth day; 90% from the fifth to the 20th day; 100% from the 21st day

	arise in cases of illness or accidents that urgently require the employee's immediate presence.	
Parental leave	Pregnancy leave: 4 weeks with full pay; maternity leave: 14 weeks with full pay; paternity leave: 2 weeks with full pay; parental leave no later than week 52: 13 weeks with full pay. Of these 13 weeks, each of the parents is entitled to payment for five weeks. If the leave of absence reserved for the individual parent is not taken, the payment is not made. The payment for the remaining three weeks is made to the nominated parent. The enterprise will pay maternity pay from four weeks before the expected date of delivery (pregnancy leave) until 14 weeks after the birth (maternity leave) to employees who on their expected date of delivery have completed nine months' service. An employee who gives birth at a later date than expected by the doctor/midwife is thus only entitled to pay during pregnancy leave for up to four weeks. Adoptive parents who have completed nine months' service when they take custody of the child shall be paid wages for 14 weeks from the day on which the child enters their custody (parental leave). The pay corresponds to the wages that the individual would have received during this period. The amount includes the maximum rate of state benefit laid down in legislation. Under the same conditions, benefits are paid during paternity leave for up to two weeks.	Maternity leave: integrative to the INPS: 100% for 20 weeks
Marriage leave	/	15 days
Income	Minimum wage for skilled workers: 2802,19 EUR (20,888.00 DKK); minimum wage for unskilled workers: 2600,96 EUR (19,388.00 DKK); minimum wage for people under 18 y.o: 1478,77 EUR (11,023.00 DKK);	Depending on the professional categories levels, from 1281,31 EUR to 2697,77 EUR
Part-time	The normal working hours (duration and timing) are agreed in each individual case for part-time employees when they are first employed. The working hours can be planned as an average over 16 weeks in a fixed schedule. In exceptional cases, it may however be agreed that part-time employees will take on extra work and overtime. Part-time	Weekly: at least 16 hours; monthly: at least 64 hours; yearly: at least 532 hours. For company with more than 30 workers the minimum amount is: 18, 72, 600 hours; possibility for students, workers who already have another job or young people up to 25 years old: 8 hour for Saturday or Sunday work

	employees are graded according to the same rules as full-time employees, and their wages are calculated using the ratio between the individual's weekly working hours and the applicable normal weekly working hours of the enterprise or the department.	
Temporary contracts	Temporary employees and agency staff hired for a period of no more than a month, payment is rendered for at least four hours of work per day, unless otherwise agreed in advance.	2 in workplaces with up to 15 employees or 5 in workplaces with an amount of workers between 16 and 30; 28% per year in total
Training	Foreseen	Foreseen
Corporate welfare	/	Foreseen: integrative pension' system; integrative health assurance

Source: author's own elaboration based on the national collective agreements texts

4.4.1. Conflict and representativeness: the Italian industrial relations' model

Italian industrial relations' model is, compared to the other European countries, still quite strong, in terms of institutional recognition and trade unions' density rate. A reason to that, that is similar to the Danish case, relies on the fact that Italy **does not have any regulations' on minimum wages**, something that is delegated to the national collective bargaining, and that, thus, helps in maintaining the Italian trade unions as a very important player in the labour market (Bordogna, Pedersini, 2019), still having one of the highest density rate (ratio of wage and salary earners who are unions trade members and total number of wage and salary earners), among European countries, that in 2019 was of 32,5% (OECD, 2023).

Italy is also characterised by an elevated number of trade unions and employers' associations, something that underlines the presence of a fragmentation: there are several unions' confederations or autonomous groups. This fragmentation actually takes relevance considering that **that Italy lacks an administrative extension procedure to guarantee universal coverage of collective agreements**. This is because, according to the article n. 39 of the Italian Constitution, the trade unions' organization is free, unlike the registration of trade unions and the allocation of sectoral bargaining power in accordance to member numbers. Trade unions resisted state control over its internal structure under the post-fascist democratic system and chose for collective autonomy with relation to strikes and collective bargaining, rejecting official statutory interventionism (Leonardi, Ambra, Ciarini, 2018).

The collective agreements applied most of the time are signed by the three most representatives trade union, that are: CGIL (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*), CISL (*Confederazione*

Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori) and UIL (*Unione Italiana del Lavoro*) (Cella, Treu, 2009; Pedersini, 2014; Burroni, 2016). Regarding the main three unions' confederations that operate in the service sector, the three most representative ones are **FILCAMS-CGIL, FISASCAT-CISL and UILTUCS-UIL.** They cover many different sub sector, from retail, to tourism, hospitality, private service sector like cleaning and surveillance, and they have more than 20 contracts.

The Italian panorama of the employers' associations operating in the retail sector is, as well as in the case of the trade unions, fragmented and differentiated. **In fact, there are four main employers' associations:** CONFCOMMERCIO (the employers' association that is focused on the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), with more than 700,000 members and covering 2.7 million of workers); CONFESERCENTI (representing around 350,000 small and medium enterprises and 1 million of employees); FEDERDISTRIBUZIONE, focused on the large-scale mass distribution, that today represents almost two hundred big companies and MNCs and has more than 220,000 employees; and the so called COOPERATIVE DISTRUBUTION. FEDERDISTRIBUZIONE was born from a break with CONFCOMMERCIO (Leonardi, Ambra, Ciarini, 2018).

The breaking point related to two main themes: **the opening of new, big structures also inside the city centers** (something that would have created problems to SMEs, as main competitors); and **on the flexibility of hours and opening days,** especially after the deregulation of the labour market regarding the opening hours happened with the introduction of the Law Decree 201/2011. Plus, FEDERDISTRIBUZIONE was structured once the big chains started to spread in Italy, a quite recent phenomenon, since, as already outlined, the Italian retail sectors has most often been made by small companies – most of the time also managed at family level (Eurocommerce and Uni Europa Union, 2017).

> "I totally get it why they [the big chains' managers who created FEDERDISTRIBUZIONE] wanted to exit CONFCOMMERCIO… I mean, despite the fact that we represent employers operating in the same labour sector [retail]… I mean… Small and big enterprises have vastly dissimilar needs. I get that they wanted to have their own voice inside the various employers' associations… and also in relations with the trade unions." (Labour market and trade unions relations' responsible, CONFCOMMERCIO, IT).

In every branch of the labour market in which they operate, Italian unions are organized in the same way. **There is the confederal (so, general structure) category, that has the pivotal role of guiding the general position (also political position) of the union itself, but are the single categories based on the market sectors the ones that actually carry on the bargaining procedure**, and have plenty

of autonomy. This very same structure is present in all the territory, even if at the national level, trade unions' representatives have the role to coordinate their delegates in the regions (Bordogna, Pedersini, 2019).

In terms of the parties involved, the sectoral social partner federations carry out nationwide negotiations, **while the unitary union representative body is in charge at the workplace level** ("Rappresentanze sindacali aziendali" or RSA), are co-entitled to company-level bargaining. The RSU is the only form of workplace representation, and members are chosen by both members and non-members in organizations with more than 15 employees. In fact, according to the Italian Workers' Statue (1970), **in order to elect a trade union representative at store level there have to be at least fifteen workers in the single workplace** (Bordogna, Pedersini, 2019). This law makes sense considering that Italy has been characterised by a strong presence of manufacturing industries. However, with the spread of the tertiarization of the labour market, this law create some difficulties in the Italian retail sector, that is characterised by a high percentage of small and micro companies. The interesting part relies also on the fact that the law stands even if the single workplace is part of a franchise company, or of a multinational corporation – thus, cases where the company is very big, but maybe has very small and fragmented workplaces.

However, there is not an law that force the application of these contracts, something that leaves many grey zone in the Italian labour market and that has helped in the spread of the so called "yellow unions" (not representatives unions who also can sign contracts, most of the time at company level) (Negrelli, Signoretti, 2014). The "dark part" of this peculiar element is that, especially in the retail and in the agriculture sector, the yellow unions sign contracts that most of the time offer worst working conditions. As Pulignano *et al.* (2018) show, during and after the financial crisis, the response of employers was to negotiate with only non-representative trade unions and to sign agreements more favourable to themselves. **Hence, the trade unions' institutional power resources diminished due to an increase in pirate agreements** which established lower salary levels and poorer working conditions, allowing employers to cut labour costs and maintain their competitiveness (Leonardi, 2018); during a financial crisis that was particularly harsh in the retail sector.

Regarding the bargaining rules, in Italy the legislation delegates to the social parts the definition of the national labour market contracts (CCNL). What is most important about the bargaining rules is that the Italian system of industrial relations **does not require the workers to be a member of the unions in order to being hired under the national collective agreements' disposals** (of course if the company applies it) – something that can create, especially in "difficult" sectors, many problems in reaching a high number of trade unions' density.

The bargaining structure is quite articulated: the first level of bargaining is related to the national levels, and it is divided **following the labour categories**; the secondary level bargaining can be at company level (much more diffused) or at territorial level (not very often applied). There are also some experimentation going on, for example bargaining at the workplace level, but articulated (for example, big malls). In particular, Italian systems always pushed much more on the National Collective Agreements, even if since the first decade of 2000, a **gradual shift to decentralised bargaining (firms-level contracts)** has been taken place (Curtarelli *et al*., 2015; Pedersini, Leonardi, 2018). National agreements set sectoral wage floors in accordance with various work levels as one of their key responsibilities, safeguarding the purchasing power of wage earners against inflation. There are no institutional processes set up to broaden the binding effect of agreements, so there may be an issue with respect to treating employees equally within the same branch, territory, or even organization. In the case of minimum wages, these issues can be quite severe, even if somehow mitigated by the jurisprudential extension of the minimum wage levels of the CCNL, according to the article 36 of the Constitution. Due to the high number of trade unions (including the least representatives) and the high number of employers' associations, Italy is also characterised by having a **significant amount of national collective agreements (almost 800).**

The general approach of Italian trade unions' is of social cooperatvism, even if they also present a strong **conflictual part**. In any case, the use of the concertation with the State has been, in Italy, fragmented and not constant, reaching a peak especially during the 90s (Burroni, 2016).

Italian unions have faced in the last decades some difficulties especially in their level of involvement in the bargaining processes during the right-parties governments and due to the lack of a law on the unions' representativeness and representation rights (Negrelli and Signoretti, 2014). Despite this, Italian unions are highly involved also in other social issues, in addiction to what strictly relate the regulation of the labour market. **This strong "societal" aspect had contributed in being perceived as key elements even during the years of the economic crisis** (Leonardi, 2017), when the economic recession were pushing (as elsewhere) to decentralised bargaining (Regalia, Regini, 2018).

4.4.2. Concertation and collaboration: the Danish industrial relations' model

In Denmark industrial relations follow a **neo-corporativist model** (Gallie, 2007; Visser, 2009), with a strong relation with political parties. Also in Denmark, trade unions have always been highly involved in the policy making processes both for labour market issues and for social needs requests and instances, in particular considering the strong connection and collaboration between the most

representative unions and the social democratic parties, until the end of the nineties (Jørgensen and Schulze, 2011).

As outlined, the years in between the nineties and beginning of the 2000 represented a great change in Denmark polices, related both to welfare and to labour market ones. In this contexts, a great decrease in the concertation processes has been noticed, with unions been excluded especially by right parties governments; however, they have remained strongly present especially at local and at firm-level. Denmark, however, is **characterised by its really high trade union density** that in 2019 (last data available) was 67% (OECD, 2023).

Between employer organizations and trade unions, Denmark has a long history of voluntary collective bargaining and active social involvement (Piasna, Myant, 2017). The majority of the terms and conditions of employment (such as wages, pensions, and notice periods) are negotiated and settled by the social partners without the involvement of the government (Andersen *et al*. 2012). **In the case a firm decides not to sign a collective agreement, the trade unions are entitled to start strikes** or other forms of protests, while workers of other companies who are "close" to the company involved in the refusal can adapt a series of "solidarity campaigns" – for example, workers of the logistic firm can choose not to deliver to that company the material it needs and so forth (on this, see also chapter 7).

Because of this strong dialogue among social parts, strikes are regulated as a "last option" unions' instrument of pressure. The strikes (or the locks-outs) are in fact foreseen only when the collective agreements are renewed, and only if there is an impossibility to reach an agreement (Mailand, 2006). This is because the strikes promoted by unions are deeply felt in Danish society, and when they happen they involve the majority of workers:

> "It's like, actually… it's a bit like the atomic bomb because everything stops. You know, most of the whole private labour market shuts down completely, and only essential services and welfare can be justified that that work keeps going on. Um, and we haven't had a general strike in Denmark since 1998... I think it was." (National Secretary, HK HANDEL, DK)

The majorly representative trade union is the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions – (*Landsorganisationen i Danmark*, LO). What is most important and that underlines that most importance difference between Italian and Danish industrial relations' systems regards the so called **"umbrella system"** present in the second case. In fact, the main trade union in the retail sector considered in this case study, namely HK HANDEL (*Handels-og Kontorfunktionærernes Forbund*)

is a union affiliated to the most representative one, LO (Mori, 2020). HK is the union for salaried employees, representing workers in a wide area of the Danish labour market. Historically, it was centred around office and trade workers, for both public and private sector. More specifically, HK is made of four sub-branches, every of which has its own collective agreements and dialogue with employers' associations and political parties; the one related to trade and service is known as HK Handel. HK Handel itself has 7 major local (regional) branches distributed in the countries.

However, it should be highlighted that over the past three decades, **there has been a clear rise in so-called "yellow unions" or alternative ideological organizations**, and a reduction in the proportion of people who identify as union members (Ibsen *et al.* 2013). Concerning the service sector, in Denmark the main representative union is the HK.

On the side of the employers' associations, there are: the confederation of Danish Employers (*Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening,* DA, the Confederation of Danish Industry (*Organisation for Erhvervslivet*, DI) and the Danish Chamber of Commerce (*Dansk Erhverv).*

Looking at the role of the employers' associations, however, underlines a difference between Italy and Denmark. **In Denmark is almost implicit that big corporations are part of some employers' associations**, considering the charatcteristics of the institutional context: the strongest level of cooperation between all the social parts makes it natural that a big company is part of the Danish Employers' Confederation (Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening, DA). Employers' associations are in fact, first of all, less fragmented in Denmark compared to Italy, considering that they are all under the macro framework of the DA, even if they are specialized depending on the labour sector they represent (manufacturing, service and construction). Almost all the sectors are thus covered in the DA, despite few exceptions (Andersen *et al.,* 2012).

Regarding the collective agreement structure, as outlined, the system, very differently from the Italian one, is based on a **first-level bargained system, run at centralized level, and the sectorial agreement system,** that refers to the single sectors of the labour market – but, as in the Italian case, workers do not need to be enrolled to the trade unions to be covered by the national collective agreement.

There are, then, different types of general agreements in Denmark. The "basic" one (applied in the retail sector) **is known as "minimal wage agreement",** that bounds to give the employees the minimum wage and that stipulates that the company has to set, later, individual salary.

Regarding the retail sector, it is important to make a point to a peculiarity occurring in the bargaining rules. Retail, in fact, present a rule that states that, if **the company does not sign the collective**

agreement, the unions, in order to apply the contract, have to make at least the **50% of the workforce** enrol the organization (Larsen, Ilsøe, 2022). However, it is also true that because of the strong cooperation between the social parts, especially when the company is part of an employer association it is very rare that it will not sign the collective agreement:

> "Yes, so we just sign with the company. And then they have to apply it in every shop, also in the future shops that will come. And if they do not want to, then we can do through the 50% rule, and that's why we came in into the picture. Zara, for example… they didn't want to make the collective agreement so that's why we need to make the 50% rule. And we have done it in some places, not in all places, but there are some of the employees in Zara in Denmark who have collective agreement and some other who don't…" (Organizing Leader, HK HANDEL, DK).

However, even if rarer, this is a particular scenario that makes Danish retail sector even more "difficult" from the trade unions' point of view.

Also in Denmark there is a secondary level bargaining. They are especially spread in the big chain, and they usually involve issues related to salary or pensions. The secondary level bargaining is delegated to the shop stewards (unions' delegates in the companies), who make the deal, with the help of the trade unions' representatives (Ilsøe, 2021).

There is a chairman among all the shop stewards of the company who speaks for all the others and who goes to the negotiation with the company on behalf of the group. Shop stewards regulation in Denmark is not exactly the same as in Italy. Especially in retail, it is not to take for granted that there are shop stewards in every shop, as well as in Italy, **but the difference is here is that, according to the agreement signed with a specific company, a single shop steward can "cover" more than one workplaces.**

> "So I take two to three stores, depending on how far I have to drive and just visit them and go. And I, of course, always go out and say hi to the manager and saying that I'm there and then I go around talking with different of the employees, how they are feeling, how they're doing." (Shop Steward, HK HANDEL, DK)

Shop steward mainly try to mediate with the local managers if any issues arises, and also, on behalf of the unions, they try to organize their co-workers and make them enrol the unions.

Of course, their role have to face with several difficulties, especially if they have to visit many stores. another problematic relates the rule that states that, in order to have a shop steward elected, there have

to be six or more members of the union in the workplace, and only then the workers are entitled by the collective agreement to make an election of a shop steward. Also, an issue with which unions have to struggle with regards the difficulty in finding someone available to cover this role. According to unions' representatives, the main reason why workers do not easly want to be elected as shop stewards regards the availability in terms of time, "bad unions' culture" (especially with very young people) and only as a last motivation the fear of being mistreated by managers**.**

A different element that is present in Denmark concerns the fact that, **in order to improve working conditions, the Danish union has also a counselling department**, in charge of making the workers aware of their possibilities, something that also eases the unionization processes because workers perceived to be followed also in their personal careers:

> "You know, as counselling department, we follow our members for everything that concerns their career paths. For example, we make annual or even more survey, we try to understand the good parts of a specific sector, and the bad parts as well. And we are constantly trained on how the companies in that sector work, so that we can advise our members on how to grow in their career inside the sector… or we help them in case they want to exit from that sector and start another job…" (Career counselling responsible, HK HANDEL, DK)

4.5. Final considerations

What emerges from this chapter is that the two istitutional settings, despite presenting some similarities, are in fact very different, as also already outlined in the chapter dedicated to the methodology (3) and as plenty described by the literature of the comparative political economy and the Varieties of Capitalism.

The Italian system presents a labour market characterised by higher (compared to Denmark) level of **fragmentation, both in terms of entrance in the labour market and maintenance of the occupational status** – something that affects especially the young people, creating a generational gap, and women. This fragmentation has actually increased since the nineties, because a series of deregulation policies have been applied, but they mainly hit the new generations of workers, who are now less protected; while, at the same time, they did not achieve to reach what was the *ratio* behind them, namely the increase of the occupational rate. Plus, as seen, these deregulation policies have not been followed **by the implementation of a series of targeted active labour market policies – that should have been the aim of *contrasting* the flexibilization and to consent to workers to re-enter**

in the labour market. This mismatch contributed to a picture where workers suffer by the lack of employment security, low salaries and, most importantly, being employed with atypical contracts.

Italian welfare has also suffered from this "incomplete reformism". In fact, the new reforms introduced in the last decades modified the range of people who could access to specific monetary transfers, while on the contrary, new targeted policies have not been implemented. This is particularly true in relation to those new risks that, themselves, are the consequences of the already described deregulation policies implemented in the labour market, **that affected in particular the dimensions of the salary and of the work-life balance.** In relation to this last aspects, as seen, the still "familistic" approach of the Italian system creates burden especially for women. Plus, also the presence of **passive labour market policies are still very much dependent on the workers' occupational status**, actually increasing the gap between insiders and outsiders.

Industrial relations system in Italy, despite the trade unions being still quite strong and embedded in the society, is following what seems to be a tendency in all the European countries (Baccaro, Howell, 2017), that is pushing **the bargaining process to a more decentralised level.** This, as seen, risks to increase the inequalities inside the same sectors, especially if the conflicts and/or the concertation happen at company level – something that is particularly true for some sectors, including the retail. Along with this, Italian trade unions, especially in the last decade, had adopted a much more collaborative approach with the governments – also because the retrenchment and the austerity policies that significantly decreases their room for actions. What is most important, especially in comparison with Denmark, is that Italian trade unions are more fragmented between them *and* in respect to the employers' associations, something **that create frictions that can negatively affect the final outcome of a bargain process**.

In Denmark, the three institutional elements described in here, taken to together, cover in a more comprehensive way several spheres related to the job quality.

As see, the labour market, despite being hit by the very same deregulation processes happened in all the European countries, relying on its three balanced pillar, **consents to combine flexibility, productivity and security**. In fact, despite being much more liberal (both in terms of internal and external flexibility) than the Italian labour market, this does not affect the workers' security. On the contrary, despite the absence of a "work protection", Denmark guarantees **the "employment protections" thanks to a series of targeted (and public funded) active labour market policies**. These help workers to re-enter in the labour market after a potential period of unemployment, but also help young workers to enter in it for the first time, contributing to the creation of a better match

between labour demand and labour supply (also due to an educational system that foresees Vet policies).

This flexicurity works well being accompanied by the "second pillar", represented by a universalistic welfare system, that, differently from the Italian case, not only foresees targeted monetary transfers, but also services, especially for child and eldest care – that play a very important role especially regarding some dimensions of the job quality, such as the work-life balance.

In this picture, Danish trade unions remain a constant element that influence both the implementation of the welfare policies and the labour market regulations. This is because **the level of concertation and institutionalization in this country is quite high – in any case, higher than in the Italian scenario**. Thus, in Denmark the stronger collaboration between the social parts result to be more in continuity, while in Italy, as seen, it has been characterised by "alternative phases", leading also to different consequences.

Having explained the differences occurring between these two system has been fundamental in order to analyse the data **and to try to answer to the research questions related to the potential impact of these institutions**. It is clear that, *ex ante*, the expectation is that the Danish system can more positively affect job quality. However, as explained in the next chapters, **retail characteristics are so "difficult" in terms of job quality that the institutional impact has not to be taken for granted**. On the contrary, an element that plays a role in this sense regards the workforce characteriscts, as will better emerge especially in chapters 5 and 8.

V.

WORKFORCE CHARACTERICS AND JOB QUALITY INDICES IN THE RETAIL SECTOR: A CONTEXUAL ANALYSIS

5.1. Introduction

Secondary data analysis are fundamental to fully contextualise the two countries selected for the study. In this section, thus, Italy and Denmark are compared in relation to the job quality indices.

This chapter aims at proposing a contextual analysis of the **retail sector** for both the countries, and it is structured as follows.

Paragraph 5.2. and 5.3. analyse the **workforce characteristics in the retail sector** looking at the **European Union Labour Force Survey dataset** by Eurostat (Eurostat, 2022).

Paragraph 5.4. focuses on the analysis of the **job quality**, looking in particular at the job quality indices proposed in the **European Working Conditions Survey by Eurofound** (Eurofound, 2019).

The chapter concludes with some final considerations (5.5.).

5.2. Workforce characteristics in the retail sector

The comparison, built on the European Union Labour Force Survey, looks at four different sectors of the labour market, built from the elaboration of the variable NACE (1 digit): **private services[6]; public services[7]; industry; and retail observed alone**. Before looking in detail at the data, it is worth to remind that the two countries selected for the analysis have very different dimensions in terms of people employed in the labour market: in fact, Italy counts about 22 and a half million of workers, and Denmark almost three millions of workers.

Denmark presents a higher level of tertiarization, in comparison to Italy: in fact, in the first case all services taken together (private services, public services and retail sector) represents **81,6%** in Denmark and **74,2%** in Italy.

Looking more in detail inside the macro categories of "services", the differences between the two countries appear in a more evident way. In Italy workers employed in **the private services** are the **38,4%** against the **33,2%** of Denmark. Looking at **the numbers related to the retail sector, they**

[6] This macro aggregation comprehends: water supply, severage, waste management; transportation and storage; accommodation and food services activities; information and communication; financial and insurance activities; real estate activities; professional, scientific and technical; administrative and support service activities; arts, entertainment and recreation; other services activities; activities of households and employers; activities of extra territorial organization.

[7] This macro aggregation comprehends: public administration and defence; education; human health and social works activities

are more similar, the **14,6%** and the **15,5%** of the total of occupation respectively in Italy and Denmark. Looking on the contrary at the **public services**, in Denmark the percentage of people employed there is almost **33%** against the **21,2%** in Italy. **These numbers are explained by the higher investment in social expenditures present in Denmark, due to a strong fiscal contribution, which contributes to creating more job opportunities in the public sector.** Finally, the percentage of people employed in the **industry** sector is higher in Italy than in Denmark (**25,9%** vs **18,4%**), due to the most spread presence of manufacturing districts in Italy.

Table 8 - Percentage of workers employed in Italy and Denmark, by sectors

	ITALY		**DENMARK**	
LABOUR MARKET SECTORS	***freq***	***%***	***freq***	***%***
Services - private	8.610,59275	**38,35**	930,5767375	**33,19**
Services - public	4.754,3089	**21,18**	924,6797175	**32,98**
Industry	5.799,6815	**25,83**	515,1928	**18,38**
Retail	3.286,5041	**14,64**	433,6390	**15,46**
Total of occupation	22.451,0876	**100,00**	2.804,0883	**100,00**

Source: own elaboration on European Union Labour Force Survey, 2019

Now the following table compares the workforce characteristics in Italy and Denmark.

The two main important and significant differences between the two countries relate workers' ***sex*** and ***age*****: looking at the labour market participation, in the Danish labour market there are more women and more younger people employed, in comparison to Italy.** First of all, in general, female workforce is higher in Denmark than in Italy (**49.4%** against **44.4% on the total of occupation**). The distribution of female workforce is also quite different in the comparison between the two countries, as seen in the next tables. The percentage of women employed in the **retail** sector in the two countries is similar (**14%** in Italy and **14.9%** in Denmark). On the same line, also the female quota *inside* the sector is quite similar: **42.9%** in Italy and **45%** in Denmark. In both the cases, thus, the retail sector results to have not an extremely high presence of female workforce. However, in Italy the majority of women is employed in the private services (**40.9%**), while in Denmark almost the half of the female workforce (**49%**) is employed in the **public services**, while in Italy the percentage is only the **32.9%**. This difference is significant because it means that if women are present in the labour market, they will be mostly present in the public service in Denmark and in the private in Italy.

Table 9 – Sectoral distribution by sex (% by column)

GENDER	PRIVATE SERVICES	PUBLIC SERVICES	INDUSTRY	RETAIL	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
Male	**51.62**	**36.13**	**78.34**	**57.17**	**55.54**
Female	**48.38**	**63.87**	**21.66**	**42.83**	**44.36**
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

Table 10 – Sectoral distribution by sex (% by column)

GENDER	PRIVATE SERVICES	PUBLIC SERVICES	INDUSTRY	RETAIL	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
Male	**57.96**	**28.10**	**76.12**	**54.96**	**50.61**
Female	**42.04**	**71.90**	**23.88**	**45.04**	**49.39**
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

The ***age*** distribution of the workforce in the countries is also very different. Danish labour market presents a much higher percentage of people between 15 and 24 years old employed in the labour market: **16.9%** vs **4.5%**. These numbers are explained **in particular by the fact that young people use to work – mostly part-time – also while still studying. This is especially true for the retail sector, where part-time contracts are very much diffused.** Because of this, also in the retail sector the numbers between the two countries are very different, as visible in the next tables. In Denmark, the percentage of people between 15 and 24 year old employed in retail is of **37,5%, while in Italy is only of 5,8%.** On the contrary, in the Italian case the number of people employed in the retail is much higher in the age category comprised between 25 and 54 years old (71,5%). For the same category, Denmark presents a percentage of 45.3%. This distinction is very important, especially in terms of job quality, as will be seen. In fact, in a "difficult" sector like the retail, being very young foresees different need that can be more easily satisfied; or, on the other way round, the difficulties of the retail sector can be more easly managed if so young (see chapter 8).

Table 11 - Distribution by age in Italy (% by column)

AGE	PRIVATE SERVICES	PUBLIC SERVICES	INDUSTRY	RETAIL	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
Between 15&24	**5.44**	**1.61**	**5.20**	**5.73**	**4.55**
Between 25&54	**71.06**	**63.48**	**74.56**	**71.53**	**70.28**
Between 55&64	**19.75**	**31.05**	**17.86**	**18.22**	**21.63**
Over 64	**3.76**	**3.86**	**2.39**	**4.52**	**3.55**
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

Table 12 - Distribution by age in Denmark (% by column)

AGE	PRIVATE SERVICES	PUBLIC SERVICES	INDUSTRY	RETAIL	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
Between 15&24	**18.59**	**8.40**	**10.87**	**37.51**	**16.87**
Between 25&54	**56.59**	**63.27**	**61.52**	**45.35**	**57.88**
Between 55&64	**20.77**	**25.37**	**24.05**	**14.19**	**21.83**
Over 64	**4.05**	**2.97**	**3.57**	**2.94**	**3.42**
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

Looking at the ***country of birth,*** Italy presents a higher percentage of foreign people (meant as born in extra EU15 countries) than Denmark (**12.7%** vs **7.2%**), and this is true also in the retail sector, where, in comparison, Italy presents a higher quota of foreign workers than Denmark (**9%** against **5.8%**).

Table 13 - Distribution by country of birth in Italy (% by column)

COUNTRY OF BIRTH	PRIVATE SERVICES	PUBLIC SERVICES	INDUSTRY	RETAIL	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
Native & EU15	**82.48**	**95.48**	**85.27**	**91.00**	**87.38**
Extra EU15	**17.52**	**4.52**	**14.73**	**9.00**	**12.62**
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

Table 14 - Distribution by country of birth in Denmark (% by column)

COUNTRY OF BIRTH	PRIVATE SERVICES	PUBLIC SERVICES	INDUSTRY	RETAIL	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
Native & EU15	**90.43**	**93.93**	**93.79**	**94.28**	**92.83**
Extra EU15	**9.57**	**6.07**	**6.21**	**5.72**	**7.17**
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

Regarding the ***educational level***, Denmark presents a consistently higher percentage of people with tertiary and post tertiary education than Italy: **38.7%** against **23.1%.** This numbers are not surprising considering the general low percentage of graduates in Italy, compared with the average of European countries. In both the countries, the majority of people employed in the retail sector has lower secondary or upper secondary education level (respectively, **31.6%** and **53.2%** in Italy and **31,2%** and **46.4%** in Denmark). The percentage of workers in the retail who have a tertiary or post tertiary education level is higher in Denmark than in Italy (**15,4%** vs **11,2%**). In Denmark is however quite common for young people who have just finished their university career to have one (or more) **"gap year/s", in which they can figure out what to do next – and thus it is very common that they work, usually part-time, in low-skilled sectors such as retail**. However, it is quite interesting that the numbers inside the retail sector are almost the same in Italy and Denmark, considering how much different is the education system and how much more post graduated Denmark has compared to Italy.

Of course, in both the countries the majority of graduates people work in the private or in the public services (**36.5%** and **46%** in Italy and **30,9%** and **50,9%** in Denmark), even if once again the percentage in the public services is higher in Denmark.

Table 15 - Distribution by educational level in Italy (% by column)

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	PRIVATE SERVICES	PUBLIC SERVICES	INDUSTRY	RETAIL	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
No education	**0.54**	**0.07**	**0.46**	**0.65**	**0.43**
Primary	**2.49**	**0.41**	**3.25**	**2.60**	**2.22**
Lower-secondary	**26.74**	**11.51**	**38.62**	**31.65**	**26.98**
Upper-secondary	**46.84**	**39.75**	**47.55**	**53.19**	**46.32**
Post sec/non tert.	**0.90**	**1.69**	**0.63**	**0.72**	**0.98**
Tertiary and post	**22.49**	**46.57**	**9.5**	**11.19**	**23.06**
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

Table 16 - Distribution by educational level in Denmark (% by column)

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	PRIVATE SERVICES	PUBLIC SERVICES	INDUSTRY	RETAIL	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
No education	**2.77**	**1.52**	**1.47**	**1.21**	**1.87**
Primary	**3.77**	**0.91**	**2.61**	**5.47**	**2,88**
Lower-secondary	**16.43**	**6.91**	**18.21**	**31.18**	**15.93**
Upper-secondary	**39.68**	**32.12**	**51.57**	**46.43**	**40.33**
Post sec/non tert.	**0.37**	**0.11**	**0.39**	**0.32**	**0.28**
Tertiary and post	**36.98**	**58.43**	**25.75**	**15.39**	**38.71**
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

5.3. Labour contracts and skill levels

Looking at the variable of the ***type of contract,*** **for the purpose of this analysis are considered only the employees, and not the autonomous workers.** Thus, commenting the employees, the following tables focus on the distinction between being employed with permanent or fixed-term contract, to see the level of external flexibility present in the two labour market, and looking inside the retail sector. In Italy, the percentage employed with fixed-term contract in the retail is of **16.6%,** while in Denmark of **16.2%. This numbers are very similar, but actually interesting exactly for this reason.** In fact, looking at the private and the industry sectors, it is evident that the percentage of people employed with fixed-term contracts is lower in Denmark than in Italy. This is because, as explained in chapter 4, in Denmark it is much more common to hire people with permanent contracts than in Italy. However, in the case of the retail the percentages in the two countries are more in line, once again because the percentage of young people who works in the retail sector for shorter period (while studying or during their gaps years) is higher, as seen. It is however worth to remind also in here that this data, in the Danish case, is not necessarily perfectly useful to make an evaluation on the level of

external flexibility present in the country. In fact, as said, **the more liberal labour regulations in Denmark makes much easier, in comparison to Italy, to fire workers, even if they are employed with a permanent contract.**

The higher level of easiness in finding a permanent job in Denmark is confirmed also looking at the data that measure **the percentage of people who works with fixed-term contracts because it was not possible to find an alternative foreseeing being employed with permanent contracts.**

Table 17 - Distribution by type of contract (duration) in Italy (% by column)

TYPE OF CONTRACT	PRIVATE SERVICES	PUBLIC SERVICES	INDUSTRY	RETAIL	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
Perm./unlimited cont.	**80.59**	**87.63**	**86.41**	**83.45**	**84.37**
Temporary job	**19.41**	**12.37**	**13.59**	**16.58**	**15.63**
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

Table 18 - Distribution by type of contract (duration) in Denmark (% by column)

TYPE OF CONTRACT	PRIVATE SERVICES	PUBLIC SERVICES	INDUSTRY	RETAIL	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
Perm./unlimited cont.	**90.11**	**87.05**	**91.31**	**83.76**	**88.21**
Temporary job	**9.89**	**12.95**	**8.69**	**16.24**	**11.79**
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

Looking at the ***distinction between part-time and full time,*** first of all the two labour markets results to be very different in general, with Denmark presenting a significantly higher percentage of part-time workers: **28.2%**, while in Italy they are the **19.6%.** Looking inside the different sectors, the percentage of people working with part-time contracts in the Italian retail sector is remarkable: **21.7%,** but still lower than in the whole private service sector (**27.2%**). In Denmark, the spread of part-time contracts in the retail sector is incredibly high (and higher than Italy): **42.2%, much higher also in comparison with all the other sectors** (private services: **28.9%**; public services: **30.2%**; industry: **10.2%**).

It is important in here also to look at the data of the involuntary part-time rate, meant as the percentage of people who is hired with a part-time contract because they could not find a job being employed with a full-time contract. The picture that emerges from the data shows a situation in which the **Italian workers, much more than the Danish ones, are forced to work with part-time contracts even when they would prefer not, and this is true for all the sectors considered in here**. In the retail sector, the percentage is of 61,7% in Italy and 5.9% in Denmark; in the industry, 53,1% in Italy and 6,5% in Denmark; in the private services, 69,5% in Italy and 9,9% in Denmark; and finally, in the public services, 55,3% in Italy and 13% in Denmark.

Table 19 - Distribution by type of contract (part-time/full-time distinction) in Italy (% by column)

PART-TIME/FULL-TIME CONTRACT	PRIVATE SERVICES	PUBLIC SERVICES	INDUSTRY	RETAIL	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
Full-time job	**72.70**	**82.06**	**91.66**	**78.31**	**80.44**
Part-time job	**27.30**	**17.94**	**8.34**	**21.69**	**19.56**
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

Table 20 - Distribution by type of contract (part-time/full-time distinction) in Denmark (% by column)

PART-TIME/FULL-TIME CONTRACT	PRIVATE SERVICES	PUBLIC SERVICES	INDUSTRY	RETAIL	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
Full-time job	**71.12**	**69.77**	**89.76**	**57.74**	**71.78**
Part-time job	**28.88**	**30.23**	**10.24**	**42.26**	**28.22**
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

Finally, it is now analysed the ***skills level***. In Denmark the percentage of high skilled workers covers almost half of the total employment (**50%**), while in Italy they are the **37.5%,** and the majority of workers are categorised as "manual high sill workers" (**45.2%**). It is interesting, however, how in Denmark the percentages of the high skilled workers , despite the labour sectors in which they are employed, are higher than in Italy. Looking in detail at **retail sector,** in both the countries the majority of workers are manual high skilled (**68%** and **55.4%** in Denmark). However, what is most interesting regards the percentage of the other two categories, where Denmark presents higher values for both high skilled and low skilled workers (respectively, **28.4%** and **16.2%** against the **22%** and **10%** of Italy). The differences in the skills level are due to the differences inside the organization of the work itself. Denmark presents a much higher presence of big chain, especially in the retail sector, while Italy is characterised by a strong spread of medium, small and micro firms. The skills required in bigger workplaces are thus more and more differentiated.

Table 21 - Distribution by skills level in Italy (% by column)

SKILLS LEVEL	PRIVATE SERVICES	PUBLIC SERVICES	INDUSTRY	RETAIL	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
High skilled	**36.74**	**63.56**	**25.17**	**22.05**	**37.55**
Manual high skilled	**40.26**	**29.41**	**53.14**	**67.99**	**45.21**
Low skilled	**23.00**	**7.02**	**21.69**	**9.97**	**17.24**
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

Table 22 - Distribution by skills level in Denmark (% by column)

SKILLS LEVEL	PRIVATE SERVICES	PUBLIC SERVICES	INDUSTRY	RETAIL	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
High skilled	**52.52**	**63.42**	**39.67**	**28.41**	**49.96**
Manual high skilled	**25.99**	**32.23**	**36.07**	**55.43**	**34.67**
Low skilled	**21.49**	**4.35**	**24.26**	**16.16**	**15.37**
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

The following comparison takes into account different occupational statuses in **the retail sector**, in both Italy and Denmark, looking at the **different companies' sizes**. Companies that have a number of workers comprised between 1 and 19 are identified as "small"; between 20 and 49 workers as "medium" and with more than 50 workers as "large". The choice to set up these thresholds (different from the usual categories of 1-9 "micro", 10-49 "small", 50-249 "medium" and > 250 "large" companies) relies on the reason that *FoodForYou* usually employs a number of workers comprised between 20 and 49 workers. Thus, the aim was to look at this macro aggregation in order look at a higher number of observations that are more similar to the case study selected, to grasp differences or similarities.

In general, retail sector in Italy presents a much less variegated presence of the different occupation selected: the vast majority of people employed in this labour sector are shop salesperson (**89.4%**), while cashers and ticket clerks are the **8%** and other sales workers only **2.7%.** In Denmark, on the contrary, of the total of people employed in the retail sectors shop salespersons and cashers and ticket clerks are present more or less the same (respectively, **50.4%** and **44.1%**). As expected, looking inside the different sizes of the company, it emerges that in the Italian case the gap between these two categories of occupation reduces as the company dimension grows (**92.5%** vs **4.8%** in small companies; **79.9%** vs **17.7%** in medium companies; **77.2%** vs **20%** in large companies). The biggest the company, the less the salesperson because biggest workplaces need more and different tasks to be solved. The same tendency is in fact present also in Denmark (**67.4%** vs **25.6%** in small companies; **32.5%** vs **64.3%** in medium companies; **35.7%** vs **59.5%** in large companies). This tendency is in any case lower in Italy than in Denmark. However, between small Italian and Danish companies the differences in the occupations is more evident, considering that in the first case there is basically only one type of occupation (shop salespersons).

Finally, the total of employees in the retail sector in Italy is mainly present in small companies (77.6% vs 11.4% in medium companies and 10.9% in large companies), while in Denmark this distribution is less sharp (49.2% in small companies, 27.3% in medium companies, 23.5% in large companies),

due to the strong spread of very small companies operating in the retail sector in Italy, also run by single families, while in Denmark the presence of medium and larger companies is stronger.

Table 23 - Distribution by employee's occupation in Italy (% by column)

Occupation	Between 1&19 workers – small		Between 20&49 workers – medium		50 or more workers – large		Total of occupation	
	freq	*%*	*freq*	*%*	*freq*	*%*	*freq*	*%*
Shop salespersons	6204	**92.51**	786	**79.88**	735	**77.70**	7725	**89.45**
Cashers	322	**4.80**	174	**17.68**	190	**20.08**	686	**7.94**
Other sales workers	180	**2.68**	24	**2.44**	21	**2.22**	225	**2.61**
Total	6706	**100.00**	984	**100.00**	946	**100.00**	8636	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

Table 24 - Distribution by employee's occupation in Denmark (% by column)

Occupation	Between 1&19 workers – small		Between 20&49 workers – medium		50 or more workers – large		Total of occupation	
	freq	*%*	*freq*	*%*	*freq*	*%*	*freq*	*%*
Shop salespersons	847	**67.44**	227	**32.52**	214	**35.67**	1288	**50.43**
Cashers	321	**25.56**	449	**64.33**	357	**59.50**	1127	**44.13**
Other sales workers	88	**7.01**	22	**3.15**	29	**4.83**	139	**5.44**
Total	1256	**100.00**	698	**100.00**	600	**100.00**	**2554**	**100.00**

Source – Author's own elaboration on the EULFS (2019)

5.4. Job quality indices in the retail sector

As outlined before, the secondary data analysis is necessary to evaluate at a larger scale (Vartanian, 2010) the information on job quality in the retail sector, and also among different countries. **This step is fundamental to collocate the single case study in a more general framework, also to understand if there are particular similarities or differences between the case study and the retail sector taken as a whole.**

In order to look at job quality inside the retail sector, the Eurofound's ***European Working Conditions Survey*** has been analysed especially to: compare the two countries selected as units of analysis, Italy and Denmark; compare the retail sector with other sectors of the labour market; look at the differences in job quality depending on companies' size.

5.4.1. Eurofound job quality indices: structure and methodology

Eurofound (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Condition), set up by the European Council, deepens issues related to job quality, industrial relations and labour changes occurring in Europe (Ipsos, 2015). Among other surveys, the *European working conditions survey* (EWCS) monitors, looking at the European countries, working conditions through an ad hoc survey, **which investigates themes related both to the quality of the employment and the quality of work**

(De Bustillo *et al*, 2011; Gossetti, 2012). EWCS has been carried on every five years starting from 1991.

Due to the spread of COVID-19, the last available survey (sixth edition) is related to 2015. The survey reached out approximately 43,000 workers in 35 countries: the 28 EU Member State plus Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania. **Every questionnaire in the course of the years has been modified and adapted to the new emerging issues related to labour market and working conditions**, even if some "pillar" questions have remained the same, or slightly modified. The last available microdata comprehends 756 variables with a total of 178.905 observations.

What is particularly interesting about this survey is the creation of a series of ***job quality indices.*** Their construction derived from multiple survey items and from aggregation of sub-indices, with their appropriate weights (see Annex I for the list of the specific questions used for the construction of the indices). The proposed indices are:

- **Skills and discretion index.** The index summarizes aspects related to the cognitive dimension, the decision latitude, the organisational participation and training. Some items covers task complexity, problem solving, computer use frequency and learning participation.
- **Social environment index**, that looks at and summarizes aspects related to both positive issues, such as supportive social relationships and management quality, and negative issues, such as adverse social behaviour (bullying, harassment or violence in the workplace).
- **Physical environment index** comprises 13 indicators that looks at posture-related (ergonomic), ambient (vibration, noise, temperature), biological and chemical aspects. Physical environment is an issue which can be more easily increased with specific measures – like for example, safety norms for workers and so forth. Even if it is easier to understand why this index can be particularly important, for example, in manufacturing or industry, in low-skilled jobs of the service sector the repetitiveness of specific actions, heavy lifting, bending *etc*. are very common.
- **Work intensity index,** which looks at quantitative demands, pace determinants and interdependency and emotional demands aspects, which are more required in jobs that involve dealing with people.
- **Prospects index** looks at the employment status, the career prospects, job security and downsizing aspects.

- **Working time quality index** summarizes aspects related to duration, atypical working time, working time arrangements and flexibility. "Duration" refers to long working hours (48 hours or more in a week), long working days (10 hours or more a day) and a lack of a recovery period between two working days. Time arrangements and flexibility, as well as in some cases asocial shifts, are quite common in the retail sector, also due to the high percentage of part-time workers.
- **Earnings index** summarizes two principal aspects: level of earnings and fairness of earnings. The level of earnings is net, without taxes and social insurances contributions. Also, to be coherent with the different cost of living in the countries, monthly earnings are divided by the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) index obtained from Eurostat, to facilitate eventual comparisons among the countries present in the survey.

The following table reports the item used in the construction of the indices[8] (Eurofound, 2012).

Table 25 - Items used in the construction of the indices

Index	Items used in its construction
1. Skills and discretion	Q61A, Q61C, Q49C, Q49E, Q49F, Q50A, Q50B, Q50C, Q51C, Q51E, Q51I, Q51O, Q24H, ef1_isced, isco_08_2
2. Good social environment	Q51A, Q51B, Q58A, Q58B, Q58D, Q58E, Q77E, Q70A, Q70B, Q70C, Q71A, Q71B, Q71C
3. Good physical environment	Q23A, Q23B, Q23C, Q23D, Q23E, Q23F, Q23G, Q23H, Q23I, Q24A, Q24B, Q24C, Q24D, Q24E
4. Work intensity	Q45A, Q45B, Q46A, Q46B, Q46C, Q46D, Q46E, Q51G, Q51L, Q51P, Q24G
5. Prospects	Q77A, Q77C, Q6, Q7
6. Working time quality	Q18, Q32, Q33, Q34, Q35, Q39, Q40, Q43
7. Earnings	EF10, EF11, Q18

Source: Eurofound (2012), Trends in job quality in Europe, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg

For the purpose of this work, all the indices have been taken into considerations. The results are highly aggregated in order to look at a higher number of variables. Indicators are displayed from the lowest to the highest, with the exception of the ***work intensity index*****, where on the contrary a smaller value indicates a better level of job quality.**

[8] For the list of the questions, see Annex I.

In the next paragraphs, job quality indices are first of all compared in Italy and Denmark, in order to describe the general framework of the two countries selected as case studies for this research. Secondly, job quality indices are compared looking at some independent variables created from own elaboration on microdata. These are:

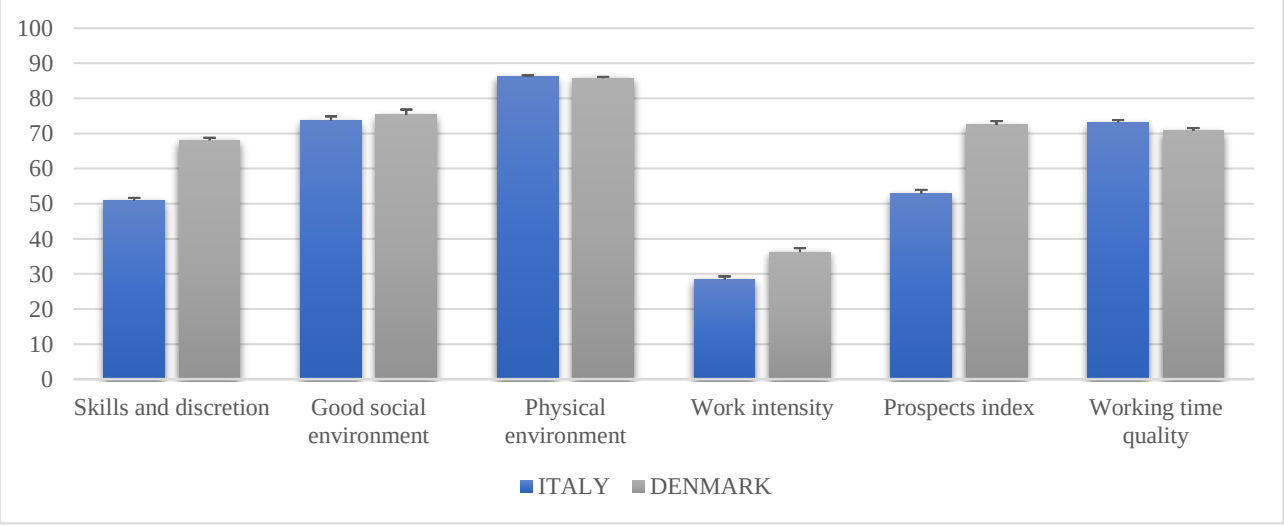
a. An elaboration of the NACE variables: retail sector taken singularly, which represents the sector investigated in this research; a macro aggregation of all the other services; and industry. Agriculture has not been taken into account.

b. New variables created crossing the already used new NACE variables, the employment status (employees and not self-employed ones) and the size of the company (<10, between 10 and 50 and >50 workers), in order to focus on that categories which are more similar to the case study selected (the company *FoodForYou*).

5.4.2. Job quality in Italy and Denmark

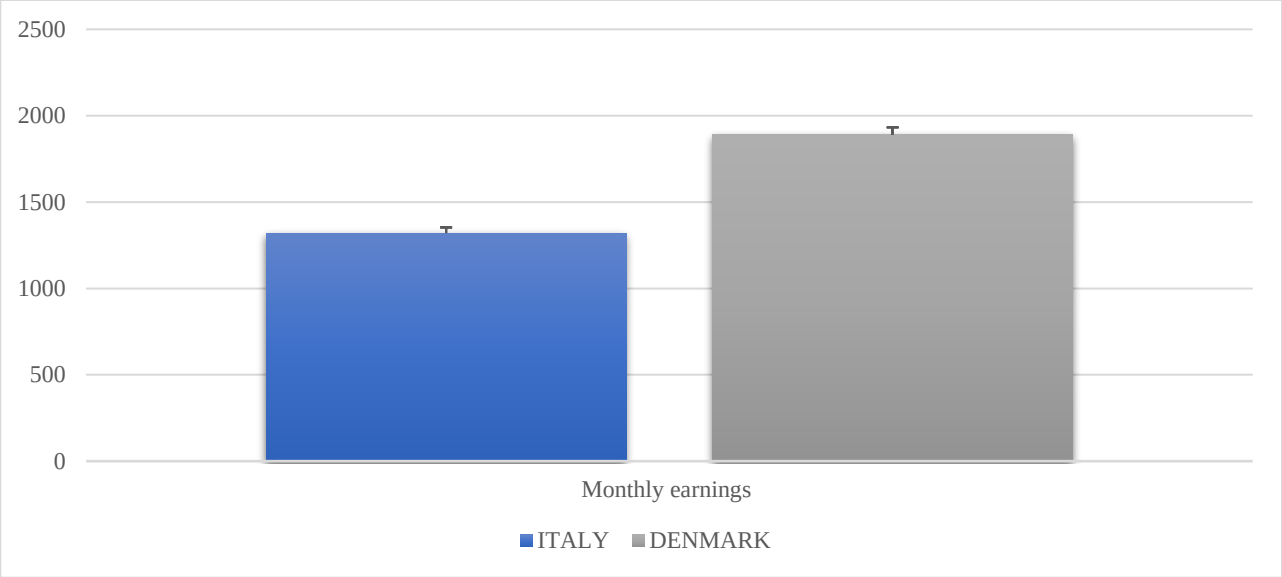
This first comparison looks, in a macro aggregation, to the job quality indices in Italy (N = 7,375) and in Denmark (N = 6,744). In here and in the following graphs the monthly earning index is represented in a separate image to avoid a comparison with a very higher score.

Figure 2 - Job quality indices in Italy and Denmark – graphics with confidence interval



Source: Own elaboration on European Working Condition Survey micro data (2015), Eurofound

Figure 3 - Monthly earnings in Italy and Denmark – graphics with confidence interval



Source: Own elaboration on European Working Condition Survey micro data (2015), Eurofound

Looking at the data, it is evident that some indicators are very similar; however, some differences (that **are significantly relevant according to the confidence interval applied in the analysis**), emerge:

a. The **work intensity index** is much lower in Italy than in Denmark (indicating a better job quality), while **working time quality index** in Italy is slightly higher;

b. The **skills and discretion, the career prospects and monthly earning indices** are all significantly higher in Denmark.

The fact that the two indices described in **a)** indicate a better score in Italy can be explained looking at the flexibility in the labour market (Ibsen, 2010). In fact, in Denmark due to a more liberal regulation of the labour market, also the spread of part-time contracts that foresees a fewer amount of hours is higher. Plus, the opening hours – especially in the private sectors such as retail – are longer. All of this explains a worst working time quality index in Denmark.

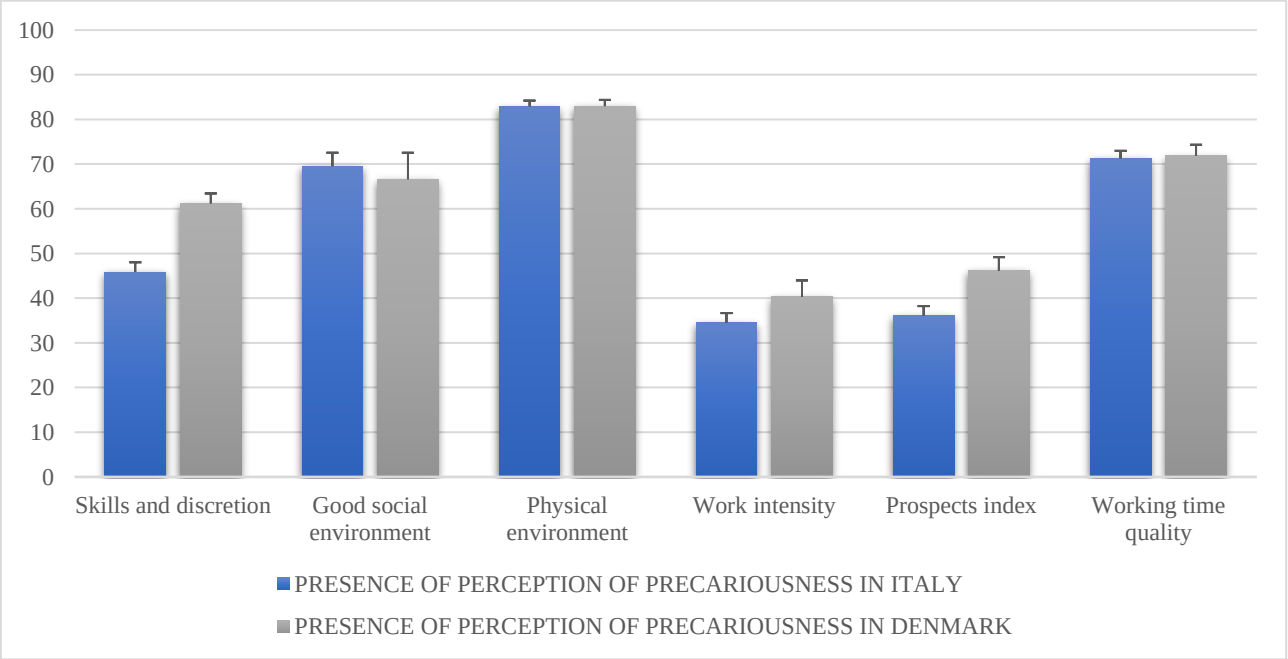
Skills and discretion index's higher values in Denmark, on the other hand, can be explained by a **better match between labour demand and supply**. Danish system has in fact stronger investment and a more structured and targeted training system both on-the-job and off-the-job, more instruments to help people to enter in the labour market, and even a more active role of the trade unions, that not only actively participate in the general growing strategies of the countries with all the relevant institutions, including the education ministries (Andersen, 2018), but who also have a specific counselling career department in order to follow the workers also when already employed.

This aspects can also influence Denmark's higher values on ***prospects index,*** which is particularly significant, and it is justified by a strong presence **of active labour market policies which have helped in building the well-known model of "flexicurity"** (Burroni, Keune, 2011). Denmark has, in fact, strongly invested in the so called *workfare*, with the aim of putting workers who lost their job again in the labour market, especially investing in agencies for job seekers.

The flexicurity model can also affect the sense of **precariousness** perceived by workers. Notwithstanding the fact that precariousness is a personal and subjective perception, it can greatly affect the final perception of job quality from workers' points of view. **The next graph thus reports how job quality indices change even if in presence of the perception of precariousness in Italy and Denmark.**

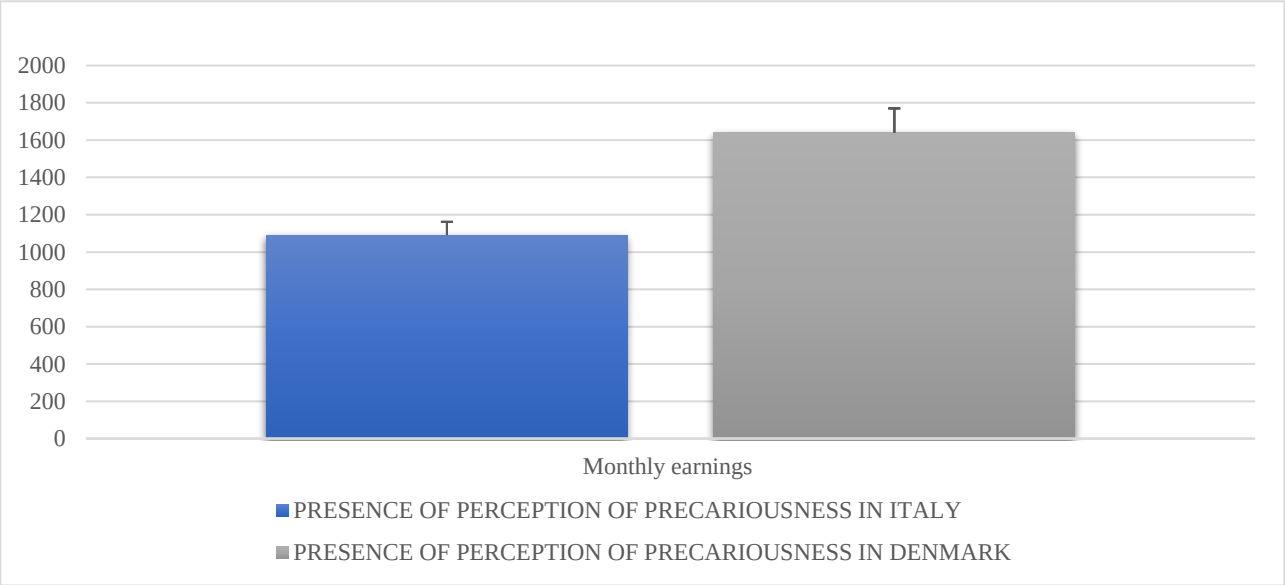
This variable has been constructed from the question 89 of the sixth survey's questionnaire, "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your job? – I might lose my job in the next six months". This question presented 8 possible answers: strongly agree, tend to agree, neither agree nor disagree, tend to disagree, strongly disagree, not applicable, don't know, refusal. To look at a higher number of observations, these options have been grouped in 4 answers, "agree", "neither agree nor disagree", "disagree" and "no answer". Crossing by countries, Denmark presented 3,077 observations and Italy 4,069, and these observations have been then crossed with the job quality indices. To look at the sense of precariousness, the next graph looks at the "agree" column, which presents 278 observations for Denmark and 541 for Italy.

Figure 4 - Job quality indices in relation to perception of precariousness in Italy and Denmark – graphics with confidence interval



Source: Own elaboration on European Working Condition Survey micro data (2015), Eurofound

Figure 5 - Monthly earnings in relation to perception of precariousness in Italy and Denmark – graphics with confidence interval



Source: Own elaboration on European Working Condition Survey micro data (2015), Eurofound

The graphs report all the job quality indices; however, this analysis has focused only on the two dimensions more strictly connected to the sense of precarity; ***prospect*** and ***skills and discretion indices.***

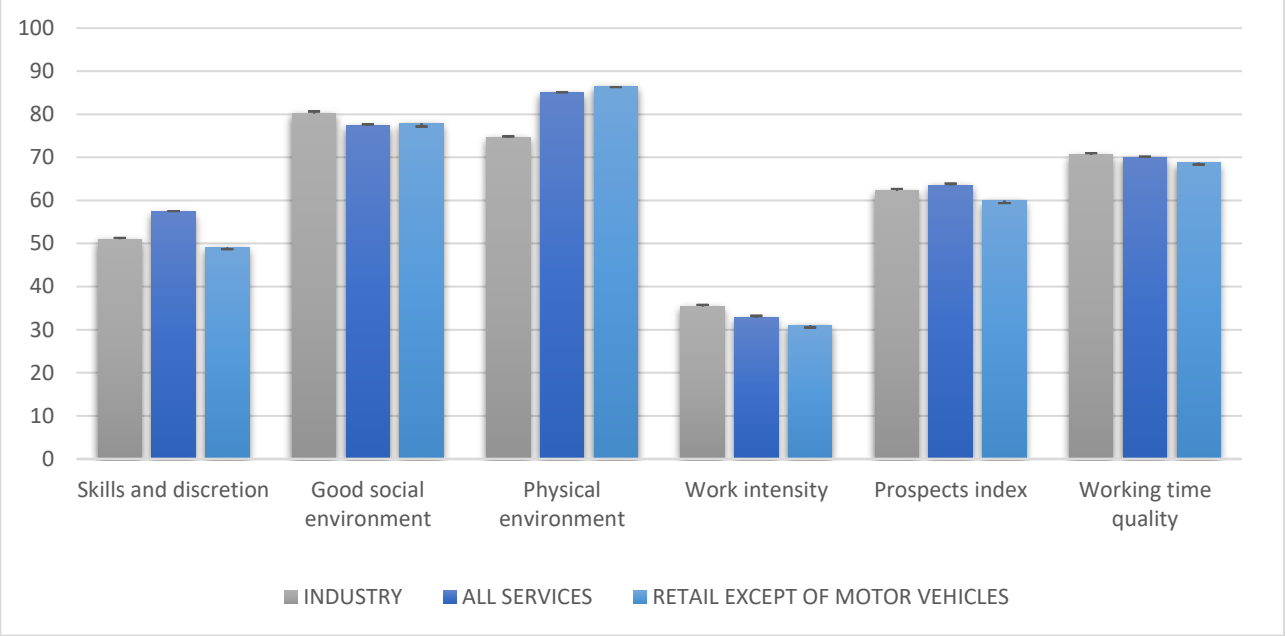
Prospects index in Denmark is significantly higher even for workers who declared to "feel like I can lose my job in the next 6 months": again, this can been explained considering the impact of the presence **of active labour market policies** (Kananen, 2012), which positively affect workers' career prospects and job security.

Skills and discretion index, too, is higher in Denmark. The presence of target training courses both for employees and especially for job-seekers contributes in maintaining a higher level (in comparison to Italy) of discretions and recognition of workers' skills even for those workers who feel a sense of precariousness (deriving from the possibility to lose the job).

5.4.3. Job quality in the retail sector

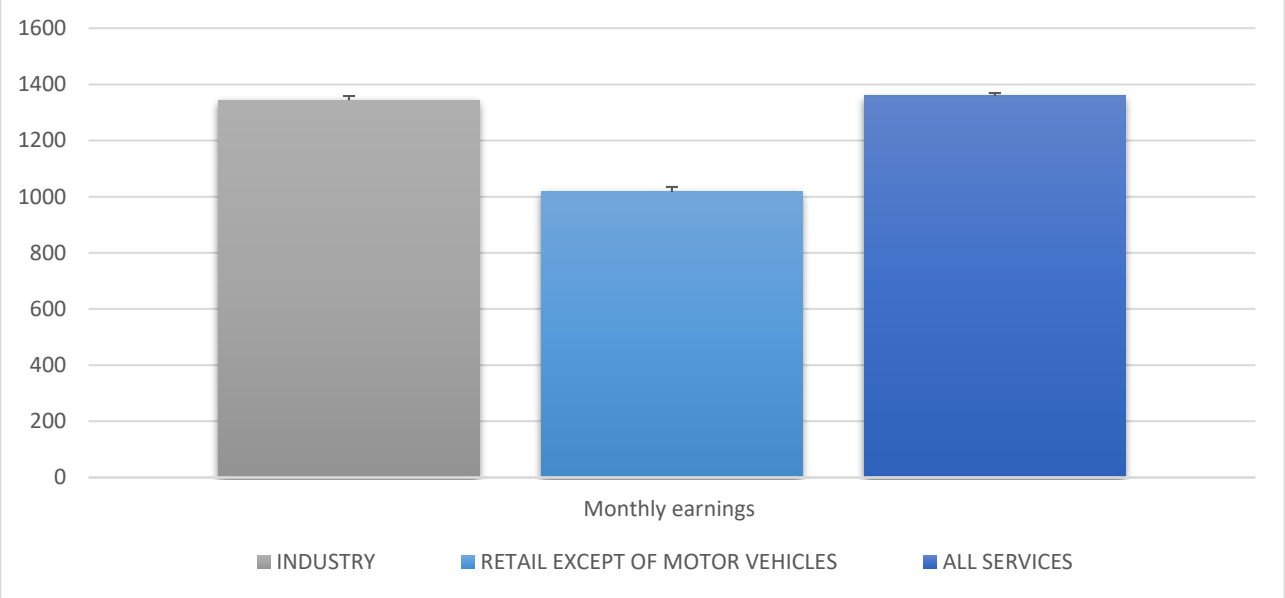
In this paragraph the indices of job quality compare retail sector (taken singularly) with all the other services (aggregated) and industry.

Figure 6 - Job quality indices compared to sectors in the EU countries – graphics with confidence interval



Source: Own elaboration on European Working Condition Survey micro data (2015), Eurofound

Figure 7 - Monthly earnings compared to sectors in the EU countries – graphics with confidence interval



Source: Own elaboration on European Working Condition Survey micro data (2015), Eurofound

Considering that "all services" is a variable highly aggregated, it is not a surprise that **the skills and discretion index** is much lower in the retail sector. One of the most relevant characteristic of service sector, in fact, is that **it includes several sub-sectors** (production, distribution, personal, social services). This aggregation, thus, includes both services to *firms* and services to *households* (Reyneri, 2011), and so different specificities, levels of skills required, organisation of the production and

technology-intensive levels (Fellini, 2017); thus, in the aggregation there are many elements which foresee high skills, affecting the *skills and discretion* index.

There are two significant differences emerging in the retail sector:

a. The **skills and discretion index** is lower both in relation to the services as a whole and in the industry;

b. The good **social environment index is** very similar to services considered as a whole, but lower than in industry.

What is more interesting is the comparison between retail and industry sectors. **Skills and discretion index is in fact slightly lower in the retail sector than in industry, where traditionally one would expect greater standardization and less decision-making autonomy, especially considering the high use of technology, while retail usually involve front-line workers** (Korczynski, 2009).

Thus, retail sector, among the other services, is the more similar to industry in respect to the other services, and **retail's workers can be considered in some sense as "blue collar" workers employed in the industry sector.** This similarity with industry is very interesting. On the one hand, it highlights the high standardization present in the retail sector, especially looking at pace of work and at the low level of skills and discretion. On the other, it points how the presence of costumers, which is an important difference between retail and industry, does not affect so much workers' discretion. In fact, considering the presence of questions such as "Are you able to choose or change your order of tasks?", "Are you consulted before targets for your work are set?", "Are you able to apply your own ideas in your work?", it could be inferred that in the retail sector decision-making autonomy is actually very limited.

On the other hand, with regard to the **good social environment index,** although very similar to the services combined as a whole, it is lower than in the industry sector; however, this difference is not due to the presence of customers, since the questions from which the index was built **concern only the support and the relationships with managers and colleagues;** in particular, question 77E, "I have very good friends at work", can affect retail considering the high turnover rate and work organization based on shifts that could make more difficult to establish good relationships with colleagues.

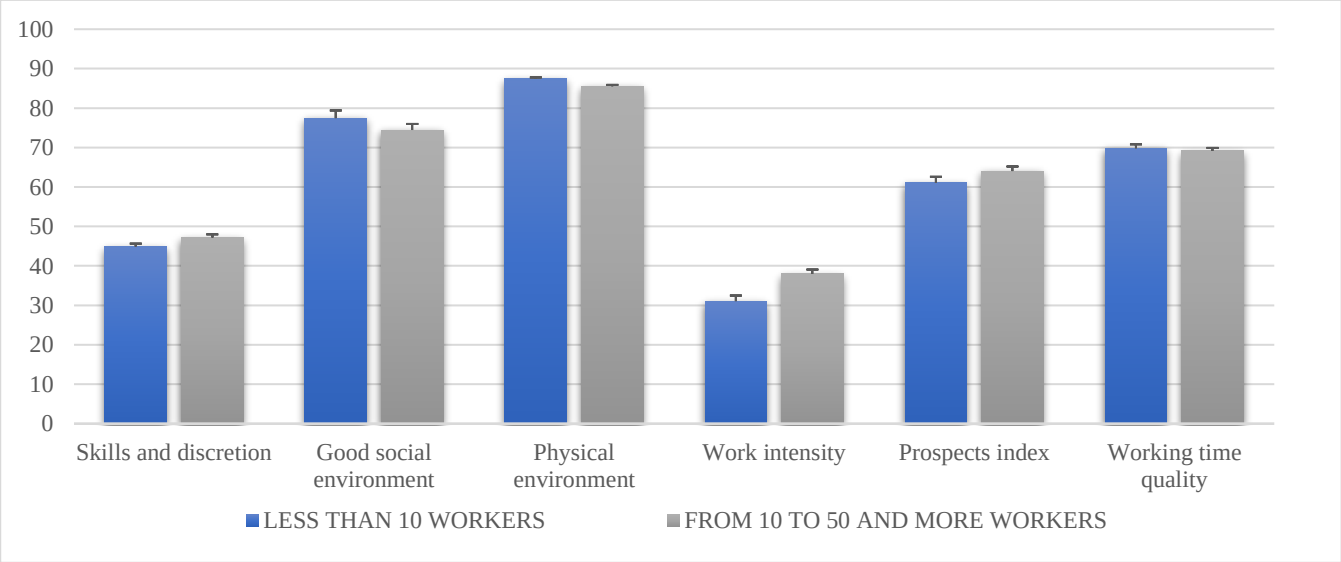
Finally, two other significant differences concern the indices that measures **career prospects and income**, where the lowest value of retail is in fact in line with the literature (Carré *et al.*, 2010), while the physical environment index is slightly higher than the services combined as a whole and, as one would expect, higher than in industry.

Now job quality indices are compared looking at two **different companies' size: less than 10 workers and from 10 to 50 workers and more.**

Initially, the comparison looked at three different companies' sizes: less than 10 workers, between 10 and 50 workers, and over 50 workers. Aggregating the last two groups and crossing them with the job quality indices, however, the results are not different, and thus in here it is reported a graph showing this last macro aggregation.

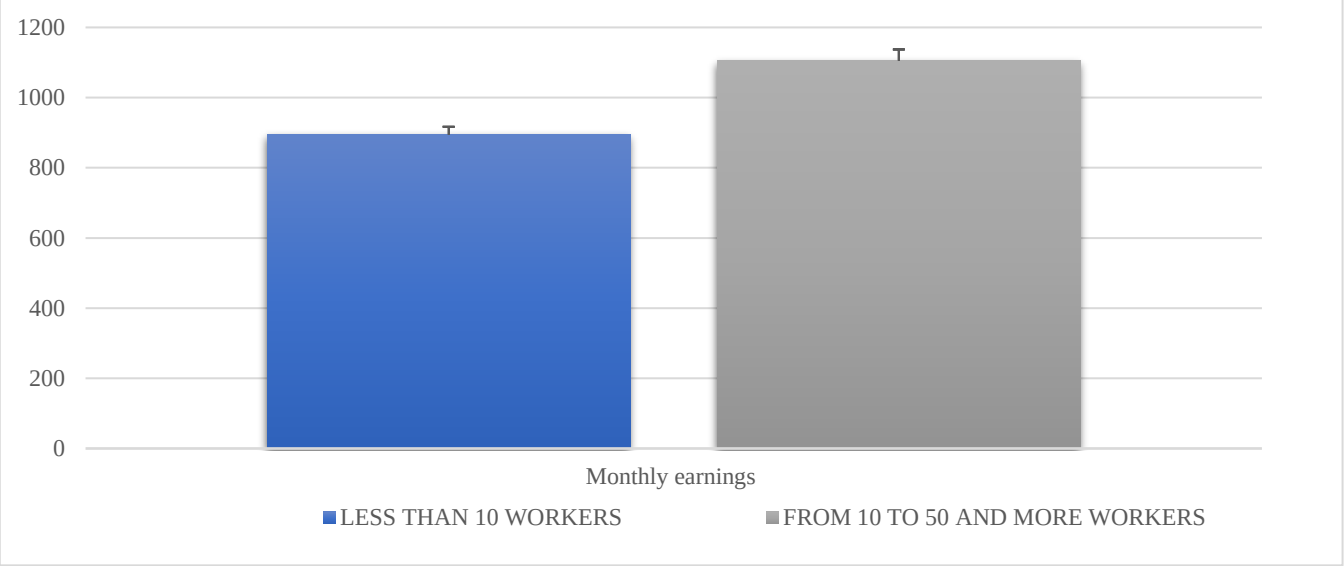
This comparison looks only at the employees, not taking into considerations autonomous workers. In fact, even if autonomous workers represent a high percentage in the retail sector, at least in Italy, in here the scope was to look at those characteristics which are more similar to the case study selected, *FoodForYou*.

Figure 8 - Job quality indices based on companies' size – graphics with confidence interval



Source: Own elaboration on European Working Condition Survey micro data (2015), Eurofound

Figure 9 - Monthly earnings based on companies' size – graphics with confidence interval



Source: Own elaboration on European Working Condition Survey micro data (2015), Eurofound

What emerges from this comparison:

a. **Good social environment index** is higher in company with less than 10 workers than in the category which includes *FoodForYou*. It is worth also to remind that retail, especially in bigger company, present a high level of turnover, something that can affect the social environment in comparison to smaller companies (that, in Italy, are also more likely to be family-company) (ISTAT, 2019).
b. **Physical environment index** is also lower in larger company than in small one, probably due to the presence of specific labour norms that regulate, for example, ergonomic and ambient aspects – that biggest companies cannot easily avoid to respect.
c. Looking at the company's size, a significant difference concerns the lower **work intensity** index (thus indicating a better quality of work) in firms with less than 10 workers; this could be explained considering that in a smaller company it is probably that both the overall workload and the number of customers are lower.

5.5. Final consideration

This quantitative analysis, as outlined, is fundamental for two reasons: on the one hand, to better understand the features of the retail sector, and on the other to have in mind a the framework of the countries selected, both in terms of workforce characteriscts and of job quality indices.

In relation to the first aspect, **the analyses of the workforce characteriscts can really explain why in Denmark some aspects of the job quality could result to be less sever, *in comparison* with**

Italy. In fact, Danish workers fit better with the characteriscts of the retail sector, while in the Italian case the difficulties related especially to the low salaries and the work-life balance are also explained looking at workers' age, for example. Being, in fact, a middle-aged woman who takes care of her family is really different from being a young person who can more easily cope with a high level of flexibility and with low salaries. All of these aspects are better explained, in fact, in chapter 8. Of course the presence of other relevant institutional differences (such as a more structured welfare system in the Danish case) plays a role, as seen in the previous chapter and as will emerge more in detail in the next ones.

Coming to the second aspect, the most interesting hint emerged in here relates **a very high level of standardization present in the retail, low skills and discretion and – as expected also following the literature – low wages.** All of this makes really important to analyse especially the retail under the lenses of job quality – considering that, for some aspects, it presents even more difficult characteriscts also compared to the industry sector, where it is more likely to find research on the job quality. Also**, as already said in the introduction and es better explained in the next chapters, retail sectors presents a series of inner characteristics** that makes more important to understand what institutions can do in order to improve job quality for workers employed in this sector.

VI.

INSIDE A MULTINATIONAL CORPORATION: STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

6.1. Introduction

Considering the difficulties occurred during the fieldwork in Denmark, the insights reported in here principally refer to the Italian case. However, the interviews conducted in Italy have been very useful to understand ***FoodForYou*'s structure and its general characteristics, and many respondents have underlined that, in respect to some aspect, the dynamics are the same in all the countries where the company is present** – something that was partly expected also following the literature on multinational corporations' functioning (Edwards, Marginson and Ferner, 2013).

Starting from this premises, the chapter is structured as follows.

Paragraph 6.2. presents a brief overlook of ***FoodForYou*'s history**, its growth during the years, the countries in which it operates, and describes the main products it sells; in this general presentation, the following sub paragraphs focus on the characteristics of the stores and on the company's business model. All of these insights stands for both Italy and Denmark.

Paragraph 6.3. describes *FoodForYou* **managerial figures** in the two countries, focusing on the company's pyramidal structure, the main roles of the board, the most important figures present at territorial level and the relations occurring between these different figures.

Paragraph 6.4. then looks at one of the aspects that can be different between Italy and Denmark and that represents an important variable in the analysis of the job quality: **the human resource management.** The paragraph describes in particular who are the managerial role in charge of following everything that relates the HRM in the two countries, and the hiring procedures implemented.

After having proposed a framework of the functioning of the company and having underlined the high level of centralization and standardization present in *FoodForYou*, paragraph 6.5. focuses on **the consequences of this company model on the role of the store managers**, taking into account their autonomy especially on the management of the working schedules (Almond, 2011).

Right after, paragraph 6.6., partly anticipating what explained in chapter 7, takes into account **the role of the trade unions** and their position in front of what have been described in the previous paragraphs: the high level of centralization and standardization especially concerning the Human

Resource Management (in particular, the hiring procedures) and the (absence) of autonomy of the stores managers.

Paragraph 6.7. describes the **corporate welfare**, in Italy and in Denmark.

Finally, paragraph 6.8. proposes some final considerations.

6.2. Welcome to *FoodForYou*: history and products

FoodForYou is an international discount retail chain, with its home country in Germany. This company operates **in the sector of the large-scale retail trade, and it is specialised in the sale of food – even if it also sells some house products, such as kitchen tools, gardening equipment, linen and towels and similar items.**

This company has been active in Europe for forty years now, and is currently present in 31 countries, with almost 12,000 stores, and it employs more than 340,000 workers. The first store opened in 1973 in Ludwigshafen-Mundenheim (Germany), and then the company rapidly started to grow: in fact, just after a decade, it already had opened 450 stores in Germany. Right after, *FoodForYou* begun its activity of expansion, crossing the borders and arriving in France, the first host country in which the company came. Up to 2016, the company kept developing all over the European countries, arriving, in 2017, to the point of opening its first store in the United States; in five years, *FoodForYou* counts, now, 165 stores across all the USA. The company owns almost 700 stores in Italy and 120 stores in Denmark.

In general, *FoodForYou* has been described, especially from Italian trade unions' representatives, as **a healthy company, constantly growing**, something that, on average, gives to its workers a sense of security:

> "[…] It is however a solid company, and if you have a family and many expenditures for your house, or for a car…if you have a permanent contract with this company you have a lot of opportunity." (Territorial delegate, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

FoodForYou (and *FoodForYou*'s products) changed significantly during the years. At first, as underlined by Italian trade unions' representatives, the company used to be known as the **"German discount", where costumers were expected to find cheap products, mainly of low quality.** When the company started to grow, however, it begun to invest in **increasing the quality of its products, becoming nowadays a store that can reach different targets of costumers**, also selling products of higher quality: thus, today clients can find both cheaper brands and high quality level products, including territorial specialities.

> "I cannot deny this, *FoodForYou* made a huge investment in the quality of its products. Most of the time, we refer to the company labelling it as a "luxury discount"… Because yes, it is of course cheaper compared to other players, but there are also products that are quite expensive, and good. The thing is that you can find everyone at *FoodForYou* now… Also richer people." (National Secretary, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

During the years, thus, *FoodForYou* has changed its "look" also in the collective imaginary. For example, in Italy the company has implemented agreements with *Slow Food*, a well-known international association that focuses its activity on the food fair production (and fair trade), on food quality and on the development of a major level of awareness on these topics for the consumers. **A decade ago, it was impossible to imagine finding this high level of quality products in a discount**, but *FoodForYou* invested also in this aspect. Thus, it changes its initial "label" in something new, more popular and more appreciated by different types of consumers.

6.2.1. Same stores, same structure: in a word, standardization

Something that is immediately recognizable also from a direct observation is the extremely high standardization present in this company. This is not only true about its management and its key roles, as described in the next paragraphs (6.3.); but it is also true regarding the asset of the stores, that are everywhere organized in the same way. The dimension of the stores are medium-sized, and there are always the same departments and the same structure: when costumers enter into a *FoodForYou* store, being it in Italy or in Denmark, they will find the cash boxes on the right and the fruit and vegetables department at the beginning of the store; and then the bakery department, followed by the frozen department; the fresh meat and fish; and finally, the house products and the personal products.

As reported by a Danish *FoodForYou*'s manager, **the company invests a lot, in fact, on the strength of being "recognisable" everywhere,** in order to allow the costumers to perfectly know where to find what they are looking for, in every shop they visit.

> "Yes, no, they are [the different stores] very much standardized. All the… like…the entire concept of *FoodForYou* is that no matter what store you go in, it always looks like… of course there is something like, a bit different [...] but otherwise, they are pretty much standardized, if you compare the different stores. I guess this is the whole, you know… idea… of *FoodForYou* to be… to find the best way to do things… in the same way in all the stores. So that even if you go in Denmark, or you go to a store in Italy… you will find the same model." (Branding Manager – national level, *FoodForYou*, DK)

The very same aspect has emerged also from the interviews conducted in Italy:

> "So, as in every other multinational corporation, the difference [with non-multinational corporation] is made by the standard, and the standard is determined basically by a common… by being able to maintain a common line in all the stores. Thus, in our stores… you can walk in there and find every day, in every store, the same products; so in what we call "testata zero" [the middle shelf], that is where you can find the items in discount, positioned in the open space when you enter the shop… our objective is exactly that our clients can find, everywhere in Italy and in determined days, those products. So our main goal is to absolutely have a homogeneous standard in all the stores…" (Manager – macro area level, *FoodForYou*, IT)

The same is true regarding the types of workers the costumers will encounter: a group made by, on average, 25 people. **Clients will find cashiers operating in the same way, sometime the store manager, specific employees who have the task of cleaning the store and storekeepers who can walk in the corridors**. *FoodForYou* employees wear the same uniform and the distinguish colours of the company are present everywhere. This is an aspect that has emerged both from the interviews with *FoodForYou*'s managers and from the direct experience, as workers, of the trade unions' delegates present in the stores, both in Denmark and in Italy, as explained in the following quotations, reported in here as examples:

> "Yeah, I feel like it [that *FoodForYou* is a standardised company] because we have to do the same things the same day. And every… as you know, most of the things are very the same and we have to bake the same way and we have to put up all the products the same way and all of that, because those are the rules from headquarters, how we do things. […] So things are very, very the same. Costumers are used to us, they know how we operate, they know how to ask the things they need because maybe they asked something in a store in Copenhagen and then in another one, they received the same answers, so they know how it works…" (Shop Steward, HK HANDEL, DK)

> "I mean, usual costumers know very well that if they do not find a product, they can ask to the worker who put things on the shelves. If they have doubts on some discount product, they can ask to the cashiers… in every store is the same." (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

This high level of standardization, in the job tasks, in the guidelines that indicate how to relate to the costumers, in the dress code and so forth is strictly related to the issue of the autonomy and the

discretion (Eurofound, 2012; Gosetti, 2012). The autonomy perceived by workers, as seen in chapter 2, can really positively affect job quality, reducing the sense of alienation and of being replicable. And the autonomy is also related to the training policies available for workers, that, as better explained in chapter 8, are however very standardized and apparently not influenceable by any national institutions (for example, trade unios' claims).

However, despite the aim to be standardized also in terms of workers' characteristics and tasks, from an insider perspectives there are of course some differences: in particular, on the organization of the work and on the workers' age, as will be explained more deeply in the chapter dedicated to the job quality inside the company (chapter 8).

6.2.2. Company's business model and marketing strategies

In order to describe the company's business model and marketing strategy it is fundamental to make a premises about the market in which the company is collocated: *FoodForYou* operates in the retail sector, and in particular in the food large-scale retail trade. **This is important, because of course the characteristics of sectors can be very different in the host countries: for example, in the Italian panorama, in the food retail sub sector there are few big companies, while it is much more common to find also small enterprises; while in Denmark the spread of big corporations operating in the food retail big chains is higher, in comparison to Italy.**

Operating in the food retail sector, the **business model cannot be perfectly the same**[9].

However, notwithstanding the differences occurring in the different contexts, the company can operate in the same way, at least regarding some aspects: one of this is the **branding and marketing strategy,** a topic where the company has been investing a lot in the last decades, both in Italy and in Denmark, becoming a major player among food retail shops in both the countries.

According to the Italian trade unionists who have been following this company for years, for example, the relative rapidity through which *FoodForYou* has changed its "image" it is a clear example of the accuracy the company put in this process of expansion.

This is really not a surprise, however. In fact, the marketing policies are something very much not connected with the institutional assets of the host countries; the decisions made regarding this

[9] The sub-sector of the *food* is one of the few that can vary according to costumers' preferences and cultural differences (Edwards and Ferner, 2002; Pulignano and Keune, 2015): thus it is already impossible to find a perfect replication of the products it sells. This aspect already partly answers whether there is similarity or a difference between home country and host countries' level of autonomy: however, even if the marketing strategies are part of those aspects where the level of autonomy is high, it is also true that this particular element does not affect in any way the job quality for the employees – thus, in this case, the prominence of the different institutional characteristics is something that, despite being important, does not have direct consequences on workers.

aspect are set at the home country level and easily replicated everywhere. This is even truer considering that at first *FoodForYou's* products were labelled in the original language, a clear centralized marketing strategy. Thus, at least regarding the policies related to the branding, *FoodForYou* applies the strategy of the *replication,* that implies the adaptation of the same functioning at every local subsidiaries, creating **synergies for *horizontal integration*, with subsidiaries acting in same way also in different countries** (Edwards, Marginson and Ferner, 2013) (see Chapter 2). As seen later, this strategy does not apply only for the branding, but in general for all those aspects that are less embedded with the host countries institutions.

This element has emerged both in Italy and in Denmark:

> "They have been especially smart regarding the marketing, they made a 360° strategy, in the labour market. It is not just about being "good" in selling your products and items… you have to be able to change the vision of who is around you, and you have to do that through methods that… When I was in charge of the sales… I used to see them, to really feel them [the company's strategies] […] So yes, maybe, for this specific topic I felt more standardization because, you know, it was like "we must go there". (Manager – macro area level, *FoodForYou,* IT)

> "Since we first came in Denmark, we had several competitors, especially because there were already large food retail chain. But we invested a lot on our marketing strategies… starting from our "catching" flyers, to the implementation of the website, the social media channels… thus we became more known in the country. We needed to do what all the other *FoodForYou* in Europe already did or were doing; we already knew it was a winning strategy." (Branding Manager – national level, *FoodForYou,* DK)

6.3. A centralized and pyramidal company

Several insights have emerged regarding the corporation's main figures from the interviews to the Italian company's managers.

In Italy, *FoodForYou* presents a highly centralized structure, with a national headquarter in Verona and 10 macro territorial areas, thus 10 territorial Head Quarters, from now on defined as "districts" – in Italy defined as "macro aree", coincident with some macro groups of geographical regions: Anagni (that comprehends all the stores present in the regions of Marche, Abruzzo, Umbra, Lazio and Campania), Arcole (Western Veneto, Trentino Alto Adige, East Lombardia), Biandrate (some areas of Lombardia and Piemonte), Misterbianco (Sicily and Malta), Massa Lombarda (South Veneto, Emilia Romagna and North Marche), Molfetta (Puglia, Calabria, Campania, Molise), Pontedera

(Tuscany and Sardinia), Sesto al Reghena (Friuli Venezia Giulia and East Veneto), Somaglia (some areas of Lombardia and Emilia Romagna), Carmagnola (some areas of Piemonte, Valle d'Aosta, West Liguria).

The Head Quarter has a pyramidal structure, where, at the top, there is the President of the company; then, the main decisions are made by a board, composed by six Heads of Departments.

The first Department follows everything that concerns the Human Resource Management, starting from the hiring and firing procedures, the management of the workers' contracts, some financial aspects and so forth.

Then there are the Departments dedicated to the sales; to the logistics (meant as the coordination of the distribution of the products); to the supply chain; to the real estate and property, in charge of developing new projects, new stores, of following the bureaucratic aspects with the municipalities and of controlling the maintenance of the structure themselves; and finally the marketing department.

In a smaller scale, in the regional districts the managerial structure reflects the same of the Head Quarter: thus, each one is guided by the area/district manager, who is in charge of the management and of the coordination of all the departments present in the district itself.

The coordination, thus, happens both vertically and horizontally (Fernie, Sparks, 2014)**:** the replication of the very same managerial figures from the national Head Quarter to the territorial districts consents to maintain a **constant communication between the two; and each department share its policies and strategies with the others,** in order to collectively operate to make the company grow.

> "Each district follows the inputs coming from the Head Quarter, let's say all about all the goals that must be fulfilled, and they can be of different nature. Then, usually we confront with each other, between different regional directions, I mean." (Manager – macro area level, *FoodForYou*, IT)

Thus, in synthesis, **the main general guidelines comes from the German Head Quarter, are then replicated, or** adapted (when it is not possible to do otherwise) **to the host countries and then,** sometimes, re-adapted in the different macro areas.

This last passage is however quite rare, as emerged in the interviews many time and regarding several aspects:

> "I can tell you everything you need to know about this company, you do not need to ask to someone else in the territory. *FoodForYou* is the same everywhere, they act the same,

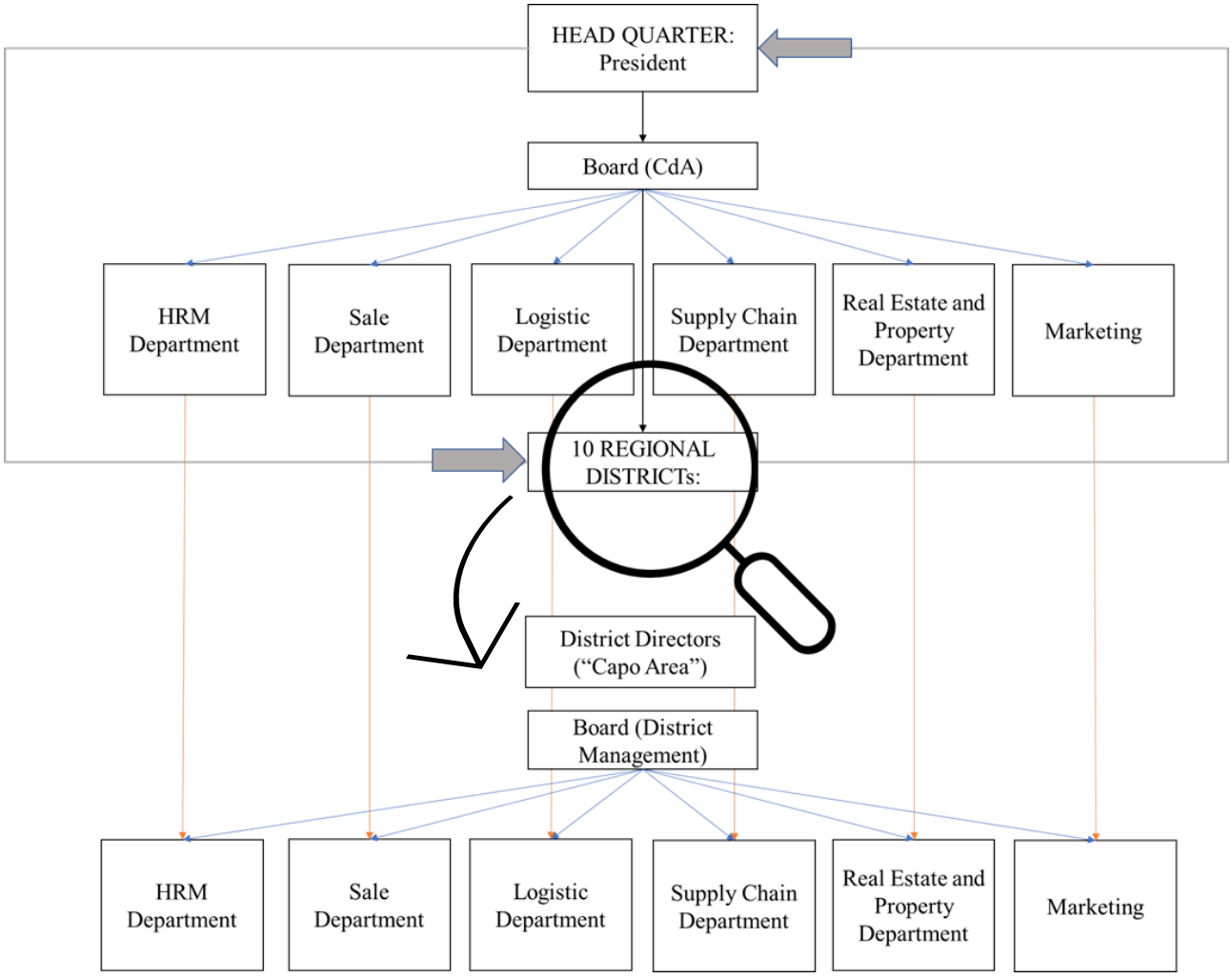
think the same, operate the same, every time and for every aspect they have to follow the same procedures and most of the time they have to ask to someone who is in a higher position of the pyramid." (National Secretary, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

This however means that, regionally speaking, there are not many differences. This is not a surprise, but, at least for the Italian case, this aspect is relevant in terms of job quality.

In particular, the potential issues concerning the lack of the territorial differences had emerged especially regarding the corporate welfare, as explained later in paragraph 6.7.

This lack of differences, or even better, this strong standardization, affecting the corporate welfare play a role on the job quality, too: in fact, a more targeted corporate welfare policies can positively affect both the earnings (with economic premiums) and the work-life balance (with specific services for the family care, for example nursery).

Figure 10 - FoodForYou flowchart



Source: Own elaboration based on the information collected through the interviews with managers and through secondary desk research

The managerial figures described so far are very similar in Denmark (Chief Commercial Officer, IT-Supporter Manger, Accounting, finance and tax, marketing and Human Resource Management department), confirming that on the organization of the top-level managerial figures *FoodForYou* adopts a perfect form of replication:

> "Every store has a store manager who responds to a district manager. Then there are the sales manager, the regional director, and then they all report to the chief operating officer, at top level. And finally there is the CEO. Then there is the finance director and the HRM director in charge of labour law, HRM development and engagement, training, education and personal benefits. And finally there is the team of recruitment employment branding that develops all the concepts, in all the stores." (Branding Manager – national level, *FoodForYou*, DK)

Internationally speaking, the horizontal coordination remains, because the Heads of the host countries Departments use to meet, to share their best practice and to confront on their strategies. This is especially true regarding those aspects where there can be possible differences due to different institutional contexts, for example, once again, corporate welfare policies.

> "Yes, we meet once a month with our peers in the other countries… especially to talk about those themes that can be more different. For example, we exchange what we consider as our best practices, because maybe we can take inspiration from other ways to do things… for example, in relation to the welfare policies implemented by the corporation…" (Responsible of Industrial Relations – national level, *FoodForYou,* IT)

In both the countries, *FoodForYou* seems to have a very similar structure underlining a marginal managerial autonomy, and **confirming the high level of standardization present, at least, in some aspects, according to the culturalist approach** (Edwards and Ferner, 2002). However, as explained in the followings paragraphs, the two countries selected as macro institutional context happen to be quite strong and structured in some aspects – in particular, their industrial relations' systems. Because of this, *FoodForYou* needs to adopt different strategies depending on the different aspects it manages in the host countries.

6.4. *FoodForYou*'s Human Resource Management

This section describes the Human Resource Management of the company. It starts with the analysis of the main managerial figures of the HRM Department; then, it focuses on the hiring procedures implemented by the company, and finally it tries to give an answer about the question of the high (or low) presence of standardization regarding this aspect.

6.4.1. HRM managerial figures

From the Italian fieldwork, it has been possible to collect several hints about how *FoodForYou* Humans Resource Management Department is structured.

HRMD has a leader at the Head Quarter level. This leader it thus responsible not only of governing the human resource management at the central level, but also to coordinate all the Head of the HRMD departments at macro area/district level.

From the interviews it has emerged that *FoodForYou*'s HRM is considered divided in two parts: a "hard" part and a "soft" part.

The first one includes the **legal office,** responsible of everything that concerns the normative aspects and the right application of the labour laws. This is the office, thus, that more than others has to be perfectly aware of all the changes that can occur in the **labour market regulations of the host countries, that can change due to different legislators and political actors or due to external reasons – and the spread of COVID-19 is a clear example of this**. According to the company's managers, in fact, this specific office significantly struggled during the period of the pandemic:

> "You can imagine how hard it was. It has been particularly challenging in the last years, with all the new restrictions and laws about the pandemic period… Also because, they first of all had to understand what was going on, when nobody was really understanding what was happening… and plus, we are a gigantic company, and we always have to replicate what we do everywhere. It was not easy at all." (Responsible for the Human Resource Management – national level, *FoodForYou*, IT).

The consequences of these (understandable) difficulties had of course an impact on workers' lives too, as better explained in chapter 9.

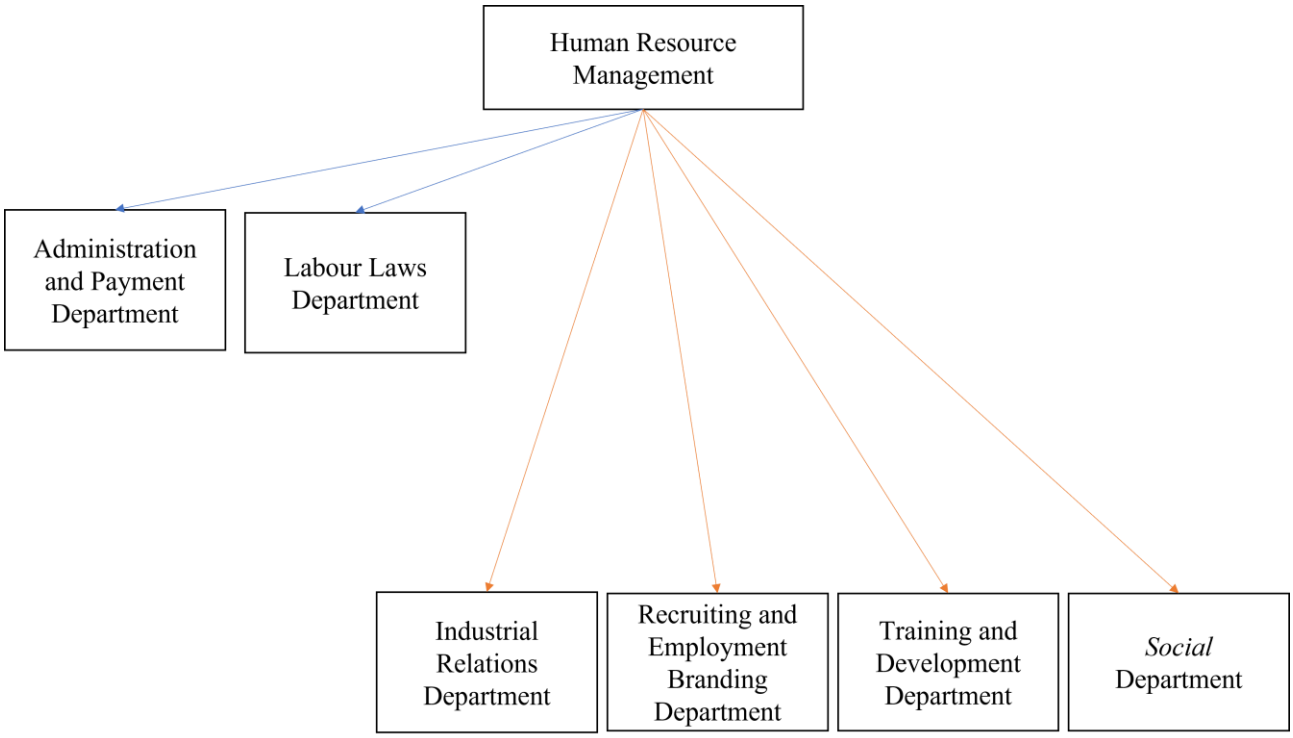
This office then takes into account all the bureaucratic and formal issues in relation to the company's employees: thus, it follows the contracts, all the hiring and firing procedures, the policies to implement when talking about workers' career advancements and so forth.

Then there is the "soft" part:

> "Regarding the soft part of our human resource management department, we have three sub sectors: **recruiting and employment branding**, that focuses on the new hiring procedures; the **training** department, in charge of coordinating all the training procedures; and then the **"social manager",** a specific figure who is in charge to create "a constant touching point" between workers and management and who is also

responsible (together with the industrial relations department) to talk with trade unions, especially at the territorial level. Thus, if a store has actually a delegate, he or she will talk with the local *social* manager in case of any issues." (Responsible for the Human Resource Management – national level, *FoodForYou*, IT)

Figure 11 - Human Resource Management in FoodForYou



Source: Own elaboration based on the information collected through the interviews with managers and through secondary desk research

6.4.2. Hiring procedures

For the Italian case, another issue related to the Human Resource Management that has emerged several times from the interviews relates the **hiring procedures**. **Due to the differences present in the labour market regulations and laws, in relation to this issue the host countries Head Quarter management acts autonomously from the Home Country directives, *confirming the strength of the institution*.** But, if it is not possible to talk about a perfect replication in the comparison between home and host country, it is still possible to talk about homogeneity and centralization in the way *FoodForYou* manages the hiring procedure: at national level[10].

[10] Even if from the Danish fieldwork have not been collected data relating this issue, it is plausible however to imagine that the method through which the hiring procedures are managed is the same – a centralized system through the website. What changes is the content of the contracts, where the spread of fixed-term ones or the percentage of part-time ones will

In fact, for the recruitment and the hiring procedures, the process to follow is clear and strict. The Italian company has a centralized system on its website platforms, where workers can apply for the positions they desire (cashiers or even Head Quarter managers). Then, the company foresees the presence of a specific committee, part of the Human Resources Department, in charge of evaluating the different applications and the best matches between workers' profiles and company's needs. Even the procedure through which the company gives a feedback to the applicants is standardized, thus they receive an answer after a fixed amount of days – a policy that also includes the eventual denials.

> "What is absolutely not in charge of the regional districts concern the processes to be followed, that are absolutely standardized, scheduled, there are precise rules to be followed in the management of the workforce selection and how to introduce it in the company… these have to be guaranteed, that's it, they are standard for everyone… both if you apply for a position in Turin, or at Misterbianco, the process has to be the same, with the same criteria, and so forth". (Responsible for the Human Resource Management – national level, *FoodForYou*, IT)

Human resource management is one of the aspects related to the functioning of the company where the directives of the home country cannot be completely implemented. **In fact, HRM depends on a series of labour market norms** (that changes among countries: for example, Danish labour market is much more liberal than the Italian one, intended as deregulated, as seen in chapter 4) and **potentially also on the relations between the company and the trade unions**, that depends on the industrial relations model (Gallie, 2009). In here, thus, ***labour norms do matter***, and coherently with the initial hypothesis, exactly for this reason it is possible to see differences between the two countries. In fact, due to a fixed quota on the use of fixed-term contracts and of (more) rigid procedures in terms of dismissals, Italy presents a majorly protective picture, that positively affect job quality in terms of work stability, careers' prospects and social protections (in accordance to the indicators proposed by Reyneri, 2013). Despite this, as seen in chapter 4, the apparently more liberal Danish labour market is compensated by a well-structured system of social protections and active labour market policies, that are particularly relevant in a sector characterised by a high level of flexibility. Plus, somehow HRM can change **depending, also, on the workforce characteriscts**, and, on the other way round, HRM have different consequences on different types of workforces, as better explained in Chapter 8. Thus, it is important to have in mind all of these aspects together, as will emerge in the course of this

be more diffused due to the labour market features described in Chapter 4 but also due to the workforce characteristics, as will be described in Chapter 8.

work, in order to fully comprehend what is the institution more efficient in playing a role on the job quality, and how.

In here it is important to make a distinction on what are the attended differences. On the hiring and the firing procedures, the more rigid labour market present in Italy makes the management of human resources more structured, while on the contrary the more liberal labour market present in Denmark allows that the majority of the processes are "smoother". However, this can be considered true also starting the analysis from the trade unions' side: **in Denmark, the industrial relations' system is more solid than the Italian one, or, at least, more embedded in the society to the point that the concertation between the social parts is much more collaborative**. Thus it is easy to imagine that the more cooperative relation between the Danish employers' associations and the trade unions lead to a fully agreed and respected Collective Bargained Agreement (CbA), and that, culturally, companies will follow the rules signed in it. In Italy, on the contrary, the relation between trade unions and employers association – and, in a smaller scale, between unions' delegates and companies' managers – are much more conflictual, as explained in chapter 4. So the presence of the National Collective Agreement, alone, cannot be a guarantee of the full respect of the norms (neither in Denmark, for the sake of honesty, but considering the institutional framework, where there is more collaboration between the social parts, especially the trade unions and the employers' associations, it is easier to advance this thesis). These aspects can of course affect the Human Resource Management – thinking for example about the respect of the working hours set in the contracts.

Plus, Denmark is a much smaller country, something that already helps the management of a big company and, of course, that eases the communication between *FoodForYou* and the trade unions, in the eventuality that the management of the human resources would create any kind of problematics.

However, despite these "systematic" differences, HRM have been described by both *FoodForYou* managers and trade unions' representatives, in both the countries, as something that can also present standardized and centralized elements; that, does, presents both similarities and differences, as explained in the following paragraph.

6.4.3. Standard HRM or not?

In general, regarding the relation between HRM and home country directives it is interesting to notice that sometimes it has emerged a strong control from the home country, sometimes on the contrary more autonomy in the host countries. Even if these aspects have been deepened only in the Italian fieldwork, the company's managers made a clear distinction between what were the

aspects that could be considered applicable to all the other countries and which ones were typical of the Italian case.

In fact, summing up, it seems that HRM could be analysed as divided in two subgroups: on the one hand, training schemes, workers and applicants' evaluations' schemes and possibilities of vertical career prospects are **common** in different host countries and derived from home country directives – aspect that can potentially affect workers' job quality in different ways, and thus they will be better analysed in chapter 8: for example, autonomy and discretion (Eurofound, 2012), security of the job (Reyneri, 2013).

On the other hand, hiring and firing procedures, numbers of workers to employ and some part of the training (for example mandatory courses depending on national regulations) are more related to the differences between different countries.

The way *FoodForYou* manages its Human Resource Department, thus, follows the *ethnocentric or global strategy* (Farndale and Paauwe, 2007), where the main aim is to maintain a control on the HRM at a centralised level an thus the host countries companies replicate what is implemented at the home level. However, this strategy does not apply for *all* the aspects that concern the HRM. As seen, especially in these two countries this cannot be possible even if the company would wanted it, because the labour market norms and, most importantly, the industrial relations systems oblige *FoodForYou* to act inside a determined framework. Because of this, the general hypothesis is to find, thus, differences on the HRM. **These differences depend, also, as seen in chapter 2, on what are mostly the very same variables used in the framework of the Varieties of Capitalism**: the general asset of the economy, the use of the technology, the presence or absence of vocational and training policies. But also aspects that, themselves, depend on the degree of *voice* of the different European trade unions, that can more or less push for higher degree of legal requirements of information (of the companies' revenues, for example), consultation and participation (Budhwar and Sparrow, 2002; Nikandrou *et al.*, 2005).

6.5. Standardized policies vs. managers' autonomy

The centralization and the strong standardization of the company of course also affect **managers' autonomy** (Edwards *et al.*, 2013). This aspect is particularly relevant in terms of job quality. In fact, the level of autonomy that managers have can affect the work organization (especially on the management of the working schedules), and consequently the work-life balance – that can be considered as a proxy of the work time quality indices, in accordance with Eurofound (2012) (as seen in chapter 5).

In general, because of all of the reasons explained so far – the centralization and the pyramidal structure of the company and the aim to apply the most standardized policies as possible – stores managers **do not have plenty of autonomy**. This aspect has emerged not only from them, but also from the District managers, who described this tendency starting from the other way round: **this means that, even when there is the chance that the district manager wants to apply suggestions coming from some store managers, there is not always the possibility to do that, at least not without the authorization coming from the Head Quarter.** And the same is true, in a higher level scale, in the relation between district managers and Head Quarter:

> "Of course sometimes I find myself listening to some district managers… some new idea, and maybe I say "okay, let's try this, let's see if that works. […] But of course it depends on what you want to monitor, because then we have to verify that the policies and the objectives given by the company are fulfilled. Because we need this… also in order to intervene in case we have to make some corrections or if we do not receive the outcome we expected from the territories". (Responsible of Industrial Relations – national level, *FoodForYou,* IT)

This quote underlines how both store and districts' managers do have some kind of autonomy in trying to apply new policies, **but that it is always required a sort of "proof of the results".** This is because the most important **goal, especially in a sector like the food retail, is to reach the economic target** (Broadbridge, 2002; Johansson, 2007; ILO, 2015), decided by host countries' Head Quarter but strongly dependent on home country's directives.

> "I mean, we have… also here, there are some definitions and targets that we have to complete, in Italy. Thus I have my objectives and a series of themes that I have to cope with. Thus, on that, I cannot do nothing, I can't change it… but I have the possibility to go there however I want, mostly. For example, if I know that I have to carry on the automatic order of the items for the stores, or I know that I have to manage the logistic platform in a determined way, I have more autonomy in how I do that. Of course, the final goal will be always the same, I mean, the management, the implementation of a determined project, theme, numeric target… okay? Then of course we have the possibility to manage it, always with the support of the general direction and so also with a… being monitored constantly, during the months or the weeks…" (Manager – macro area level, *FoodForYou,* IT)

This aspect has emerged as well also in Denmark:

> "You do not have to be in a top position to have a lot of responsibility, for your own project. But at the same time we have to go through a lot of approval process… so you can do a lot and you can get a lot of responsibility because there are a lot of things to do and we always are very committed to our projects, but… at the same time there is a very strong structure that needs to approve something before you go ahead. Like… I can't make something for a store without making sure that I have the approval from the central organization. **So, I think that is like what in *FoodForYou* they call "freedom within a framework."** (Branding Manager – national level, *FoodForYou*, DK)

> "No, they're definitely not [autonomous]. We are separated into groups where there is a district manager and he has four to five stores that he is like in control of, so they do have some things that they can do themselves in their store. But we don't choose what stuff we have on sale, and we don't choose how we're supposed to do the stuff that is all from higher up. Someone don't follow the rules. That's a totally different thing. But I definitely see that the district manager has a lot to say about whether they [the stores managers] follow the rules. [...] But the rules of how we are supposed to do everything comes from headquarters. Everything is marked down from headquarters." (Shop Steward, HK HANDEL, DK)

In this sense, thus, the pressure toward a high level of standardization is not the same in all the policies implemented from the company, but it varies depending on how much it positively affects the economic target.

6.6. Consequences on the relation with Trade Unions

What are the trade unions' positions regarding this high level of centralization?

The perception of working with managers who do not have enough autonomy has also emerged from the trade unions' side, especially from the delegates:

> "Well, it depends what you are talking about… But yes, for the majority of the issues my store manager cannot just decide by his own. I can tell this. This also creates problems when I ask him something just slightly different from the management of the working hours… he has to ask to the district management." (Territorial delegate, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

This strong centralization creates, however, as underlined not only by the unions but in some cases even from managers, an "elephantiac structure that slows all the processes". This aspect

has emerged, in Italy, as an element that affects the final level of the workers job quality, as better explained in chapter 8, especially when some specific needs occur, being them new instruments to lift the boxes (that can help the work fatigue) or hiring new workers to decrease the pace of work

> "With this company is a continue fight. Everything that is not standardized, for them is inaccessible. It is something incredible, even a simple glove, if it is not the same in all the stores they become paranoid…" (Territorial representative, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

From the trade unions' delegates, on the other hand, **this feeling is summed with the sensation to have to obey to everything that is decided not even from the store manager, but from "higher and not-known" figures**. This creates a sense of impossibility to give a contribution to the company in which workers are hired:

> "Despite all the difficulties, I have been working here for years… sometime I feel that I can't propose anything, because my store manager does not have the authority to do anything in the first place." (Territorial delegate, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

The fact that also **the hiring procedure follows a centralized and standardized** schema is another issue that has been underlined from the Italian unions (not from the Danish ones). Unions recognize that the centralization has as a positive effect to not create different treatments for the applicants. Thus, in this case, being employed in a big company recognised as a "big brand" represents an added value in this sense. The way through which *FoodForYou* manages the hiring procedure has been described, however, as something that can create some problems in the long run. In fact, in the eventuality that stores managers need, for example, to hire new workers **for a better management of the pace of work, they have to follow a series of procedures that sometimes can be very long (and not always they get the authorization from the area manager/HQ).**

This is an aspect that create frustration to the workers, and on which unions have no power of intervention, as reported in the following quotation. It is also interesting that this territorial delegate used to be a vice store manager, thus in here it reports a managerial perspective that is however enlarged by the awareness of what trade unions think about this aspect.

> "If there is a new worker, and she is good, and I want to offer her a permanent contract… I just simply can't. I have to send her CV to the direction in Verona, and then they let me know what I can do. Even if I underline that there is the need… That the cashers can't do the work… that they are not enough… if they say that I can hire her, I will hire her, otherwise, I simply won't." (Territorial Delegate, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

The limited margin of action from the trade unions' side, in respect to these aspects, is coherent with the initial hypothesis presented in chapter 1: trade unions' actions, despite playing a fundamental role, especially at store level, can only have a marginal impact in affecting some of the aspects of the job quality. However, again in relation to the hypothesis, due to the more collaborative and less fragmented picture present in Denmark (as seen in chapter 4), the expectation was to find a different outcome, while on there is a high level of similarity with the Italian picture, as emerged from the fieldwork. This aspect is not to underestimate, because it underlines – once again – how much, despite **the potential differences in the industrial relations' systems, in this sector trade unions, alone, cannot solve the main problematics related to the job quality**: and this is even truer when the sector's characteristics are triggered by the standardization present in multinational corporations.

6.7. "We care about our workers": corporate welfare

The theme of the corporate welfare underlines one significant difference between the company in Italy and the company in Denmark.

In Denmark, as outlined, corporate welfare is not an issue, being the public welfare sufficient for workers:

> "Yeah, that's not a normal thing to do in Denmark. We always, all of us get paid into like a... Pension plans, so when we go, they do that, but no, all like nursery and health care, and all of that is not something you regularly do in Denmark because that is like… it's a personal thing. You all… Everyone does it themselves and have health insurance and we all… Well, I don't because I don't have any children, but people get extra support for it, like nursery, day-care time and all of that. So yeah, we don't… but that's not a thing that *FoodForYou* doesn't want to do, we do not need it, no one does." (Shop Steward, HK HANDEL, DK)

Corporate welfare is thus something that more than other aspects trigger the standardization, both between countries (see Denmark and Italy) and inside the same countries, especially if there are a lot of territorial differences, like in Italy.

In fact, the theme of the corporate welfare has emerged several times during the interviews with Italian company's managers:

> "About the welfare… we follow, yes, some guidelines, because they are related to what are the principles of the company. But I would say that is… more like a horizontal coordination. In fact, whoever is in charge of corporate welfare in the host countries,

> meet… like monthly… their peers from the other countries. To confront […] to find some best practices." (Manager – macro area level, *FoodForYou*, IT)

Corporate welfare is highly present in this company in Italy, both in a more formal way – looking at the integrative contract signed by the company and two of the three majorly representative Italian trade unions (Fisascat CISL and Uiltucs UIL) and in **a less structured way, looking at a series of unilateral policies implemented by the company by its own**.

> "As a formally bargained corporate welfare policy, *FoodForYou* adheres to the EST fund, a supplementary health care fund, mainly for specialist visits. It is a mutual fund because the employer is obliged to pay a certain amount for all workers, although there is not the certainty that they will benefit from it. *FoodForYou* then adopts forms of "unilateral premiums", not formally bargained though, such as shopping voucher, baby bonus, the study bonuses for employees' children. The head office also has a daycare for employees." (National Secretary, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

Thus, not considering what is formally bargained with the trade unions, the company also offers some other policies, that are "unilateral" and that can change without a proper consultation with the unions.

Differently from the stores, the Head Quarter employees also benefit from a private gym and a corporate kindergarten, while they are absent in the Italian territory.

However, there are a series of vouchers also for the **"operative workers":** this is the definition used by *FoodForYou* management when referring to all the figures who are not "high management", thus **cashiers and warehouse workers**. This distinction is already quite interesting, because when talking about the corporate welfare policies, the central management, first of all, refers to what it offers to the managerial figures, and only in a second moment they refer also to the low-skilled workers hired in the stores – even if they are, actually, the workers who really help the company to grow, underlining an approach that strongly distinguish the centralized workers' figures and the "subsidiaries ones", typical of big companies' welfare policies, in general (Femer, 1997; Farndale and Paauwe, 2007).

Thus, in order to allow to these workers to have access to some welfare policies, too, the company has invested in some discounts to go to local gyms (GymPass); then, *FoodForYou* has developed a series of **policies for new parents, such as longer period of parental leaves; this means that the company takes care of paying the extra time of parental leaving, allowing to its workers to get a salary for a longer period than the one provided and covered by the general law (that covers a period of three months since the birth of the child, with the possibility to extend it up to six months)** (INPS, 2022).

However, *FoodForYou* does not have any policies related to any sort of economic premium. This element is quite interesting because, according to the trade unions, this is something that workers (and unions) would like to see implemented:

> "I mean… should I be sick in order to get some advantages from this kind of corporate welfare?" (Territorial delegate, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

Also, according to the Italian trade unions' representatives, it is not uncommon to find this kind of rewards in the integrative contracts signed with other companies operating in this sector (Faioli, 2017; Gasparri, 2020).

The implementation of the corporate welfare policies has been described by the Italian managers as something not really easy to actualize. In fact, it is difficult to select what kind of services might be more useful to the workers, but also the ones that do not require too many difficulties to be realized. And, considering that the company offers only services as corporate welfare policies, and not money, it is also difficult to understand what kind of services can be offered in **a standardized way** in all the stores. But of course, **especially in Italy, territorial differences play a role in this sense:** regional differences are so elevated that is not to taken for granted to have, for example, easy access to gyms or other facilities; especially in the South. So, there is a sort of mismatch between one of the most important guidelines of the company – the standardization – and the real assets of the regions.

> "[…] In any case, for what regards the corporate welfare in general… or at least the concepts around it… there is a sort of guideline because it is something that is also part of the company identity. I can make some examples, like welfare intended as something more at a higher framework level… like the role of women inside the company and their growth… it is something that we are doing right now as a company. As well as many other companies. Doing that in the North has different difficulties in respect to the South, though […] thus yes, there can be some difficulties… But the same is true also regarding other more practical stuff. In Milan is much easier to make agreements with some gyms, maybe it is not the same in Palermo. Or, if we offer integrative health care for dental surgery, maybe in the south it is difficult to find such a specialized professional figure." (Manager – macro area level, *FoodForYou*, IT)

Corporate welfare is one of those aspects that has to be flexible in terms of adaptation to the host countries features. For this reason, there are just some guidelines from the home country, but more autonomy from the national Head Quarters. **Considering the features of the public welfare, it is**

not a surprise to find a higher number of corporate welfare policies in Italy and less in Denmark.

6.8. Final considerations

The aim of this chapter was to analyse *FoodForYou*'s functioning and organization, the way it operates in the host countries and the eventual differences present in Italy and in Denmark. **What has emerged is that the standardization and the strength of the host countries' directives change depending on the topics**. Considering the two countries selected, that have quite strong institutional characteriscts (most importantly, industrial relations systems and labour norms), and considering the sub-sector of the food retail (that already implies differences in the products offered by the companies due to costumers' preferences), ***FoodForYou* follow the strategy of the *institutional adaptation*** (Cantwell *et al.,* 2010).

On the one hand, in fact, everything more related to the economic aspects and targets and to the more structural elements (starting from the assets of the stores) are clearly dependent on the home country's directives. And in fact, aspects such as the Human Resource Management and the Corporate Welfare are more dependent on the host countries' characteristics. Thus it is not possible to talk about a "single strategy" of a multinational corporation operating abroad. On the other hand, wage determination, hours of work, forms of job contracts and so forth are all elements too much embedded to the local institutions to be not respected/applied by the Home Country Head Quarter (Femer, 1997).

However, something interesting concerns the relation between unions and a foreign company. In the case of *FoodForYou*, its international provenance had represented and added value, especially for the trade unions, that were somehow quite prepared on how the company would have acted, especially regarding its business model and marketing strategy: in fact, they already knew *FoodForYou*'s brand, because it was already operating in other countries. **But this awareness comes with the guarantee that there will be a formal and more or less structured communication between the company and them.** At the same time, however, is has not emerged a strong presence of the **supranational trade unions,** despite the presence of a multinational corporations, as better explained in the conclusion (chapter 10).

VII.

WORKERS' VOICE IN THE COMPANY: THE ROLE OF THE TRADE UNIONS

7.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the role of the trade unions inside *FoodForYou* company, on the strategies they implement and on the role of the delegates inside the stores as well.

Considering that *FoodForYou* is an important company both in Italy and in Denmark, it was thus expected to find **structured and significant industrial relations**. However, even if the company is the same and tends to operate in a similar way everywhere, as seen in chapter 6, the industrial relations' systems of the two countries present some differences, as explained in chapter 4. Thus, the interviews conducted with the trade unions' representatives of both the countries had the aim to grasp, on the one hand, these potential dissimilarities, looking in particular at the different strategies trade unions can implement in front of the eventual difficulties they have to face. On the other hand, most importantly this chapter aims **to analyse what is the impact of trade unions on working conditions**: what are the concrete actions that unions do in this company, and how do they affect workers' job quality?

The chapter is structured as follows. Paragraph 7.2. describes the history of the unionization process happened in Italy in this company, that is quite peculiar and interesting. It can be said that this "long road" is already something confirming both the efforts made by trade unions in entering the company and the importance that this had in affecting the working conditions. The history of how Italian trade unions established a relation with *FoodForYou* is a good example of trade unions' capacity to have a voice even with a company that posed, at first, in a hostile manner – something ttypical of the company culture overall, as the same was true also in Germany. The rest of the paragraph describes what has happened inside *FoodForYou*, in Italy, after trade unions managed to enter the company. In particular, in here the focus is on describing the achievement obtained, especially on the working conditions. But, also, it underlines what are the difficulties still occurring in the relations with the company, and what are the consequences on workers' lives according to the trade unions' points of view. Finally, the paragraph concludes underling the relation between the unions and the employer association – that is an aspect that had emerged in both the fieldworks. This focus, taking into account both the countries, helps in introducing the next sections, where the comparison between Italy and Denmark is explained more deeply.

Paragraph 7.3. then focuses on the effective role of trade unions, on their difficulties and on their strategies, in both the countries. The paragraph is however divided on two sections.

The first one (7.3.1.) analyses the point of view **of the national and territorial trade unions representatives in both the countries**, focusing especially on what are the struggles unions have to face in order to make the workers join the organization and what are the implication deriving from dealing with a very big and standardized multinational corporation; while later it presents the strategies implemented in order to face these obstacles.

The second one (7.3.2.) focuses **more specifically on the role of trade unions' delegates, thus taking into account what happens specifically inside this company**. In order to describe the "every-day" industrial relations, thus, this part starts describing who are trade unions' delegates in both the countries, their numbers and their territorial collocations. Having in mind this framework is necessary in order to understand what is described in the following parts: what are delegates' difficulties and what kind of actions they implement in order to face and resolve them.

Finally, paragraph 7.4. focuses on the general perceptions that trade unions representatives have when dialoguing with the multinational corporations, and describes, then, the role of the supranational trade unions in this sense. The chapter concludes (paragraph 7.4.) presenting some final considerations that are helpful to introduce the next chapter (8), dedicated to the job quality inside the company.

7.2. A long road to the unionisation

As outlined in the previous chapter, the company has begun its activity in Italy and in Denmark once it was already quite well established and strong in its home country, Germany.

In Italy, trade unions' relations with *FoodForYou* have evolved, compared to an initial period of more than ten years (from 1992, when the company first arrived in the country, to the firsts years of 2000) when they were absent or in any case very conflictual. According to the testimonies of trade unions' representatives who have been following this company since the beginning, in fact, before the unionization phase it was very difficult for unions even to communicate with *FoodForYou*.

The conflictual aspects of the relations with the company related especially to the attitude that *FoodForYou* managers had with the trade unionists, their way of talking to them, their absence and the lack of will to answer to unions' claims. Plus, working conditions were much worst – compared to today – something that of course led unions to pose themselves in a conflictual way with the company.

> "I mean, I remember that, at first… once we had a meeting, and the room was full of union's representatives, national and territorial, and full of delegates, the ones we had… If we would have said something not completely correct, or if we would had posed in a way that they did not consider… If we would had not shown pure courtesy… I remember, one day they just left. This is what I mean when I talk about the relations we had at first. The company acted absolutely in a conflictual way, and… I do not want to sound too much… I do not want to use words too much for insiders, but I have to say this, 'the table jumped for nothing'." (National Secretary, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

At first, thus, **the relations between trade unions and the company management were more or less limited to the company's annual meetings on the topic of the right to information**. In any case, this was something guaranteed by law: trade unions can have access to the company's data on the flow of the economic activities, the company's structures, the attended occupational percentage, the work organization and the instruments that the company foresees in case of crises.

Even more, but not surprisingly, relations with the home country Head Quarter never occurred, not even when the company first arrived in Italy. This is also because the company has its own Italian logo, its own board, and thus host countries' trade unions had no reason to talk with the home country. Thus, the relation between this company and the trade unions, at first, was not easy at all.

FoodForYou is actually an example of the general problems that trade unions usually find in the service sector, where the level of conflict is lower, especially if compared with other sectors – such as industry (Regalia, 1990). However, even when it comes to workers, unions have a very difficult time getting workers to sign up for the organization in the first place, or even just enacting a number of concrete measures, due to the fragmentation of workplaces, the high level of turnover rate, and the differences within the workforce (Gasparri, Ikeler, and Fullin, 2019; Fellini, 2017; Grugulis and Bozkurt, 2011).

For these reasons, trade unions had to adopt a different strategy. **This type of relations and the presence of conflicts led to the drafting, between 2008 and 2009, of a real "black book", co-written by FILCAMS CGIL, FISASCAT CISL and UILTUCS UIL,** the three more representative trade unions in Italy, **but it was elaborated within a larger framework, at European level.** In fact, the first draft was made in Germany, where *FoodForYou* has its Central Head Quarter. After, in some of the countries where the company was present, the trade unions who had the relation with it started to share their experiences and eventually decided to collectively write this document, written in an informative and very "popular" way, in order to also reach workers' attention and interest.

The book contained a series of complaints and testimonies from national RSA ("Rappresentante Sindacale Aziendale", the Italian trade union's delegate), which mainly reported "vexatious, manor behavior" towards workers. **The book described how, in the early years, the pace of work was more intense, and it was pretty common that the company did not pay overtime work,** something that was even facilitated by the lack of badges – thus, there was not an efficient and formal system to regulate working hours, negatively affecting the working hours, the asocial shifts, and of course the salary, three of the indicators of job quality that Reyneri (2013) recognizes as diriment in the service sector. Plus, in some stores, the scanner was missing at checkouts, and cashiers had to learn codes by their own, something that has been described as very complicated and frustrating. Because of these reasons, of course workers started to complain, but, back then, the company showed a clear opposition to any kind of unionisation process to take place.

> "Let's say this… at first people were really unsatisfied, pace of work was absurd, and for this reason at the end, we worked all together and we managed to bring the unions inside the store. But at first it has been very difficult, because the company did not want us to contact the unions […]. You have to consider that in 2009 we did not even have the badges, we had to clean the cash box by our own…" (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

When trying to report some complaints to the managers, the answers were always arrogant and not useful at all. **And the strong hierarchy present in the store was something evident and expressed though very rude ways.** Two Italian delegates who have been working in *FoodForYou* since before the drafting of the black book gave these testimonies:

> "We had to act super respectfully, we could not complain, even if we had to work a lot, they did not pay us for the extra shifts… they treated us very badly." (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

> "…If we were in the warehouse we barely could go to the toilet… once I complained because I had my period, and the manager told me "What do you expect, do you want a red band on your arm so that I know that you have to go to the toilet more often?" (Territorial delegate, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

FoodForYou was also very hostile towards trade unions: there have been also **judicial sentences** from Italian tribunal of Savona, in 2003, due to **"anti-unionism behaviors"**. So, the book served to highlight the difficulties of both workers and the unions themselves.

The drafting of this document represented a turning point in the industrial relations with this company. After the book was diffused, in order to gain more affordability and "clean its image", *FoodForYou* started to act in a more collaborative way with trade unions: this was a necessary step also considering that **from the drafting of the black book workers started to enroll the trade unions, and at some point it was impossible for the company to ignore them**. And it is interesting the fact that the first workers who approached the trade unions were the store managers, who had to cope with very stressful (and not properly recognized) pace of work and responsibilities. But after the managers, also the cashiers started ask for trade unions' services.

> "That was a very important action [drafting the black book]. We were present in all the newspapers, everyone was talking about that, and thus the company became more known. We used this to start a series of campaigns, in order to reach workers' attention. But… also the workers started to come to us. At first just for asking about something that was not clear: "is it normal that they didn't give me the extra money if I worked more hours than expected?" and something like this… Consider that even stores managers came to us…" (National Secretary, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

With the increase of the level of collaboration with *FoodForYou,* trade unions started to obtain new achievements, **coming to the first agreement signed at secondary level bargain (company level contracts)**. This agreement regulated, for example, wage increase for the employees working on Sundays.

The sign of the integrative contract is something that underlines the importance of the host countries institutions. In this case, Italian industrial relations' system did affect the job quality, adding a plus on the standard working conditions implemented by *FoodForYou.* However, also because of the need, from the company, to maintain a strong standardization in all the countries regarding some issues, trade unions usually play a "defensive" strategy, underlining the importance to also look at other institutional impacts.

7.2.1. The second phase of industrial relations: still not a fairy tale

After the drafting of the "black book," between 2013 and 2015, years of strong unionization, several improvements were achieved in Italy, as testified by workers employed in this company since the beginning. Those who have been *FoodForYou*'s employees for longer periods speak about "a real watershed" between a first and a second phase.

Since the beginning of this "second phase of industrial relations," more dialoguing and structured, subsequent and new secondary level (company level) contracts started to be signed, leading to a

strong improvement in the working conditions (starting for example from **the introduction of the badges, that for workers marked a positive impact, being them an instrument that could guarantee the amount of extra-work and consequently the extra-payment**, something that before was absent).

7.2.1.1. The introduction of the *"social"* manager

Once the company started to grow in Italy, and once the industrial relations became more structured, the company decided to create a new and **specific managerial figure, called "*social*", in charge of dialoguing with the most representatives unions' confederations**, both at national and at local level. These peculiar types of managers, thus, only had (and still have) this exclusive task, while, before, there were the "classic" company figures (area managers, regional commercial directors, etc.), who were in charge of this duty and who usually did not know issues related to trade unions' world or how to approach to aspects related to the labour market, thus creating difficulties on how to manage the discussions and how to share the same lenses of analysis – something, in general, quite diffused in the *big companies.*

The introduction of the *social managers* is something that has been considered as a good thing from unions' point of view exactly because of these specific training, skills and role they have:

> "[…] The social helped this situation, I mean… our relation with the company. Because, for a long time… we used to talk just with the managers who of course do not know anything about industrial relations […] this happened both in the Head Quarter and in the territories. Now is better because you know… even if they are, of course, on the company side… at least they are not arrogant, they know what we mean when we use specific terms… they are more trained about how trade unions work." (National Secretary, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

As also seen in the previous chapter, the strong centralization of this company and **the presence of some "elephantiac" processes means that most of the time the *socials* managers are required to inform the Head Quarter, or at least the territorial district management,** before making agreements with trade unions, or simply answering to their issues. And this is something about which unions' representatives and delegates complained a lot in the interviews, especially because this also affects workers' perception of unions' capacity to positively have an impact on their work.

It is important, thus, to underline that the social managers are not as much autonomous as the territorial trade unions' representatives, This aspect, once again, highlights that trade union's capacity

to affect job quality is, due to the presence of this high level of standardization, limited – so is the workers' voice, that can been considered as proxy for the presence of autonomy (Eurofound, 2012).

Plus, despite the presence of these specific figures, it is however worth to underline that, also from what emerged from the interviews with *FoodForYou* managers, all the *social* managers receive the very same exact training, something in line with the management of the Human Resources that is usually applied by the multinational corporations also in the host countries – at least, on those aspects that can be replicated because do not depend on the national boundaries (Edwards *et a.,* 2013; Price, 2016; Carreri, 2020). This means that the added value derived from the introduction of this specific figure cannot be considered as a guarantee, for the territorial unions, to obtain clear (and fast) answers to their claims, because the *socials* tend to **give every time the same solutions**, regardless the differences that may occur between the stores.

> "Let's say this… apparently… no, to be fear, formally, industrial relations are well structured with this company. But, considering all the difficulties I was telling you about… about the long time they use to just answer to simple questions… workers perceive our relation with the company, and our actions, as not efficient. And also yes, *social* are useful in this because at least we know who to call, instead of wasting time and being exposed to *FoodForYou* internal division of tasks… but not always the social is a good person, or is in general good at his job. I mean, the same is true about trade unionists, but at least we have more voice [at territorial level, in relation to the confederal centre or the specific category's national representatives]." (Territorial representative, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

On the other hand, from the Danish fieldwork the reference to the role of the "*social*" managers did not emerged at all; thus it is not clear whether this role is something present at international level. **If yes, it might a be a way to "overcome" the different trade union relations and industrial relations systems, underlining how the corporations strategies, based on the standardization of its policies, are, under certain aspects, "stronger" than the institutional differences (and impacts)** (Jackson and Deeg, 2008; Bonache *et al.,* 2012).

The extremely high standardization of the way of reasoning of the *socials* is actually an aspect more related to the company dimension more than to the national/multinational distinction: a big corporation, in fact, being it national or foreign, usually relies on standardized managerial figures, in order to maintain a high level of standardization in its functioning (Farndale and Paauwe, 2007). On the other hand, though, the dimension of the company has its pros and cons.

On the one hand, **it is unlikely that a small company would invest in a specific managerial figure in charge of talking with trade unions**, and thus the biggest dimension of *FoodForYou* is, in relation to this aspect, a positive thing. On the other hand, however, these figures act in a very standardized way – as in many other company's aspects: **this standardization, thus, results to be prevalent over the *different* requests that *different* unions can pose**. This means that, actually, the industrial relations at company or territorial level are very similar, because unions receive more or less always the same outcome from the socials.

> "We really can't do something 'fancy.' […] … Yes, we kinda have a sort of marginality, but at the end of the day, when we confront at our monthly meetings [with *FoodForYou* delegates and representatives of other territories], we all have the same things to say because the *socials* give to us more or less the same answers." (Territorial representative, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

7.2.1.2. Italian Trade Unions' fragmentation: the new integrative contract as a breaking point

After the drafting of the "black book," the unity between the three different Italian trade unions, at national level, became fragmented: the last (2018) firm-level contract was signed by FISASCAT CISL and UILTUCS UIL, but not by FILCAMS CGIL. The new integrative contract foresaw several aspects. First of all, it was signed that, in order to be able to elect a local trade union's delegate, the minimum numbers of workers present in the store was 14 (instead of the 15 already foresaw by the Workers' Statute of 1970). Secondly, the social parts agreed to establish a permanent group, made by workers' and company's representatives, in charge of follow and monitor all the issues related to the health and safety in the workplace; thirdly, it was agreed an increase of the 135% of the salary for the shifts on festive days and Sundays. Then, a point defined as "controversial" by FILCAMS-CGIL regarded the introduction of what the company defined as "experimental part-time", that foresaw an increase, based on a voluntary base, up to five hours for a period of maximum six months, maintaining the part-time contractual status. And finally, regarding the corporate welfare, in the integrative contracts were introduced some policies related especially to the work-life balance and the family care. The following table synthesizes the contents of the last integrative contract:

Table 26 - Synthesis of the Italian integrative contract signed with FoodForYou

THEMATIC	CONTENTS
Industrial relations	The company agrees to extend all the unions' rights in stores that have at least **fourteen workers (instead of the fifteen foreseen by law)**
Safety and health issues and security representative	Implementation of a **permanent thematic table** composed by three representatives of the company and one unions' representative; the company agrees to elect one to three security representatives for the housekeepers (depending on the dimension) and three security representatives for the stores
Work organization	Incrementation **of the salary up to 135%** for Sunday work
Experimental part-time	Voluntary adhesion to increase up to five hours (in respect to what agreed in the contract) the total amount of the working hours for a period of six months
Corporate welfare	**Extension of the marriage privileged** (sick leave, fiscal angulations, grieve leaves) **to civil couples**; integrative health assurance; **voucher** (to be used at the stores, amount: 100 EUR); **baby bonus** (amount: 100 EUR)

Source: own elaboration based on the integrative contract furnished by trade unions' representatives

FILCAMS CGIL started a campaign in order to fully inform the workers about the main reasons why they decided not to sign the integrative contract. As explained in chapter 4, it is not uncommon to find, in Italy, a fragmentation among the three different trade unions' positions. Plus, traditionally, CGIL (and by extension, FILCAMS CGIL, that focuses on the service and trade sector), pose in a much more conflictual way in respect to CISL and UIL (Cella, Treu, 2009; Ambra, 2018).

In any case, the choice to not sign the integrative contract was actually a risk for FILCAMS CGIL – as happens also every time a union decide not to sign a contract. As explained by a FILCAMS CGIL National Secretary:

> "When we decided not to sign the integrative contract we knew that the risk was to lose members… or that some workers would leave us in order to join [FISASCAT] CISL or [UILTUCS] UIL. So, we decided to circulate a flyer where we explained all the reasons why we did not sign… Because it is important that workers know why, that is not just for political reasons, is more than that […]. If unions sign everything [all the contracts with all the companies], we are already losing power… that is already incredibly low in this sector!" (National Secretary, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

According to FILCAMS CGIL, there were several reasons why it would have been at least coherent not to sign the contract. First of all, and, as reported also in the interviews, the most important reason was linked to **a strong demand, from the company side, for internal flexibility (by keeping hiring workers with part-time contracts but increasing the hours in the contracts) and strong flexibility in the management of the working schedules.** In fact, *FoodForYou* proposed a sort of "experiment" that foresaw an increase of the working hours for a sample of workers. However, FILCAMS CGIL considered this choice not useful because, on the one hand, it was referring only to some workers, while the number of workers employed with part-time contracts in the company represented in any case a consistent part of the workforce. On the other hand, this experiment was also risky because the increase of the working hours proposed by *FoodForYou* would have not cancelled the extreme flexibility derived from the changes of the shifts; and plus, the most important aspect was that the extra hours added in these experiments did not offer an increase in the salary, differently from the "standard" supplementary hours. According to FILCAMS CGIL, so, **this flexibility was not only "dangerous" in relations to work-life balance but would also have led to a lack of economic recognitions**, a relation particularly present in the service sector, especially in terms of job quality (Reyneri, 2013). It is not a coincidence, in fact, that this type of work organization (especially based on a high use of part-time contracts, as explained in chapter 8), has been defined by trade unions' representatives as the most important problematic, leading to a negative effect both on the ***work time quality*** and on the ***earnings*** (two of the Eurofound indicators described in chapter 5 resulted to be, in fact, lower in comparison with other sectors). But the impossibility in finding an agreement between the company's needs and trade unions' claims underlines that trade unions' could only partly solve these issues.

The second reason was, in fact, more related to the **issue of work-life balance**. In fact, a more regulated management of the working hours and of the shifts was formalized in the integrative contract but only referring to the full-time workers, something that according to the unions' representatives was not sufficient. This is true especially considering that the majority of the workforce was hired with part-time or atypical contracts, as happens in many other companies operating in this sector (Mason and Osborne, 2008), something felt as very problematic from trade unions' point of view, in general. And also, the integrative contract regulated and explained as a **very positive thing the use of a two-weeks-based work organization, meant as the period of time through which workers know their time schedules.** This was written and agreed in the integrative contract even if, formally, *FoodForYou* applied (and still do) a formula that regulates workers' timetable for three weeks.

> "Is not that absurd that they proposed something that was worst and that did not follow the rules they agreed with in the first place? Maybe it is more absurd that they described it as a good thing…" (Territorial representative, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

The third reason was connected to the **refusal to offer a productivity premium to the workers, despite the significantly good economic revenue and economic growing of the company, that was visible even seeing the number of new stores that *FoodForYou* had opened in the previous years**. This is also an aspect particularly interesting considering that the lack of the productivity premium is something absent in all the countries (at least according to trade unions' representatives), probably deriving from a home country guideline – something easier to replicate, because it does not involve the "non respect" of some host country regulation, but that only depends on the company's decision (Femer, 1997). Regarding this specific topic, the strength of the multinational corporation results to be higher compared to the host countries institutions, in both the cases: even in Denmark, where unions are stronger, there is not any form of productivity premium. And this is even more important considering that the retail sector already presents low salaries (Gautié & Schmitt, 2010), underlining the importance to look at what other institutional elements can play a role on this aspect. The issue of the low salaries will emerge many other times in this work, especially in the next chapter, confirming what have been underlined also by the OECD report (2015), as explained in chapter 2: in this sector, salaries become the driver for the access to many other complementary services, that help in managing the main consequences of the flexibility (for example, private services for the childcare).

Another complaint from the trade union' side related to the **corporate welfare**. Corporate welfare concerns all the policies a company can implement in order to give to its workers a series of further facilities, that can be of different nature and that can be complementary to some services already offered by the public welfare (for example, in terms of health) or other services more specifically related to the company itself (for example, voucher to buy the products the company sells). The aim of the corporate welfare is thus, in principle, to improve employees' lives (Leonardi, Arlotti, 2012; Maino, Razzetti, Santoni, 2019).

In the integrative contract, *FoodForYou* did not propose anything that was different from what already covered by the law, and, most importantly, **a series of "bonuses" were decided unilaterally from the company, making thus impossible for unions to make any form of claims or to bargain those policies in official meetings** (Bordogna, 1997). An example of this regards the "buoni spesa", a fixed amount of money given from *FoodForYou* to the workers, an amount to spend inside the store itself. FILCAMS CGIL was particularly against this proposal, considering it not enough to solve the more

structural problem of the low salaries – even lower in presence of part-time contracts, that were the most spread:

> "The 'buoni spesa' (vouchers) do not help at all. Do you know what could really help these workers to gain a decent salary? To have full-time contracts. These games implemented by the management are not even to take into consideration…" (Territorial representative, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

FILCAMS CGIL also underlined how the increase of the 135% of the salary for Sunday work, something that was considered particularly valuable from the company, was also a measure that was already present in the integrative contract of 2012. And also, Sunday work shifts were in any case regulated in a unilateral way, thus decided by the managers and not following a voluntarist base. Also in this case, it emerges how the unilaterality of some company's decisions affect the work-life balance, something that, as in Gosetti (2012), underlines the importance to look at the work organization features.

The example of the refusal, from FILCAMS CGIL, to sign the integrative contract underlines a **peculiarity of the Italian industrial relations: a strong level of fragmentations between the three confederal trade unions – not even considering the presence of the *yellow unions*** (absent in *FoodForYou* in any case). This is an important aspect to underline when describing the role of the trade unions inside the company, because this fragmentation not only affects the relations with the company at national level (as in the case of this contract), but also at store level, as explained later in paragraph 7.3.2.

7.2.2. A long road still without an end

Today, according to the Italian unions, the relation with the company are "formally good." However, still today unions' representatives underline how **there are still some main problems that create several difficulties**. **Also in this case, this paragraph refers only to the Italian case, because the history of unionization happened in this company, from the beginning to these days, only emerged in the Italian fieldwork.**

First of all, and, due to the general deregulation of the labour market and of the working hours, even more than before, the main problem still concerns the **issue of the management of flexibility**, because the company's managers still do not respect the working shifts assigned to the workers, often changing them with a very short notice. This is something that makes very difficult for workers to manage their work-life balance.

Another issue that is still considered problematic from unions is the persistence of low "professional categories levels" ("inquadramenti") for workers. **This also means lower salaries, that, combined with the high spread of part-time contract, lead to serious difficulties for these workers to gain decent wages.**

A third "difficult" aspect emerged several times in the interviews is that the company **refuses to make minutes of the various meetings held with unions, both at national and local level**, regardless of the topic addressed, because, at least according to trade unions' opinion, this would entail "serious problems from a managerial point of view", because it would easily create "a track" - while without anything that is written, the company maintains a higher level of marginality.

> "What happens in *FoodForYou*, still today… is that we have with them "fake good" industrial relations. Because they are always very willing to meet us, to give us meetings… but somehow, every time we cannot really have anything written on some piece of paper. Thus it is really difficult to see the results of the work that we have done…" (Territorial representative, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

Finally, the last aspect underlined by trade unions' representatives concerns the possibility that trade unions have to access to the information related to the economic trends of the company. Of course, as already seen, by law, **unions do have the right to know the annual revenue of the company**, the investment it makes and so forth.

But at a practical level, the decision behind the economic strategies of *FoodForYou* are not easly shared with unions, even at the national level. And at store level, **delegates cannot ask about the daily or weekly attended economic target (that then affects managerial decisions about the work organization –** Newsome *et al.,* 2013**), because they are considered as "sensitive contents"** and thus cannot be shared with people external to the organization.

> "It is a company characterised, surely, by a strong centralised model… Of course we see just a piece of the company, we are not aware of the main decisions, we are not in the bottom room, we do not know the managerial aspect, the economic aspect in its complexity, but for that little piece that you can get through industrial relations…" (National Secretary, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

According to this quotation, unions do not have access to specific numbers, and if this is true at national level, the hypothesis is that this is also true at the store level for the unions' delegate. But knowing better the economic tendencies of the company could give to the unions more instruments

for ask for more (or better, or targeted) corporate welfare policies (considering, as seen, that the company does not provide any kind of economic premium, for example).

7.2.3. FoodForYou as part of an employers' association

Recently, *FoodForYou* Italy announced its' entrance in FEDERDISTRUBUZIONE. Until now, in Italy, the company did not adhere to any of the employers' association, but it applied the CCNL signed by the three most representative Italian trade unions and CONFCOMMERCIO. Being part of FEDERDISTRIBUZIONE is undoubtedly an advantage for the company. *FoodForYou* is now a player, in the Italian panorama, which has almost twenty thousand employees, thus, considering the number of collaborations it has and its strength in term of revenue, it was "the most natural thing to do [to join FEDERDISTRIBUZIONE]." **Being part of an employer association offers, in fact, the possibility to express specific ideas and to lead also other companies to follow the proposed strategies, instead of more passively accept dynamics already decided**.

What does this decision mean in terms of relations between trade unions and *FoodForYou* management? According to trade unions representatives, the relation with FEDERDSITRIBUZIONE are more complicated than the ones with CONFCOMMERCIO, especially on the issue of the flexibility of working hours.

> "Well, let's say that the history of the last renewal of the contracts says that industrial relations are more complicated with FEDERDISTRIBUZIONE. Also because, regarding the issue of the flexibility… I mean, compared to CONFCOMMERCIO, FEDERDISTRIBUZIONE pushes much more on that direction… I mean, sure, there are some dynamics, especially in the mass distribution…[…] it is evident that *FoodForYou* opted for the more "arguing" employers' association". (Territorial representative, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

In Italy, the relations between the social parts (unions themselves and unions and employers associations) are, so, not so linear. This means that the decision made by *FoodForYou* to adhere to an employer association (FEDERDISTRIBUZIONE) and not to another (CONFCOMMERCIO) creates more frictions in the industrial relations. This is even truer considering that there is not a complete unity and similarity of intentions between the three main representatives Italian trade unions (FILCAMS CGIL, FISASCAT CISL and UILTUCS UIL).

On the other hand, as seen in chapter 4, the lack of fragmentations between the Danish social parts something that has a positive impact in the working conditions, as highlighted by both trade unions' representatives and employers' associations' representatives – especially considering that

FoodForYou is a foreign multinational corporation. **In fact, the presence of a well-structured relation between Danish trade union and employer' association makes very difficult for *FoodForYou* to not adjust its behavior and strategies in Denmark (meant as a host country) and not to talk with trade unions, since the employers' associations are so used to that**. This is something that increases workers' voice, affecting their level of autonomy and discretion and thus the job quality (Eurofound, 2012):

> "I would actually say that a worker… if you work in a company that is part of our employers' association… you will have better working conditions. Because the companies that are part of our association strictly follow everything that is written in the collective agreement… we do not fight over it; we do not try to not respect it. Why should we, we wrote it… we signed it…" (Legal Representative, Danish Chamber of Commerce, DK).

This quotation refers to a general picture, but it still stand also for the case of *FoodForYou*.

7.2.4. Company's size: what are the consequence on the industrial relations?

In this paragraph the focus is on this question: is that an advantage to develop the industrial relations with a big corporation, in respect to a small company? If yes, is this true in both the countries? What is the variable that plays an eventual role in this eventual advantage, the company's size or its foreign provenience?

At least in relation to the element of the management of the industrial relations, being employed in a big corporation marks a positive difference, an aspect emerged in both the countries.

In fact, first of all, it is **more likely that**, differently from a small company, **a big corporation will adhere to some employers' associations, meaning that it will apply the national collective agreement signed by the most representatives trade unions** and not from the *pirate* ones. This is an aspect emerged in particular in the Italian case, also considering the high spread of small and micro companies operating in this sector where most of the time unions struggle to enter in, and thus the workers are not covered, most of the time, by any contract (not even the ones bargained by "yellow" unions).

In Denmark, as see in chapter 4, not dialoguing with unions and not entering in the employers' associations is something almost impossible to avoid from the companies, considering the presence of some **"sympathy" actions: these are strategies implemented by also other companies (for example, logistic companies that do not furnish the materials to the company that does not sign**

the collective bargained agreements). These actions are pushed not only by trade unions, but *also* by the employers' associations, and they are implemented if and when a new company refuses to talk and organize meeting with them. Thus, when *FoodForYou* arrived in Denmark, there was never a real problem to start the dialogue with it, from the unions' point of view. This is because the "unwritten rule" of the necessity to sign the collective bargained agreement and to dialogue with the relevant social parts (if the aim is to be fully integrated in the Danish system) applies also when the new company is a foreign one, leading to the implementation of a dialogue between the unions (and the other relevant institutions) of the host countries and the Head Quarter in the home country.

Thus, eventual differences in the relations between social parts (trade unions in particular) and companies are not related to the nationality of the company, but to its' size.

On the other hand, as deepened also in chapter 8, dedicated to the job quality inside the company, being employed in a big corporation also means a **higher level of standardization, something that sometimes creates difficulties in advancing specific requests from trade unions**.

7.3. Trade unions' role and perceptions

The previous paragraph focused on the history of the unionisation process happened in *FoodForYou* in Italy. Thus, some of the main difficulties that the Italian trade unions had to face had already been described. This paragraph, on the contrary, focuses on the state of the art of the industrial relations occurring between Italian and Danish trade unions and the company.

Considering the history of unionisation happened in this company and having in mind the issues that are still present, as underlined by the trade unions' representatives, what can trade unions do in order to improve the working conditions (especially regarding the flexibility, described by unions themselves as main problematics) inside this company? What are the main difficulties they encounter, and what are the room for actions at store level, thus concerning the role of the territorial delegates?

The following paragraphs try to give an answer to these questions. However, it is important to make a premise: the difficulties and the strategies underlined by trade unionists can be very different depending on their roles – it is different to be a national secretary or a store delegates. Thus, it is interesting to try to answer to the questions presented above also looking at the differences occurring between the different levels *inside* unions' themselves. **This two-tied vision is something present both in Italy and in Denmark, as will be seen in the following paragraphs**. Of course this is not something unexpected, but considering the inner characteristics of the retail sectors explained in chapter 2, deepening the micro strategies applied by stores' delegates can be very interesting (Armaroli, 2020).

7.3.1. National and territorial trade unions' representatives' visions: FoodForYou as an example of the difficulties of the retail sector

Before describing the difficulties that trade unions consider as more problematic in this company, it is however worth underline that, both in Italy and in Denmark, and also because the fact that *FoodForYou*, being a big corporation, applies the "right" national agreement and is part of the employers' associations, trade unions are quite satisfied of the relations they have with the company, in both the countries.

This is even truer considering the insights emerged in relation to this company. It is in fact very interesting not only how many difficulties unions have encountered at first in this company, but also how much, now, unions see all the achievement they made as a victory – even if, what is really interesting relates to the fact that these achievements are something that should be considered as the "normal", like decent working conditions or right payment.

> "I mean, now, we made our battles. Now we gained a series of better working conditions, so we cannot really make complaints… I mean, we are lucky to work in a company that, we have to say that, pays minute by minute! […] so even if a worker stays one minute more in the store, they pay for it. And this is something that in other companies is not to take for granted. So yes, the work is hard, it is hard to talk with *FoodForYou*'s workers, it is hard to make them understand that unions are important… But I can also understand that maybe if they look around, they see worst conditions." (Territorial representative, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

The interesting aspect of this quotation relies on the fact that even trade unions describe as a "positive aspect" to gain a fair salary, something that, especially talking about a big company that also agreed to the national collective agreement, should not sound as an exception, but as a natural consequence, especially in systems like the Italian and the Danish ones where the strength of the collective agreement permits also to set minimum wages. **And also, in this particular case, the relations between the company and the trade unions are structured enough to have signed, also, an integrative contract.**

All of this is true also for the Danish case, where not even trade unions at the national level can really have an impact on the management of the working hours decided from the company – and this is even truer at the store-level, because Danish trade union (HK HANDEL) only has three delegates inside this company. But still, the fact that a national agreement has been signed and that there are the shop stewards, even if few, is seen as a victory:

> "Retail has so bad conditions that we cannot really solve them all. But it is already important that the company respects the collective agreement and that we made to elect two shop stewards. Workers have to deal with a lot of unpleasant situations, but they get their money, the know that unions is present…" (National Secretary, HK HANDEL, DK)

This aspect, thus, underlines how much the general perception of the retail sector relies on the awareness of very bad working conditions; at the same time, it is also acknowledged (and accepted?) unions' weakness and difficulties in influence them in a positive way.

Having proposed this premises, the next paragraphs focus on the specific difficulties that trade unions' secretaries and territorial representatives perceived as most problematic, that relate to the **struggle in making workers join the union** (7.3.1.1.) **and the difficulties deriving from the inefficiency of the "traditional" method of pressure** (7.3.1.2.)**; and then report what are the strategies that at this "high level" of unionism are considered as winning** (7.3.1.3.). The following paragraphs, thus, are also useful to see how much the empirical data are in line with the initial hypothesis, namely that trade unions' capacity to affect job quality are limited, but that are more effective in Denmark, due to a less fragmented system of industrial relations (see chapters 1 and 3).

7.3.1.1. Join the union!

What has emerged many times from the Italian interviews to trade unions' Secretaries or territorial representatives relates to the **general difficulties to enrol workers to the trade unions** – an aspect that actually highlights something that is common in the retail in general:

> "Look, trade unions exist on the base of the workers' needs, and it has been like this since forever… Trade unions try to give a collective answer to an individual need. Thus, we grow depending on the credibility of our delegates, in the shops… but it is clear that is difficult to start this process when a new store opens, but we try to give some answer in any case…And it is even more difficult when workers cannot really have even the time to focus on their problems." (National Secretary, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

Plus, in the Italian scenario there is also a further difficulty related to making workers joining the unions, **that relies on the fact that, according to the Italian Workers' Statue (1970), in order to elect a trade union representative at store level there have to be at least fifteen workers in the single workplace,** as seen in chapter 4 (Bordogna, Pedersini, 2019).

Also, in Italy the collective agreement covers all the workers employed in that sector, even if they are not unions' members, **and thus trade unions struggle more in convincing the workers to join**

them, being them already "protected" (as in all the countries for workers employed by companies that apply the collective agreement).

However, this macro problem has also another inner difficulty. In fact, even when unions manage to make workers join the organization, the feeling is that "make people enrol to union is not enough", because it does not guarantee real participation in the assemblies. Thus, it is important to deepen which kind of strategies can be more useful in a sector in which fragmented workplaces, high turnover rate and highly isolated workforce can be adopted (Ikeler, 2016; Gasparri, Ikeler, Fullin, 2019), as explained later.

The struggle in making the workers join the union in the retail sector is, as outlined, present also in Denmark.

> "I mean, trade unions here in Denmark are strong, you know that. We still have a lot of members, even if in the last years they started to decrease… and we are listened at all levels… […] at the company level, but also all the politicians know that everything related to the labour market is our prerogative. But in these sectors is more difficult… the workers are so young, often they do not gain enough money to join us [paying the annual membership]. Thus, *FoodForYou* is not different in this sense… we have the very same problems also in this case. Workers do not pay attention to unions' actions, but most of the time they simply cannot…" (National Secretary, HK HANDEL, DK)

Also in the Danish case, thus, the struggle in making workers join the unions is seen as problematic. Paradoxically, however, **despite the higher unionisation rate, this problem is more present in Denmark, for three reason.**

The first is related to a different cost of the membership (to the unions), that in Denmark is quite high, also because it usually covers the insurance for the unemployment benefit, as seen in chapter 4. **The second, coherently with the first, is once again connected with the workforce characteriscts: the youngest the workforce, the highest the percentage of turnover and very few hours part-time contracts, the lowest the income available to pay for the membership card (as seen in chapter 5).**

The third reason relies on the presence of the so called "50% rule", that applies in the retail sector, already explained in chapter 4, even if, as seen, it can be considered as a problem that emerges only when the company does not sign *ex ante* the collective agreement, something that rarely happens in the case of multinational corporations.

7.3.1.2. When the strikes are not enough

A general awareness that is present among all the Italian unions is that the **"traditional" forms of conflicts (such as, strikes), are not very useful in this sector** (Carrieri, 2012). The strikes are always seen as a risk-taking instrument and not always particularly effective. This is because a store operating in this sector cannot really be "stopped" by a strike, because it is sufficient to have just a minimum of the workforce to cover the essential tasks necessary to open the single shop. And plus, even if trade unions could be able to organize a strike involving all the employees (that is already very difficult) the company could stay open just with the presence of managers. This aspect has been underlined several times in the interviews, especially in order to highlight how much the retail sector is a "difficult" one for trade unions.

> "[…] I mean, we can't rely on the strikes. It is impossible for us, in this sector in particular. Or better, we can try to organize them, but with another purpose… for example, I don't remember the year, we organized a strike during the renewal of the integrative contract, because… because we did not agree with it. But it was in order to inform the workers… and the costumers, and the people… not to really threat the company, or to try to push the managers to not open the stores. How could we? Even if we were a lot, it was sufficient to have… to have… I think, five workers who did not adhere… and the store was opened by the manager…" (National Secretary, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

Thus, it is clear that the company manages to make invoice even with a minimum control (one open cash-register, or less well-stocked shelves).

In Denmark the issue of the strikes is even more complex. **In fact, by law, Danish trade unions can strike only on determines occasions, namely during the renewal of the general contracts and if there is an incapacity of finding an agreement** (Andersen *et al.,* 2012). Thus, the similarity with the Italian case relies on the fact that unions cannot count on the strikes as an "everyday strategy", it never happens that just a single firm or company plans any sort of strike actions. Thus, also in this case strike is not seen as an instrument of "daily" pressure.

However, ***if*** during the renewal of the contract the social parts cannot find an agreement, in that case, **all the sector involved in this process can strike**, and they can be very effective:

> "Because every time you have a collective agreement, if you cannot reach the agreement, there is the possibility to strike or to lockout. Yeah. It's like the actually, it's a bit like the atomic bomb because everything stops. You know, most of the whole private labour market shuts down completely, and only essential services and animal welfare can be

justified that that work keeps going on. Um, and we haven't had a general strike in Denmark since nineteen ninety eight. I think it was." (National Secretary, HK HANDEL, DK)

7.3.1.3. From the problems to the solutions: useful actions according to trade unionists

Many times during the interviews it has emerged that the instrument of the strike is not really effective, as seen; while the main strategy, from Italian unions' side, are two. Firstly, according to trade unionists, **what is more efficient are the "litigation tools" (judicial disputes, complaints to the Labour Inspectorate), considered much more effective**. And these are instruments that can be applied both at the national and at the territorial/store level, thus also involving delegates, who can have room for "micro actions" that can positively affect the job quality in every-day life: for example, starting from control over the work organization and the working hours and the access to the training policies, that can increase the professional qualification (Reyneri, 2013).

Secondly, the most profitable way to mark a sign in this sector and also in this company **is to *inform and train* their delegates,** and consequently the workers:

"Our main instrument is to train our delegates. Training and communication are essential, especially in such a big company… because you highlight the quality of your union representative, and you push the workers to trust you. In a sector like this one, this is fundamental. You might be a National Secretary and perfectly managing the sign of the integrative contract or a lawsuit, but if you cannot talk clearly with the workers… You have to make workers know the company, because usually companies like this tend to hide important information, for example about the revenue. Than sometimes you have to make it clear all the rights the workers have… from the sick leave to the vacation…" (National Secretary, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

According to trade unions' representatives' point of view, thus, training the delegates contribute in the increase of the workers' voices *at store level*.

From the Danish side, what is similar to the Italian case and is considered **as efficient is the training of the delegates**.

"We constantly try to train our delegates in the shops. In all the sectors. They have to know that they can call us anytime to ask everything they need… so also the workers can do the same, with them and with us." (Organizing Department Leader, HK HANDEL, DK)

But the other actions described by Danish trade unions' representatives as strategic are different. First of all, also in this country litigation tools are considered very effective when problems related to the non-respect of the collective agreement emerge. **However, differently from the Italian case, this is much more common to happen at a higher level, thus at sectoral level instead of single company levels**. It has been underlined, in any case, both from the unions and from the Chamber of Commerce, that these litigation tools are something that the social parts involved try to avoid, and that perceive as the "ultimate" chance, when the confrontation does not work, as reported in the following quotations:

> "Yes, you know, we rarely organize the strikes, as I told you. But sometimes, if the situation is really bad, we go the Labour Judge… But it has to be a big problem." (National Secretary, HK HANDEL, DK)

> "You know, we also have a legal office. And we sometimes give legal advices to our members, and we support them if some litigation, legal litigation, happen… But it's not that common." (Legal Representative, Danish Chamber of Commerce, DK)

So, as seen, the relations between the employers' associations and the trade unions, as already explained in chapter 4, are more structured, and thus even the legal disputes are seen as "the ultimate" way to solve conflicts. However, it is not to take for granted that the strong collaboration between the social parts means that the relations between the unions and the companies operating in the retail are always good. When they are not, Danish trade unions have described as very effective the **"defamatory campaigns" they make, and in this case also in relation to single companies.** This is something that actually also Italian trade unions use to do, but that has not emerged from the interviews, while it was strongly underlined in the Danish case:

> "To force the company to follow our standards, both contractual and from the job quality point of view… We are used to make defamatory campaigns, and there is also a lot of solidarity from others correct companies in that sector when it happens… But it is also for us a way to arrive to the workers and to the population in general, because it is easier to know what's happening through this way." (National Secretary, HK HANDEL, DK).

7.3.2. Being a trade union delegate in FoodForYou

In this paragraph the focus is on the role of the delegates. As outlined, in fact, on the one hand, when highlighting some major theme that are also related to the retail in general, the main players are the national unions, but, regarding the everyday life inside *FoodForYou*, are the trade unions'

delegates the ones who really knows the meaning of working in the company. And this is even truer because delegates are, first of all, workers in the company.

The first part of the paragraph offers an introduction on the organization of the delegates in both the countries. The following part, then, highlights the difficulties reported by the delegates, while finally the paragraph ends describing the main strategies they adopt to face the obstacles they find inside this company.

7.3.2.1. Many Italian delegates, few Danish shop stewards

The number of trade unions' delegates present at the store level has been considered, in literature, as a variable related to the workers' voice (Hirschman, 1970); but also, trade unions' delegated could play a role regarding the respect of the work-organization (management of the shifts), that, itself, affects the work-life balance and the salary, as better explained in chapter 8.

The exact number of the Italian trade unions' delegates (in total, thus considering all the three main unions, FILCAMS CGIL, FISASCAT CISL and UILTUCS UIL) has not emerged from the interviews. However, considering that in Italy there are 700 stores and that, on average, every store has 15 workers, making the hypothesis that half of the stores has a delegate, the estimation is to find more or less 450 delegates or less, part of different unions. The unionization rate in the company is now, however, almost everywhere medium-high (about 40%). The presence of three different unions inside the company is an important information in terms of job quality. **In fact, also following the snap happened between the three confederal trade unions, union unity at individual store's level (therefore between delegates) is variable: sometimes there is collaboration, but other times there are frictions**, as emerged in the interviews:

> "Yes, there are two delegates in my store, me and another one, but she is with [another union]. We do different things, you know… I mean, I think she is even too good with the management, so I prefer to work alone. She's focused on some specific tasks; I follow some other issues… But I can tell that sometime I wish her to be angrier" (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

Also, the election of delegates is not something to take for granted, because the work organization based on shifts and the high level of turnover rate make difficult the unionisation processes, increasing a dangerous match.

The situation of the union's delegates in Denmark is, on the other hand, quite interesting. Unions define them as "shop stewards". First of all, something unexpected (considering the well-known

strong system of industrial relations in Denmark) is to find, in *FoodForYou*, only three shop stewards in all the country inside this company. The reason behind this has to be found at the time of the initial bargaining between trade unions and the company when it first arrived in the country. **Back then, *FoodForYou* opened very few stores, one in the capital, Copenhagen, and few others in the rest of the country**. Because of this, the company proposed to HK HANDEL (the main representative Danish trade union covering the service sector) to elect three people to cover this role, because the company was still growing, and *FoodForYou* managers did not think that more than two people were useful at that stage.

> "There was not the need, according to them, for us to have more than two people. Back then, we agreed, we could not know how much *FoodForYou* would have grown in the next years… Now, I know… we should correct this situation because it is really hard for them. And plus, also for us, we need more shop stewards in order to make other workers to join us…" (Organizer Team Leader, HK HANDEL, DK)

This is very interesting because it highlights the power of the company in guiding and shaping the first bargaining following the home country Head Quarter guideline (Edwards, Marginson and Ferner, 2013). **Plus, this is peculiar especially in a context like the Danish one, where trade unions are notably still very strong, not fragmented and well organized and collaborative also with the employers' associations and the other relevant institutions**. Even a more important aspect, as emerged in the quotation reported above, is that the difficulties that unions have in the retail sector, and thus also in this company, are so persistent that even now, after several years, HK HANDEL did not manage to increase the number of its delegates inside *FoodForYou*.

7.3.2.2. Between the managers and the trade unionists: delegates' difficulties

In this paragraph are reported the testimonies of the Italian delegates, who described their **"double" role as workers and trade unions' representatives**. What is more interesting is that being part of the workforce, they of course have different perspectives in respect to National Secretaries or territorial unionists.

Coming to the main problems underlined by the Italian delegates, the first one underlined many times in the interviews is in line with also pointed by the national secretaries: **the difficulty in making the (co)workers to join the unions.** In fact, in period where there are not any particular and contingent difficulties despite the "every day" ones, **delegates have underlined how their co-workers seem to be not interested to join the organization**, or afraid of being considered under a bad view from the managerial figures. While, from the interviews with the delegates, independently from their

affiliations (FILCAMS CGIL, FISASCAT CISL or UILTUCS UIL) **it has emerged that unionization processes, in fact, seems to be strongly linked to the "moment" (higher during the period of renewal of the firm-level contracts)** (Feltrin, Maset, 2011), and it has been very strong at the beginning, as reported several times by unions' delegates:

> "There has been a moment when it was easier to unionise our colleagues… You know, working conditions were much worst […], also, for example, in the way we had to talk with the managers… so much rigidity…". (Territorial delegate, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

The second problem relates, unsurprisingly, **to the internal flexibility present in the company and consequently on the management of the work-life balance**. This problem has been described, as anticipated, both from a worker and a from a delegate perspective: in fact, **delegates "suffer" from the high level of flexibility that also affects work-life balance not only because it, of course, has an impact in their private lives; but also because, even if they are unions' representatives, they feel like they cannot do so much in this sense**:

> "I mean, they change our schedules every day. But the most frustrating thing… is that I go to them, I try to explain them that they cannot do this, that they cannot play with me because I am prepared, I know the labour regulations… but somehow, I am not capable to convince them every time." (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

Again in the Italian case, the third elements **concerns the issue of *fear* of being "exposed" and "targeted" from the management, as unions' members.** What is interesting is that the feeling of fear or discomfort is not necessarily linked to the workers' contract: even the ones who have permanent contracts, and therefore do not risk a "non-renewal of the contract", are not always comfortable exposing themselves, because the repercussions in everyday life could be unpleasant.

Together with the fear, Italian **workers also perceive a sense of "isolation" because the perception is that, despite being employed in the same company, there is not enough communication between the small and medium stores present in the country.**

> "There are workers enrolled in the union, but the problem with this company… is that there are a lot of small and medium shops, despite being *FoodForYou* a big corporation. Thus, we are isolated… we are isolated inside the store and even more between the stores… everybody goes by their own. That's the problem." (Territorial delegate, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

This sense of isolation present among workers underlines that actually there is not a consistent difference, at least regarding this aspect, between being employed in a big corporation or in a small company. **In fact, due to the work organization based on shifts and the high level of turnover rate, there is the lack of a general consciousness, of being part of the same company, an aspect that of course affects trade unions' strategies and consequently job quality.** The start of the COVID-19 pandemic in this sense has paradoxically helped because, moving all the relationships "online", social media groups (for example, WhatsApp) have been created among the delegates of the different territories, where opinions, good practices, problems etc. were exchanged (see chapter 9).

If in the Italian case it is easy to grasp the differences (in terms of job quality) between the stores that have effectively a union's delegate among the workers and the ones that lack these figures, due to the testimonies of the delegates themselves, in Denmark, on the contrary, the situation is different. It is not a coincidence, in fact, that **the problem perceived as more evident by the shop steward regards, first of all, being alone and controlling several stores**. In fact, the only three shop stewards present in *FoodForYou* have a "region of reference", and have the competence to visit several stores, introduce themselves and listen to the eventual complaints coming from the workers, in order to report the situation to the central trade union.

> "[…] Yeah. Yes, because I am… I don't know what you call that in English, but I am... I have like an extra job from the union and I cover thirty two stores where I spend one day a week going around and I'm the only one they call if they have any implications or stuff like that. I had one call yesterday and… I deal with that kind of stuff as well. But not only in my store, but in thirty two stores.." (Shop Steward, HK HANDEL, DK)

The second aspect perceived as more problematic, in the Danish case, **regards the fact that the (few) shop stewards present in the stores feel like they have to significantly struggle in order to explain to the workers their rights,** how do things work, to teach them how to ask what they need to the managers and so forth. According to the delegate, all of this is particularly difficult because, as already seen in chapter 5 and as better explained in the next chapter, the **workforce is made by very young people who do not know their rights** and because the high level of turnover rate.

7.3.2.3. Facing the obstacles: stores' delegates role and potentialities

Thus, having in mind the issues that the delegates perceive as more problematic, what are the strategies that unions' delegates adopt in order to face these obstacles?

Regarding the issue of the flexibility that, as seen, has been underlined mainly by the Italian delegates, **it has emerged that the general feeling is of acceptance of the incapacity to play a significant role.** However, what they can do is to try to push in order to obtain work shifts that are in line with their work-life balance, and to ask for longer notice in case of changes. However, the general feeling is not to be enough "useful":

> "I mean, this job is like this. Everybody knows that. I can try to talk with our store manager, I can even ask for our working table in advance, I can get angry if they change our shifts with a short notice… But the labour market has changed and we are aware that we have to cope with these situations. If unions can do something… I mean… If unions can do something, that is not at our level. We, as delegates, cannot really… we cannot change this system. Trade unions, at national level, can maybe bargain for better working conditions… or they can talk with the Ministry…" (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

Also, these difficulties rely on the fact that flexibility is very convenient for the company, especially to "adjust" the daily productivity targets. **A coping strategy** to this problematic that has applied by the workers, especially under delegates' suggestions, **is to "use" the (apparently unavoidable) flexibility as a tool: thus, usually workers try to "organize themselves among each other".**

In this company, thus, workers combine the "traditional forms" of organization with **different solutions, more based on the internal solidarity among peers than on formal institutions' support: this is an aspect not always taken into account by the industrial relations' literature, that, as explained in the introduction, especially in Italy has mainly been focused on the industry sector, where the "traditional" forms of actions are more efficient.**

However, despite all the difficulties, the presence of trade unions' delegates is for sure significant. They organize assemblies, defend their co-workers in case of unpleasant behaviours and reports more structural issues to the territorial or national trade unions. Of course, they really cannot fix the most permanent and intrinsic company's issues, because they are embedded in a **higher framework that regards the retail sector – while it is more likely to have an impact on the general management of the company at the national level of discussion with the trade unions.**

In Denmark, the instrument underlined as more effective in order to solve the problematics that are present in the company **is to make workers aware of their rights. This is even truer considering, as said, the small number of delegates present in the company**, who have a different role, as explained. This different role makes more difficult for this shop steward to claim for more proactive

actions, because actually, being alone, most of the time her role is just to explain to workers their rights and their duties. In Denmark this is quite understandable, especially if looking at the different workforce characteriscts: it is easier to imagine, in Italy, a higher level of "awareness" of workers' rights, while in Denmark, where the workforce employed in the retail sector is often made by very young people who do not even desire, most of the time, to grow inside that companies, unions have to make an "extra effort" even explaining the "basics" of the workers' rights.

> "Yes, exactly [I kinda teach them what are their rights]. So yeah, because that's always one of the things is people say that they work really much and they work every weekend and they… all those things. And I kinda tell them what are the rights they actually have and so forth…" (Shop steward, HK HANDEL, DK)

In the Italian case, thus, trade unions' delegates actions result to be more effective in comparison to the Danish one, something that was completely unexpected in the initial hypothesis of this work, knowing *ex ante* that Danish trade unions have more power and a higher unionisation density, compared to Italy (**in 2019, Denmark present the 67% of trade union density, while Italy 32,5%** (OECD, 2023)). This example thus underlines that the Danish system of industrial relations, even if still strong, is not completely immune from the deregulation processes happening in the labour market in the retail sector and from the multinational corporations' Head Quarter guidelines. **But most importantly, in this case the characteriscts of the workforce plays an important role in the trade unions' capacity to make workers join the organization, because, as seen, the young age of the workers employed in this sector makes more difficult also for the shop steward just to make them understand their rights**. For other aspects, on the contrary, the fact that Danish workers are younger than the Italian ones marks a positive aspect in terms of job quality, as explained in the next chapter.

7.4. Trade unions in a globalized labour market

When talking about job quality in multinational corporations and the impact of the institutions, taking into account the role of trade unions is fundamental, as seen. However, multinational corporations themselves are characterised exactly by their international nature. What is, thus, the perception of national and supranational trade unions about the multinational corporation?

Both in Italy and in Denmark, national trade unions' representatives have underlined especially how much the (more or less) strength of national labour market norms and the industrial relations' system are the two elements more capable to affect multinational corporations' behaviours. **Once again, the main difference between Italy and Denmark is the level of cooperation between the different**

institutions. In Italy, trade unions and employers' associations collaborate less in comparison to Denmark. Italian industrial relations' system results to be fragmented, disarticulated, and "generally complicated" – so, sometimes multinational corporations struggle in understanding the Italian internal dynamics. And also, Italian trade unions' attitude with firms and companies is traditionally more "conflictual", in comparison with Denmark. This may lead to frictions:

> "[…] Usually what is difficult to handle [from corporations' point of view] is our industrial relations' system, they do not always accept it… […] We are now in a phase where… companies with whom we built… historically… a good relations… they are making some steps behind… I mean, it almost seems that they want to get rid of us in the stores… they look at us with difficulties." (National Secretary, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

However, in the Italian case trade unions' representatives also underlined a positive aspect deriving from the confrontation with multinational corporation. **When relating with a foreign multinational corporation trade unions can perceive the "security of the brand" and/or can rely on the biggest dimension that (some) of these companies have, so that it easier to elect a delegate.** To fully understand this passage, it is useful to remind in here that the Italian retail sector is characterised by a strong presence of small and micro companies, where it is very difficult, for the trade unions, to make workers enrol the organization or even to apply the national collective agreement. This issues has emerged during the interview with a union National Secretary:

> "When we see the company brand, we may think about more solid advantages and more guarantees. Nonetheless, the brand does not necessarily means that the management is direct [could be franchising]" (National Secretary, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

This is even truer when talking about social protections, even if in this case the turning point is not related to the dichotomy foreign/national company, but on the company dimension:

> "Being them multinational corporations or large Italian company… the company dimension in relation to the social protections play a role for sure. When you have a series of social protections more structured, more continuous and less fragmented… so in relation to social protections, in these cases they are higher" (National Secretary, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

On the other hand, as outlined, the strong cooperation between different social parts in Denmark make much easier to "force" foreign multinational corporations to adapt to their system of industrial relations and labour market regulations:

"Some of the foreign companies, the big ones… they just tend, you know, to adapt. Some of the small ones… I can remember one of the things… they had Abercrombie and fitch, they came to Denmark, in Copenhagen. And they had this… they have this policy like no clothes on, flip flop, and they have a lot of perfumes in the company and in the shop area. And the unions said that there were not good nor healthy for people, so they said that they need to do something else. And they stopped to do that. So to say, some of them just need time to adapt. And it is not like... there were not violence or whatever, there were just talks with them, just explained with the authorities that that was not good for the working environment and so forth." (Organizing Team, HK HANDEL, DK)

"[…] and if a Swedish firm like IKEA, you know IKEA? If Ikea, that is from Sweden…. And when we knew that they were coming to Denmark, we contacted our fellows in Sweden and asked "IKEA is coming to Denmark, do you have an agreement with them? What do you do?" and then we contracted, "Hello, you are coming to Denmark, now you know that we have an agreement" and so forth." (Territorial Secretary, HK HANDEL, DK)

Looking at a different institutional level, what did emerge from the interviews regarding the role of supranational trade union? It seems that European Trade Unions are not – at least in Italy – seen as particularly capable to address specific needs, especially because industrial relations systems are quite different. If this, on the one hand, confirms the Varieties of Capitalism approach, on the other it rises questions on the figures of multinational corporations and on how they are, effectively, present in more than one country, thus highlighting at least the confrontation with supranational trade unions – not sufficiently present.

"Let's say this… because of the peculiarities of the Italian industrial relations system, for us, European trade unions are not always useful. Because, for them… I mean, doing trade unions' activities in Europe has a different meaning. It means basically sharing information and elaborating on different questions. The bargaining process… it simply just does not exist. And this is a pity. But consider that in some countries… the bargaining does not exist at all. In the Eastern European countries for example… […] We really can't say that the European level has ever solved or practically helped national actions… I would say that is quite useless under this aspect. At least in our country […] Thus we do not expect to find an advancement point at this level." (National Secretary, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

> "We should bargain paradoxically only at the European level, in order to avoid the terrible social dumping between countries. At that point, we could have, not only in Italy, but for the entire Europe… homogeneous conditions. Inevitably we are asked to rethink our methods in an European way." (National Secretary, FISACAT CISL, IT)

In Denmark, on the other hand, the issues resulted to be quite not relevant. The main reason of this is because the Danish system is so consolidated than any "inferences" from outside are seen as elements potentially capable to weaken the system itself. Actually, this is true also regarding the introduction of a European minimum wage law – a proposal strongly not well considered from Danish social parts (all of them, from trade unions to the Danish Chamber of Commerce).

What are, thus, in practice, the actions made at the European level? The interviews with the delegates of UniEuropa Union have helped in answering this question. As just outlined, the main European actions have been described as "lobby", as pressure activities in Bruxelles, nothing different from other institutions dialoguing with the European Commission and Parliament. However, one of the main activities pursed at European level **regards the informative campaign, especially "against" companies' bad behaviours or anti-unions attitudes.**

> "This is something very useful for us. […] We can learn from what is their pressure instruments… it is much more modern and especially regarding… all the activities relating the communication strategies… and about the companies' reputation… that is a theme we are reaching too; it is strong pressure instrument that we did not know very well before." (National Secretary, FILCAMS CGIL, IT – Internationalisation delegate)

The other strategic way to operate, when present, are related to the presence of the Social Dialogue Groups and the Sectoral Dialogue Group, as well as of the European Work Councils (EWCs), seen as a perfect instrument to collect all together all the relevant information. They basically try to build a structured dialogue with multinational corporations. These bodies are however maybe the most useful instruments, because they are built around the single companies (multinational ones of course) and are made by all the European trade unions that have national agreement with that company. However, these bodies are not present for every multinational corporation: for example, they are absent in the case of *FoodForYou*. In any case, also with this instrument the concrete revindications are really difficult to implement.

> "The discussions they make are very very wide… and sometimes, if you already had implemented a national action… the risk is that it becomes flat, not relevant anymore." (National Secretary, FILCAMS CGIL, IT – Internationalisation delegate)

Regarding more specifically the service and trade sector, now at European level unions are focusing on the digitalization processes occurring – especially quick commerce, e-commerce and so forth. This focus is then developed in two directions: **on the one hand, monitoring the acquisition of new skills and competences and governing the process of workers' maintenance of their career; on the other, looking at the strategies of the big companies operating in this way, internationally** (e.g. Amazon).

In general, however, what seems to be the main issue here is the enormous gap between the goals (or what should be the goals) and the instruments.

> "The truth is that an international action is what should be done, the final goal, but we are still far away from it. It is a paradox… because of course with a multinational corporation… but also in general, when facing big companies that are aligning themselves on the same strategies… there should be supranational actions. We are aware that something more should be done at the supranational level, but is a very long process, and it is very difficult to reach a synthesis most of the time…" (UniEuropa representative)

Thus, considering that the action pursued also at the international level are not completely effective – despite the presence of multinational corporations, looking at other institutions become fundamental.

7.5. Final considerations

This chapter highlighted that, despite the main difficulties that unions have encountered in the relation with this company, their presence for sure signed a positive impact in terms of job quality. *FoodForYou*, both in Italy and in Denmark, is a unionized company, meaning that it applies the collective agreement signed with the (three) most representative trade union(s) and, most importantly, meaning that it has (several) unions' delegates in its stores. Of course, the presence of a trade union in the company positively affects job quality for *FoodForYou* workers. Having delegates in the stores, in fact, means having a voice on several (and daily) issues, related for example to the health and safety policies implemented in the store; but it also means to have the possibility to organize mobilization and to have a privileged contact with other relevant institutions – for example, as emerged in the Italian case, the Labour Inspectorate or the Ministry of Labour. Ultimately, working in a unionized company increases the possibility to rely not only on the national collective agreement, but likely also on an integrative contract (company level bargaining), that can offer, among other things, further protections in terms of corporate welfare, or some form of salary increment, and so on.

Also, in the Italian case, even if FILCAMS CGIL underlined its limitations, the fact that *FoodForYou* not only follows what already foreseen in the national collective agreement but has also signed an integrative contract adds further elements (for example, baby bonus for employees who become parents) that would have been absent otherwise.

Another positive impact emerges in a two-level comparison. In fact, in Italy it is evident how much the presence of the trade unions plays a role in the stores that have a delegate, as also emerged in some interviews:

> "I mean, this is in any case my company. I usually go to some other stores… And I totally can tell you that the working conditions are much worst in the stores where we are not present. Because, even if we cannot do much, at least the workers have a point of reference… and this is important at practical level because we can talk with the managers in a more trained way, and they have to listen to us. But trust me, also in terms of feelings… I mean, if you have a delegate you *feel* more secure and protected." (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

This difference emerges even more when comparing *FoodForYou* in Italy in Denmark. **Having only three shop stewards in all the country of course does not help in having a control over the stores' managers behaviour** – being it related to the management of the working hours, unpleasant way of relate to workers or other things. In this sense, though, and in a way that was not expected at first, the Italian scenario shows a more "controlled" situation from the unions' side.

Finally, as better explained in chapter 9, **the presence of the trade unions have been fundamental during the period of the pandemic**, both at the national level (thus, their voice in the implementation of certain policies) and especially at the stores' level (for example, in the respect of the social distance).

But if taking more into account the job quality indicators used all over the analysis implemented in this work, many limitations emerge about trade unions' impact in positively affect it.

On the issue of the low salaries, trade unions' presence or strategies are not really sufficient to "fix" this aspect. The presence of the low salaries is an issue emerged both in Italy and in Denmark when talking about *FoodForYou*, an issue strengthen by the fact that the majority of the workers are employed with part-time contracts. It is not a coincidence that at the European level there are many discussions going on about introducing a minimum wage level especially for some labour sectors. In this case, the common point between Italian and Danish trade unions regards the doubts they have about this, because a set minimum wage could decrease unions' contractual power. However, it is

still true that, at the state of the art, unions alone cannot do much to increase the salaries of these workers.

The second job quality indicator to analyse looking at the potential impact of the trade unions relates the work-life balance. **Also in this case, as seen, unions can try to ask for a more regulated management of the work organization, but it is not easy, especially since the labour norms allow to deregulate the contracts and the working hours. In the case of a multinational corporation operating in the food retail sector this is even more difficult**, because, as seen, managers can even change workers' timetables even in the single day, relying on the fact that this choice would be justified by the possibility (or not) to reach a targeted revenue. What can play a more significant difference in this sense is the presence of some targeted welfare policies, especially related to the family care; in this case, Denmark shows a preferable situation.

This is even truer because, despite the fact that Danish welfare system is more structured than the Italian one, also the workforce characteristics of the Danish retail sector matches more with the tendency present in this company to make a huge use of part-time contracts and flexible working hours: being the workers most of the time very young, they will be more willing to accept this specific arrangement. **And, even in the case of workers who are women, mothers, or in any case take care of family issues, still welfare policies can help them in coping with this possibility**. This is even more interesting considering that the Danish labour market is even more liberal than the Italian one, in terms of deregulation of the working hours.

The common point is that, however, and more than in other labour sectors, trade unions alone are not sufficient to improve these specific elements.

VIII.

WORKING, BUT HOW? JOB QUALITY INSIDE AN INTERNATIONAL DISCOUNT RETAIL CHAIN

8.1. Introduction

As outlined in the introduction (chapter 1) and in the literature review (chapter 2), ***job quality*** can be analysed applying several lenses of analysis, using different methodologies and looking at different indicators (Findlay, Kelleberg, and Warhurst, 2013; Gallie, 2014; Cazes *et al.*, 2015). In order to have a clearer understating of this chapter, it is useful to briefly remind, in here, the dimensions of the job quality that this research looks at. Those refer, on the one hand, to the **employment quality** (De Bustillo *et al.*, 2011; Reyneri, 2013), taking thus into account those elements related to the **occupational status** (types of contracts, working hours, career prospects, work organization). On the other hand, trough the testimonies of the trade unions' delegates, it was also possible to partly grasps how workers perceive their jobs, especially in relations to some aspects more difficult to measure through the indicators related to the employment quality (aspects more related to the **quality of the working life** – see Gosetti, 2012).

The chapter is thus structured as follows.

Paragraph 8.2. looks at the **workforce characteristic** present in the company, focusing especially on the variables of the gender and the age and describing the differences between Italy and in Denmark: workforce characteristics, as explained later, are in fact fundamental in the final perception of the job quality present in the company (starting from the type of contracts and even arriving to the physical fatigue that workers perceive).

Paragraph 8.3. deepens one of the most important issue emerged from the interviews, namely the high level of flexibility, analysing the main causes that explain its presence. After this, paragraph 8.4. focuses on the ***external flexibility***. This paragraph looks first of all at the distinction between fixed-term (or other forms of atypical contracts) and permanent contracts (8.4.1.), and just after at the phenomenon of the turnover rate, considered in here as a consequence of the fixed-term contracts (8.4.2.). Then, paragraph 8.4.3. deepens the problematics that derive from the application of this kind of contracts, thus taking more into consideration the subjective consequences they can have on workers, in both the countries: in here, the focus is however more on the Italian case, because, as will be explained, the external flexibility has a more negative impact in this country than in Denmark.

Paragraph 8.5 is on the contrary focused on the ***internal flexibility***, an aspect that have consequences on the subjective job quality perceived by the workers. In fact, this paragraph deepens, specifically, aspects such as the use of part-time contracts and its consequences in relations to the workforce characteriscts and the salary (8.5.1.); the management of the shifts and the consequences on workers (that concern several aspects, such as the relation with peers and the pace of work (8.5.2.); and finally the issue of the involuntary part-time and its relation with the family care and the work-life balance, underlining how, in here, the different institutional contexts, in particular the welfare system, have a profound different impact on workers' job quality (8.5.3.) (de la Porte, Larsen, Szelewa, 2020).

Paragraph 8.6. focuses on the **job's tasks and workers' recognitions**. Thus, it first of all presents their roles and their classification described in the collective agreements present in this company; then, the following paragraph goes on to explain how these factors may affect the workers' level of personal satisfaction, and why they can decide to leave the company, something that is thus related to the theme of the voluntary turnover rate present in the company (8.6.1.).

Then, once again regarding the more subjective aspects related to the workers' recognition, the following sub-paragraphs focuses on the issue of the **careers' prospects**, focusing especially on how they affect workers' discretion (8.6.2.); on the issue of the **gender-gap** (8.6.3.); and on the **relations with costumers** (8.6.4.).

Paragraph 8.7. presents the **training policies** implemented by *FoodForYou*, firstly describing them as presented by its managers and then taking into considerations their potential impact in making the workers perceive a sense of autonomy when fulfilling their tasks.

Finally, paragraph 8.8. proposes some concluding considerations.

8.2. Who are *FoodForYou*'s workers? Italian mothers vs. Danish young students

Chapter 5 has proposed a quantitative analysis on the workforce characteristics in the retail sector in both the countries.

In here, the focus is specifically on the workers of *FoodForYou*: how much are they in line with the workers of the sector, in general? Why is it important to look especially at the characteristics of gender and age, if the key of the analysis concerns the job quality? Depending on these features, as explained in the next paragraphs, job quality can really change. **Being a young worker instead of an adult one, for example, has an impact on the issue of being employed with a part-time contract, or to gain a low salary; as well as being a woman who has the responsibility of family's duties has an**

impact on the issue of the work-life balance or even on the pace of work (Gautié *et al.,* 2010; Askenazy *et al*., 2012).

As outlined, the interviews conducted with the trade unions' representatives and delegates helped in grasping the inner characteristics of what really means to work in this company, and **who are** the workers present in there.

In terms of gender, considering the characteristics of the retail sector in general, the expectation is to find a workforce mostly made by women: as explained also in chapter 5, the retail sector presents a percentage of women – on the total of female occupation – of almost **14%** in Italy and of **15%** in Denmark. From ***all*** the interviews in both the countries it has emerged that the majority of the workforce is made by women.

Only in the Italian case, from the interviews it has emerged a specification regarding the gender of the workforce. In fact, trade unions' representatives have pointed how, in the supermarkets, is quite common to find women in the role of the cashiers, and **men, mainly foreign**, in the role of dispatchers**:**

> "In the warehouse, it is a completely different world. There are a lot of foreign workers, young men who have to lift 25 kilos… there also a some women, but the heaviest jobs are for men. Jobs more based on repetitiveness, patience… That requires a contact with the costumers… They are for women." (Territorial representative, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

Differently from the gender, in the case of **workers' age** there is a clear difference between Italy and Denmark in this company – actually, an insight perfectly in line with what already described in chapter 5: the percentage of people between 15 and 24 years old, on the total of the people employed in the retail sector, is only of **5.73%** in Italy**,** while of **37.51%** in Denmark**.**

In Italy, in fact, workforce is mainly made by young/middle-aged people (between 25 and 55 years old), who usually already have a family or have been in the labour market for a while. **Despite this, there is also a quota of the workforce made by younger people, even if at a smaller extent and strongly connected to some clear contractual specificities, as explained later** (8.4.1.). But these are mainly exceptions, as reported in the following quotation:

> "Yes, we are mainly kinda adult women, like, 35 years old… I mean, most of us already have a family. There are few exceptions, however… like, we have that girl, she's twenty. She works on Sundays… Yes, you can find girls around that age, but in my store… only few…" (Territorial delegate, UILTUCS UIL, IT).

So, in Italy the definition of "young" acquires a different significance if compared to Denmark. There, in fact, the quota of the very young workers is much higher, an aspect that can be explained looking at general institutional context, in particular the education system and the labour market mobility, already described in Chapter 4 (Helms Jørgensen, Järvinen, Lundahl, 2019).

The case of this company is in line with this more general aspect, emerged not only from the analysis of the data on the retail sector (chapter 5), but also several time from the interviews (chapter 4): as seen, due to the **strong level of active labour market policies** and educational system based not only on a universalistic asset but also on a **VET system**, it is very common that very young people start to work when they are still studying. Plus, in Denmark it is also very common that young people take one or more "gap" year(s) in between the end of the high school and the start of the bachelor courses, or in between the bachelor's degree and the master's courses and so forth. And most of the time, these young workers are employed in sector like **retail, also because they are much more willing to cope with difficult work time management** and do not need **too high salaries**. All of this will be deepened in the next paragraphs.

> "In Denmark you can also find people who are in their forties or so, in the retail sector. But is so much common to find very young people… because there are a lot of [university] students, or students who took their gap year… and at that age is much easier that they work in the supermarkets…" (Territorial representative, HK HANDEL, DK).

In this case, thus, there is a clear difference between the two countries. The issue of the age is something not to underestimate.

Also because, as a subjective consequence, it is also worth to mention that being older of course affects the pace of work and especially **the physical fatigue** that is very much present in these jobs:

> "You have also to consider that there are very heavy shifts. Because if you have 38 hours per week, you usually work 7 hours per day […] I mean, it's not a job where you sit with a paper in your hand, you have to do different things, checking the cash machines, ordering the fruits, the meat… organizing all the items, and the boxes, in the shelves…and there are not enough people to do that, nor time […]" (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

> "We also have… of course now the stores start to have… I mean some workers are starting ageing. I am 48 years old and I am not strong as once, so I asked to my union's representatives if they know something about what the company wants to do about this aspect… Because I mean, I get the turnover, but there are people like me who do not want

> to quit the job, but I wonder… will I be able to do this job when I am 67 years old? Because at the end of the day this is a physical job…[…] I am not sure to be able to do what I do today in 20 years. Not at all. And I think this is an issue that the company should consider…" (Territorial delegate, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

In this case, Denmark presents a picture in which the consequences on working conditions are somehow less severe, because workforce employed in the retail is usually made by very young people – thus, the worries about ageing and keep doing this job is felt to a lesser extent.

There are other subjective consequences related to the workers' age, aspects that are in fact deepened later, in the next paragraphs: on the one hand, the issue of the workers' age, **once again, plays a role in front of the presence of a strong flexibility and to the high spread of part-time contracts (and consequently low salaries).** On the other, in terms of subjective job quality, being a young student or a middle-aged mother has different consequences in terms of both work-life balance (as explained in paragraph 8.5.3.).

8.3. Why so flexible?

As already explained in the chapter dedicated to the characteristics of the retail sector (5), flexibility is something very much diffused in this sector, in general, especially in some "peak" periods during the years (holidays) or during the weeks (weekends), and thus in this sense this company is in line with what happens in this sector (Grugulis, Bozkurt, 2011; Bozkurt, 2015).

This paragraph, thus, mainly focuses on the *reasons* behind the presence of the flexibility, looking in particular at the *demand side* (role of costumers) (Wren, 2013) and *the economic target* (corporation's goals).

These two reasons are related. Following the labour organization of the mass distribution, *FoodForYou* operates in a sector where the **demand from the costumers is variable**: thus, stores are open 6 and sometimes (especially in the biggest cities) 7 days per week, from the morning to the evening; but (and this is a characteristic of this specific sector) the number of costumers is not homogenously distributed. This is an aspect that has strongly emerged in the two fieldworks. In fact, according to both company's managers and trade unions' representatives, in Italy and in Denmark, **the majority of the clients are concentrated on the late afternoon of the weekdays**, and in general especially during **the weekends**. This means that **the work organization has to be distributed considering the long opening hours *and* the costumers' presence.**

The flow of the costumers presence affects the economic targets of the company. In fact, as in other major retail brands, **the expected revenue of the sales (that depends on the numbers of costumers) is calculated on the basis of the previous week,** and according to the morning trend, as underlined many times in the Italian case, managers tend to **minimize the cost of labour in respect to the volume of the selling, something defined as "lean retailing"** (Smith and Elliot, 2012; Ikeler, 2016).

Actually – both in Italy and in Denmark – managers cannot *force* the workers to accept these changes in their working shifts, according to the national collective agreements of both the countries. This binding formality, however, does not guarantee that, eventually, these changes do not happen – something that is actually in line with the initial hypothesis presented in chapter 1: trade unions do play a role, but due to the characteristics of the sectors, they can only partially put govern some problematics. In fact, **the pressure felt by the workers make them to accept these requests** (especially the ones who do not have a permanent contract, and especially in the stores where the union representative(s) is/are not present). In fact, as also underlined by Newsome *et al.*, (2013), due to this "vicious" connection between the economic target and the flexibility, **the food retail is one of the sectors where the pressure and the control felt by the workers in the relation to their manager is particularly high.** The feeling of pressure of course also affect the **work environment index** (Eurofound, 2012), and it represents a negative outcome – even if in a more indirect way – of the presence of the flexibility.

> "They cannot clearly… if a worker has 20 hours per week by contract, you cannot just "cut" those hours and use her hours of sick leave, for example. You cannot do that. But they have grey zones with the re-organization of the shifts… of course they have to do that within a certain notice, and of course they can just ask to people to stay home in order to reach the target. […] And even if they [the workers] do not want to or are annoyed… they know how it works, how the system works." (Territorial delegate, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

> "I have a 30 hour week in my contract and I never worked 30 hours a week. I worked a lot more and everyone did. And they don't follow the rules about what we have to…I came to other districts, and it was the same, the rule wasn't followed as well, and workers had really long shifts. And "can you come in an hour before, can you stay an hour later? […] They can't change [your shifts] without asking. They, you know, they have to ask if we can come… For it or stay later… Or want a different shift on a day or something. Of course they have to ask. **But you definitely feel sometimes that you have a little bit of pressure. You can't really say no**". (Shop Steward, HK HANDEL, DK)

Another aspect emerged (only in the Italian scenario) that is related to the costumers' flows and the attended revenue is the presence of the so called **"missions" (asking a worker to go to a different store).** According to trade unions' representatives, missions are also quite frequent – once again, it can happen that in order to reach the daily economic target of the selling, the worker is asked to go to work to a neighboring municipality (that maybe, in that moment, is understaffed). And this is something that is useful also in the workers' interests, because the alternatives would have been to reschedule the rest of the working week adjusting the hours that had been changed. This especially happens to workers who have zero-hours/on-call contracts (see paragraph 8.4.1.), who go "where needed".

The introduction reported in here is useful to better understand what is explained in the next paragraphs: that **the presence of a structural flexibility is something that pushes the companies operating in the retail (*FoodForYou* included) to hire workers with part-time contracts, in order to have more possibility to manage the work organization**. But this means also affecting the pace of work and the management of the working hours, and consequently the work-life balance (aspects more related to the *internal flexibility*). All of these aspects are explained in the next paragraphs.

8.4. External flexibility: security or precariousness?

In here and in the next paragraph the focus is on the *external flexibility,* taking specifically into account the distinction between fixed-term and permanent contracts and the level of turnover rate. This last aspect, in particular, represents somehow a "transversal" issue, that, for this reason, can derive from several causes: in here, the focus is on the *involuntary* turnover rate, while the voluntary one will be deepened also later, for example in paragraph 8.6.1.

A premises to read this part relates to the fact that the types of contracts **is an issue for the Italian case, but not for the Danish one**. In fact, as also explained in chapter 4, the types of contracts, and in particular the level of *deregulation* behind them, is something that in Italy offer insights also about the stability of the job, about the opportunity to grow, even about other guarantees related to some social protections – because fixed-term contracts (or even more flexible formula) can create a series of difficulties in relation to these aspects. This is because the Italian labour market, even if more deregulated since 2012, still maintains a **gap between protected and non-protected workers** (known as insiders and outsiders) (Burroni, 2016; Raitano, Fana, 2019), for example considering the difficulties in the firing procedures for workers who have permanent contracts, or the access to a series of social protections that workers employed with atypical contracts do not have.

In Denmark, on the other hand, **being hired with permanent contracts is quite the norm, but this is not necessary a guarantee from being fired** and for this reason employers can more easly fire workers even if they have a securer agreement (Piasna, Myant, 2017).

8.4.1. Types of contracts and hiring procedures: labour laws boundaries vs. managers' autonomy

As outlined, something that has emerged several times in the Italian interviews but not at all in Denmark – due to the inner differences of the two labour market regulations – relates the types of contracts applied in this company.

In the Danish case, in fact, for the reasons already explained, this theme is not perceived as an issue, in general, and also in the case of this company: most of the time, as outlined, contracts are not "atypical":

> "I told you; Danish labour market is really liberal. So yes, beside the seasonal contracts that can be present sometimes, more or less all the contracts are for a permanent period… This does not mean that the worker will stay there forever or that the manager will not fire them." (National Secretary, HK HANDEL, DK)

While in Italy it is worth to focus on this distinction. In the Italian case, **despite the fact that the national collective agreement fixes a quota of people who can be hired with fixed-term contracts, it is still more common to find workers hired with these contracts than in Denmark**:

> "Especially when you start working, it is very difficult to be hired with a permanent contract. Then, after a probation period, you may be hired for good, but it is not to take it for granted." (National Secretary, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

In the case of Italy, this is something that is not directly dependent by the company's directives, but that is the consequence of the characteristics of the Italian labour regulations and of the Collective National Agreement (CCNL) signed by the trade unions. In fact, in the agreement there is the explicit indication that sets a fixed quota (28%) of workers that can be employed with a fixed-term or **other** atypical types of contracts.

In fact, in the groups of "atypical contracts", together with the fixed-term ones, also the "zero-hour contracts" ("contratti a chiamata") are diffused, especially for Sundays work. In fact, companies have the possibility to hire (even if for a smaller percentage of the total of the workforce) people also with peculiar types of contracts, that foresee very few hours: this trend has increased a lot during the

pandemic, also to cover the shifts of workers in quarantine or positive to COVID-19, as explained later in chapter 9.

It is in here that the characteristics of the age takes relevance: in fact, in the Italian scenario the "super young" workers are usually present in these particular cases, thus, they work on Sundays, they are hired in period of peaks of work and activities – for example, Christmas holidays, or they cover shifts that cannot be covered by the "organic" workforce – as for example, during the pandemic.

> "But yes, if you are talking about students, then yes, they only work on Sundays… or maybe to substitute someone who is sick, or in maternity leave… Usually they are hired with zero-hour contracts." (Territorial representative, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

The types of contracts present in this company are something much more related to a series of regulations (at least in the Italian case) and that do not seem to have specific company's policies to be followed. However this might not be completely true: it is worth in here to briefly remind the hiring procedures that the company implements.

Concerning the more typical contracts, the hiring procedures are very much centralized and standardized (as seen in Chapter 6), and foresee a formal authorization from the Head Quarter and the use of a centralized system (organized through the website):

> "The Human Resource Management is absolutely standard everywhere. I give you some examples, the needs of the single stores, regarding the staff, have to be determined depending on the numbers [the economic numbers] of every single store, thus the number of people who are hired depends on that." (Manager – macro area level, *FoodForYou*, IT)

The same is true in Denmark, where the hiring procedures are again centralized and controlled, but in this case at district level:

> "The regional recruiters or the regional recruitment assistant will do the screening of the applications coming in. And then … The district manager or the store manager, depending on what level they are looking for… Will call to arrange an interview… and then the process… they always have to be two people from the beginning of the interview. And then they usually do one or two interviews, before they decide which candidate they wanna go for… And then they fill out everything and get a contract from the payment team, and then they can start." (Branding Manager – national level, *FoodForYou*, DK)

On the contrary, **in the case of atypical contracts managers have much more autonomy:**

> "When you want to hire someone not with a permanent contract, maybe for a peak of work or for some other special project, usually there is not so much control, or you do not need to give particular justifications… only if you want to hire someone in a more structured way. In that case, you need the approval from the Head Quarter." (Manager – macro area level, *FoodForYou*, IT)

> "Everything is decided from the top […] But an exception concerns the job on call, for example I suggested a good girl I knew, and they immediately said yes, and also for her was good to work only on Sundays. […] the company hires job on call because they want to cut on the labour costs." (Territorial Delegate, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

Something similar happens in Denmark, but more than in relation to the atypical contracts (that are rarer than in Italy, as said), this higher level of discretion happens when in presence of part-time contracts that require very few hours:

> "Yes, I was... When I was hired, I got hired by the store manager and the district manager, they were both interviewing me. Yeah, they are definitely in a lot with people under 18. That is just like for people with part-time contracts with 10, 12 hours per week. They can do that themselves. But us, when it's more than 25, 30 hours per week… The district manager is almost always there and it's a part of it because he has to approve that they have money enough for an extra man." (Shop Steward, HK HANDEL, DK)

For the extreme forms of flexibility there is no need for authorization because in terms of cost, zero hour contracts are more or less always affordable, and in both the countries (as expected) the ratio guiding the management of the staff depends on the economic target that the company wants to reach. Despite the presence of a strong centralization and control over the local managers, as in line with other empirical studies (Lloyd and Payne, 2014), thus, the presence of a certain level of discretions is however foreseen, but only in those cases where the autonomy itself does not affect the general aim of the company; however, this can create a relation with the workers based on a strong level of control and high dependency (Price, 2011; Fellini, 2017) – something maybe more expected in companies that, at least formally, are not organized in such a pyramidal way, such as a multinational corporation.

8.4.2. Fixed-term contracts and (involuntary) turnover rate

Knowing what are the main contracts applied in this company helps to introduce the theme of the **workforce turnover rate**, meaning how much the workforce changes.

In here a premises is fundamental: **the reasons that explain the presence of the turnover rate can also derive from workers' decisions to leave, so it does not depend only by the contractual characteristics.** Because of this, the theme of the **voluntary** turnover rate, because it is somehow transversal to several dimensions, will be analysed and presented again later, especially in paragraph 8.6.1. In here, on the contrary, the focus is on the dimension of the **involuntary turnover rate**, the one that depends on the use of fixed-term contracts.

In the retail sector, the percentage of workers employed with a fixed-term contract because of the impossibility to be hired with a permanent one is of **69,13%** (Italy) vs **41,31%** (Denmark) (EULFS, 2019). This is because, as said, hiring workers with permanent contracts is more diffused in Denmark, also because this does not guarantee to not be fired; while in Italy it is much more complicated (in comparison with Denmark) to dismiss the workers, and thus, when possible, in order to maintain a high external flexibility, companies hire workers with fixed-term contracts.

It is however worth to underline that, in the case of being employed with fixed-term contracts, in Denmark, once again, the contextual element of the workforce characteriscts plays a role.

As seen, in fact, Danish workers in the retail sector and in this company are much younger than in Italy, and many times they work in grocery shops as their "student job", with very few hours signed by contract. Or, even more temporarily, they work in this sector during their "gap year" (see chapter 4).

This contextual aspect works very well also with what is foreseen in the collective national agreement, where it is regulated that people under 18 years old receive a lower salary:

> "Yes, I know that in general, for like, the retail, not only this company… the turnover rate is quite high. It's a general issue, there is a big turnover… I think that we have a lot of young people working in the stores, as well. Some people having their student job while they are studying… so then they find something else. And then of course we have a lot of people under 18… because they have a lower salary, in Denmark [according to the Collective Bargained Agreement]. So they have a different contract as well, that expires when they turn 18…". (Branding Manager – national level, *FoodForYou*, DK)

Of course, this aspect is really appealing for corporations that needs to hire new workers, representing a saving in terms of labour costs (O'Brady, 2019).

Denmark, thus, presents a picture, compared to Italy, where the goals of company operating in the retail sector like this is somehow less problematic in relation to the workers' characteristics

and expectation *and* with the contextual institutional assets. This aspects once again underlines the importance to look at the workforce characteristics when analysing labour market sectors, and the job quality in particular.

8.4.3. The other side of the fixed-term contracts: other consequences of the involuntary turnover rate in the two countries

In the interviews conducted with Danish trade unions' representatives the issue of the potential problematics deriving from the level of the presence of external flexibility and involuntary turnover rate almost never emerged, an important aspect that somehow **makes difficult to talk about "precarity" (on this, see also the job quality indices analysis presented in Chapter 5).**

Despite the fact that the *external flexibility* is, in Italy, somehow more regulated (as already seen), trade unions' representatives underlined in any case some preoccupations.

In fact, the increasing presence of other forms of atypical contracts, for example the zero-hour ones, especially for young people, is something that, according to unions, must not be underestimated, especially if taking into account its consequences in the long-run. So, from trade unions point of view, the risk of hiring with these kinds of contracts is to recreate a circle of precariousness where these formulas are not anymore an exception but the norms, negatively affecting the job quality especially in terms of stability of the job and professional qualification (Reyneri, 2013) and the social protections (Gosetti, 2012):

> "Here the issue is different. The fact is that, abusing of this kind of contracts, you structure a workforce where then you cannot… I mean, this can work, these workers are ok if you need, so to say, a part of the work organization. But, if you abuse too much of this instrument, if these workers become the "norm" in dimensional term, you create a labour market that is without any possibility to grow, and of course precarious" (National Secretary, FILCAMS CGIIL, IT)

And plus, the external flexibility has an impact also on the element of the **salary**. Italian workers have different feeling in respect to the issue of on-call workers. According to trade unions' delegates, who have a specific perspective on the work's rights, **in fact, on the one hand they find positive that these figures are usually called for Sunday shifts, letting the structured workforce to have free time to spend with their families, for example.** This aspect is particularly important in the Italian case, where the management of the work-life balance is often very difficult, as explained in paragraphs 8.5.2 and 8.5.3. **However, at the same time, some workers have complained that the**

on-call contracts used especially on holidays and Sundays let the company to save budget on the cost of work and prevent workers from "receive an extra pay with a few extra shifts".

> "On Sunday they usually call that young girl, I think she's twenty. That's not bad, even if some time I could use some extra money, you know…" (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

8.5. Internal flexibility: the use of part-time contracts

Following what presented so far, the next paragraphs focus on the issue of the *internal flexibility*, thus on how this company manages the organization of the work. Through the testimonies of the trade unions' delegates, it analyses in a deeper way at the every-day consequences of the flexibility at a micro level, thus looking at what happens inside the stores. This analysis starts from the description **of the distinction between part-time and full-time contracts**.

The use of part-time contracts in this company is more in line with the characteriscts of the Danish retail sector (analysed in Chapter 5) than of the Italian one: in fact, in the first case, on the total of the workforce employed in the retail, the **42,26%** of people is hired with part-time contracts, while in the Italian case it is the **21,69%.**

But, according to the interviews, in both the countries there is a high spread of part-time contracts in *FoodForYou*. From the fieldwork it has emerged that the most widely applied contracts foresee an amount of hours that can vary **between 25 and 30 hours, in Italy, and even less in Denmark (around 20)**. In the company, in line with other players of this sector, **there is also the use of what trade unions representatives defines as "extreme part-time contracts", where employees work less than 18-15 hours, usually in the weekends** – and that is quite usual in Denmark, more an exception in Italy.

The distinction between working part-time or full-time is really relevant in terms of the consequences it has on workers' job quality *and* job satisfactions; **in fact, working part-time means gaining a lower salary** (paragraph 8.5.1.) **and having a very flexible organization of the work, that itself leads to different peaks of pace of work** (a proxy useful to analyse the work-time quality and the physical environment indices, as in Eurofound, 2012) (paragraph 8.5.2.) **and to difficulties in the work-life balance** (paragraph 8.5.3.).

8.5.1. Part-time contracts and low salaries: a more functional picture in Denmark, more problems in Italy

The use of part-time contracts, as anticipated, has several consequences: the first one concerns a lower salary, because the total amount of working hours is lower; the second one concerns the flexibility of the working organization (TradeLab, 2017). Do these two consequences have the same impact for people employed in this company in Italy and in Denmark? Also in this case, to answer to this question it is necessary to contextualize **endogenous factors that regard the workforce characteristics and the welfare policies**.

Regarding the first issue, that concerns receiving lower salaries, Italian trade unions' representatives expressed preoccupation:

> "We already have the lowest salary among the service sector. But this is because most of the time the companies hire workers with part-time contracts… Because this allows them to manage the working hours more easly. And plus, they can "play" with extra shifts and so forth… But you really do not have a sufficient salary. In fact, there are a lot of people who would prefer to work more hours…" (National Secretary, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

This aspect in the Italian case this is even more important in view of a judgment of the Court of Cassation that states that part-time working hours must be specifically defined, to give to the workers the possibility to have a second job in order to obtain a full income. It has been pointed out that this is particularly felt *especially* when in presence of involuntary part-time (as seen later): **not only the workers would prefer to work with full-time contracts** (Carré *et al.,* 2010)**, but they have to face more difficulties in applying for a second job due to the lack of fixed scheduled working hours**. If this happens, the possibilities to gain a sufficient salary decrease, and in here it is particularly evident a vicious circle.

In Denmark, on the contrary, the presence of lower salaries is not considered as much as a problematic from trade unions. If, on the one hand, the less surprising reason regards the fact that in Denmark the salaries are higher than in Italy, the more important element is however (again) the age of the workforce. In fact, even in Denmark **retail is considered a box full of "bad jobs"** (Doellgast, 2013; Ikeler, 2016), that does not provide a sufficient income: thus, when the workforce is made by adult people who have to take care of their families or pay the rental, also Danish trade unions' representatives have some concerns:

> "Of course, if you are not so young… I mean let's imagine you work there and your husband too… Then yes, you might struggle paying the bills. It is still a sector where the salaries are low…" (Career counselling responsible, HK HANDEL, DK)

However, if the workforce is very young, as in the majority of the cases, gaining a low salary has fewer negative impacts on workers' lives – especially when these jobs are transitory, something that happens most of the time.

Thus, concerning the first issue, also in this case Denmark shows a less problematic match between the dimensions involved in here, even if it presents its weakness – among all, the lowest salaries for people under 18 years old.

Regarding the last aspect, that concerns the work organization and the work-life balance, being it a more complex theme, the next paragraphs have the aim to deepen it, making a point not only on the importance of the workforce characteristics but in this case also on the welfare policies.

8.5.2. Management of the work shifts and consequences on workers

In paragraph 8.3. and the following it has been described how the flexibility is very used in this company. **This flexibility of course also affects the management of the work and of the shifts** (Cerruti, 2010; Dordoni, 2019; Fullin, 2021): for this reason, this paragraph focuses on the description of *FoodForYou*'s work organization, looking in particular at the testimonies of the delegates, who have an "insider" perspective, being them part of the workforce..

It is worth to underline that the topic of the management of the shifts has emerged much more in Italy than in Denmark; not because in the second case the internal flexibility does not present any consequences, but because, *ex ante,* in the Italian case there is a higher level of rigidity in the organization of the work, at least formally. As said, the Italian CCNL regulates quite strictly the working hours and the contingent employment rate; however, the retail sector has been particularly affected by the deregulation of the labour market, especially in these terms (Ambra, 2017, 2018). This is in line with what has been already explained so far: in Denmark the workers employed with part-time contracts work less hours than in Italy, and they are younger; thus, the management of the work is structurally less specific.

Regarding the internal flexibility, in the Italian case several interviews proposed a detailed description on how the company manages the work organization. In the company the management of the shifts relies on a system that implies a timetable that organizes all the workers' shifts **for three weeks.** This system is actually **not even too flexible, but it presents however a series of clauses**.

First of all, the flexibility can still be very high, also considering that the Italian National Collective Agreement allows a 48-hour notice to ask workers to change their shifts.

Secondly, as seen, changes may occur **in order to reach the daily targeted revenue:** in order to do that, managers can ask workers to leave earlier, for example, if the expected costumers' flow has not been reached (Newsome *et al.,* 2013). The gap occurring between the attended and the effective economic gains, if present, can be **solved more easily cutting on the cost of labour,** changing workers' shifts, that can be "readjust" later, in a second moment.

From the Italian fieldwork, in particular, having interviewed trade unions' delegates it was possible to partly grasp the testimonies of colleagues, who **have a job that requires this high level of flexibility**. In particular, the three most important subjective consequences of a flexible work organization concern: **the relations occurring *among workers* due to the shifts' management (that affect the good social environment index, as in Eurofound, 2012); the pace of work perceived by workers (with consequences also on the ergonomic dimension and physical fatigue, as in Gallino, 1978); and the management of the work-life balance.**

The first aspect is strongly related to a very personal feeling: what does it mean, for the workers, to organize the shifts among each other? What are the consequences also in terms of a good social environment?

In general, according to trade unions' delegates, workers perceive this high level of flexibility as a negative aspect, because if the company calls them at short notice, "it disrupts all the plans of the week, also because then the hours have to be in line with the contract"; **for this reason, however, workers find a strategy in arranging their own duties directly among them, trying to help each other** (replacements in the work shifts, exchanges of favors). This underlines the presence of **"micro strategy" of coping mechanism to manage the flexibility of the work organization** (Ilsøe, Felbo-Kolding, 2020).

However, this use of the flexibility can also cause unpleasant situations with peers and colleagues:

> "Then the problem is that maybe you work, for a week, every afternoon, and another week every day in the morning shift. And there is not equity even between us, so there are some frictions…" (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

Also according to the analysis of job quality indices (EWCS, Eurofound) analysed in chapter 5, the one **related to the work and good social environment in the retail is lower compared to the other**

labour sectors. This can be explained, so, not only by the work organization based on shifts (that makes more complicated to have stable relations with colleagues, also considering the turnover rate – Fellini, 2017), but also maybe by the difficulties that can occur as consequences of a bad management of the working schedules.

The second consequence of the high level of this management of the work relates **the increase of the pace of work**. This aspect in particular has emerged several time in the Italian fieldwork:

> "When they want to reach the economic target… Sometimes they even force people to go on vacation... It is a mechanism that not only is not correct towards the person involved, but that also affects the workloads of the others, of those who remain" (Territorial delegate, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

The issue of the perception of having very stressful pace of work is something that has emerged many times, especially as a consequence of the work shifts management. Despite the role these workers have, the common point always regarded the lack of an adequate number of workers to complete all the tasks required by the store manager – something that is perceived **as even more problematic during the weekends and in the late afternoons, when the number of costumers usually increase**, as already explained in paragraph 8.3. **The high pace of work is, also, another reason that can explain the voluntary turnover rate**, as better explained in paragraph 8.6.1.

> "This is one of the most important problem inside the company, because considering that the majority of the workers are women who work with part-time contracts… I mean, using those types of contracts the way they do… Is insane. Because you are formally a part-time worker but actually you work as full-time worker…because you work few hours and they have to push you has much as they can." (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

The last negative consequence of the flexible management of the work shifts relates **the organization of the work-life balance**. This is the theme that most than others has emerged in the interviews, in both the fieldworks. It is however quite complex, also because it is strictly related not only to the **workforce characteristics, but also to the welfare systems** of the two countries. For this reason, the next paragraph is in fact dedicated to deepen it.

8.5.3. (In)voluntary part-time and work-life balance: Danish welfare system vs. Italian burden on families

As seen, the company relies to a very high extent on the use of the internal flexibility, and for this reason, it employs a significant percentage of workers with part-time contracts. Hiring people with

those contracts represents an advantage for a company operating in the food retail sector: in fact, the company relies very much on the possibility of having flexible working hours **because this allows to adjust the labour costs in order to reach the economic target.** And the easier way to do that is to change the working schedules.

However, before analysing more in detail the consequences of the use of the part-time contracts, it is also worth to have a look at what are the causes behind its application, looking once again at the data offered by the European Labour Force Survey (Eurostat, 2019).

This premise is particularly significant especially **when the company's needs somehow overcome the workers' desire to be employed with full-time contracts**. **This phenomenon is known as "involuntary part-time".** Involuntary part-time occurs when the choice to work fewer hours is not made by the workers, but it is somehow forced from the company because all of the reasons reported above. In the retail sector, the percentage of workers who are hired with part-time contracts because of **the impossibility to find a full-time job**, is of **61,67%** in Italy and **5.91%** in Denmark. All of this data are useful to better understand what explained so far and in particular what is explained in the following paragraphs.

In the Italian case, the issue of the involuntary part-time has emerged many times in the interviews, and the trade unions' representatives showed several concerns about this.

> "The so called "involuntary part-time contracts", you know? What does it mean… it does not mean that there is not a formal signed contract. It means that people who are looking for full time job and who can't find it, if they are offered 20 hours per week… they have to take it, otherwise they won't work." (National Secretary, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

On the contrary, this issue has not been taken into account at all in the Danish case. It is quite difficult however to imagine that every worker employed in this company (or in the retail sector in general) in Denmark choose to work part-time. Why is that a less felt issue, then?

The answer relates, once again, to the workforce characteristic of the ***age***. In Denmark, workers employed in the retail sector, and in *FoodForYou*, too, are much younger than in the Italian case, as already explained in chapter 4 and 5. Thus, these young workers are very much more willing to accept few hours in their contract, because this matches better with their needs. **Even if in Denmark the labour market is more liberal and there are basically no labour laws, the fact that the workforce is mainly composed by young people makes this problematic more "manageable", because youngest have also different needs to fulfill.** Being employed with a part-time contract and knowing very well that this implies the possibility to have continuous changes in the working schedules is

different when workers are 18 or 35. In fact, in Denmark, this issue has emerged much less, all the difficulties related to the work-life balance are not felt as problematic **– in proportion, there are much less.**

The Danish shop steward interviewed, for example, despite the fact that she complained about the lack of clarity on the working schedule, underlined that, being she so young, it is easy cope with that:

> "[…] Of course, there will always be someone like me who is young and is just there for a couple of years figuring out what way they want to go. So yes, they are much more willing to accept changes in their working hours... But also because, I mean, it is not like they have to go somewhere else." (Shop Steward, HK HANDEL, DK)

This inner characteristic is something that somehow "works", and thus does not concern too much even trade unions representatives:

> "So if you have the everyday supermarket… they tend to have a lot of unskilled workers, they have a lot of young people, they have like opening hours that are… you know we have people working until late night, and young people who are willing to do extra jobs because they are students, so they are in secondary school, or even in university or whatever. But if you have young people working with you, they are hired for few hours, so you can say "do you want [to work] three hours tomorrow? Do you mind to not to come tomorrow?" It is not a big deal for them." (Organizing Department Leader, HK HANDEL, DK)

The issue of the age is thus very important, in terms of job quality. Because, considering the high level of flexibility present in this sector, **if the workers are younger, it is more likely that they do not need to cope with family issues** – an aspect that introduces the second structural differences between Italy and Denmark.

In fact, a similar reasoning, that is analysing the job quality dimensions starting from the workforce characteristics, can be made looking also at the **gender**: despite the fact that in both the countries the company has a strong presence of female workers, the consequences of being employed with part-time contracts are different in terms of job quality, due to the structural characteristics of **the welfare models** already described in chapter 4. As said, the common point between the two countries is that there is an important quota of female workers employed in this company. If taking for granted that culturally speaking (even if much more in Italy than in Denmark) are the women who usually take care of the family (Ferrera, 1996), **working part-time can be something that helps in that –** because there are more free hours in order to take care of the children**. However, there is also a "dark side"**

that concerns the fact that these few hours can be changed by managers also with short notices, and thus this can create for mothers several problems in their daily or weekly organization.

Starting from this premises, **the difference is that in Denmark the welfare system is much more consolidated and thus some of these problematics are partly "already solved" because of a higher presence of public (and free) services, such as kindergartens.** In fact, as already explained in chapter 4, the Danish welfare system is financed by the public system of taxation, and all of the services it offers are public (and free) (Gulløv, 2012; De la Porte, Larsen, Szelewa, 2020). Thus, if the worker employed in the supermarkets happens to be not so young, but maybe middle-aged mothers, the possibility to rely on a public support system (not necessarily related to the family) is much higher – and plus, this system also avoids looking for **targeted services in the private sector, something that would be very expensive considering the low level of salaries present in this sector**.

> "It is still true that if you have to cope with family issue, this is not for sure the best sector to work in. Because the timetable is crazy. I think that is always like this in the retail sector, in our case maybe even more, you know, we have supermarkets also open until the night… But at least, if you are not so young and you have children, you do not have to pay for the kindergarten…" (Career counselling responsible, HK HANDEL, DK)

While in Italy, as expected, due to the fact that **the welfare system does not provide sufficient instrument targeted to the family care, women employed in this company struggle much more than their "international" peers in Denmark:**

> "Yes, forget about it [being able to manage family care]. I mean, I found a way to organize everything, but not because I can count on a fixed timetable. I cannot say that it always like that, of course. But when it happens, it creates several problem to me…" (Territorial delegate, UILTUCS UIL, IT).

The most interesting thing related to this aspect emerged from the delegates' testimonies, and it is something that can be considered as relevant for the retail sector in general. **This aspect underlines the presence of a real trade-off between low wages and work-life balance.** In the case of Italy, in fact, female workers can, for example, ask to have their working schedules "fixed" ("Orari bloccati depositati", in the Italian contractual terminology), something that, however, even if helps in the management of the work-life balance, also **implies a lower salary in terms of the impossibility to do extra shifts**, as explained in this quotation:

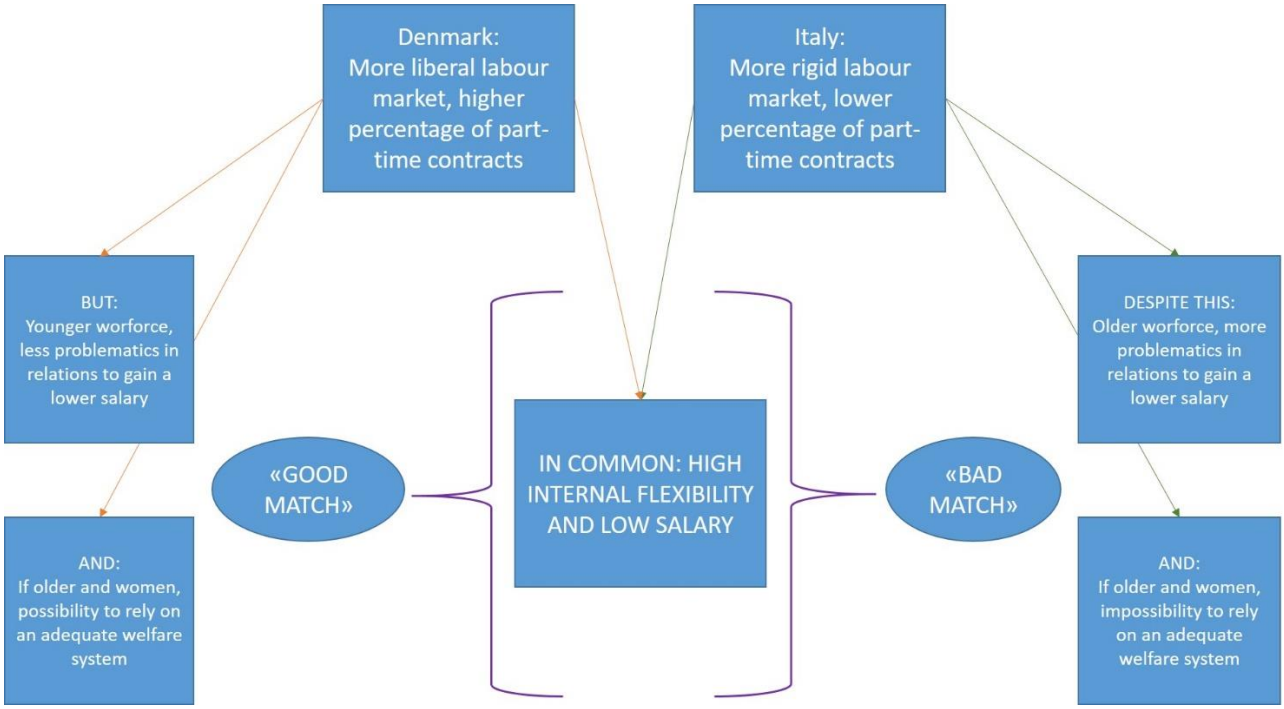
> "There have been some female workers who maybe were alone… or foreigners… who do not have any family or helps, and they had to ask to the company to switch to the fixed timetable. Those are choices that, then, have an impact on the salary, too, but you are forced to make a choice… If you need to manage your work-life balance, and if you have to take care for your family… If you have the fixed timetable it means that, one week you have a fixed work schedule and the week after another work schedules and that's all. You switch only between these two working schedules." (Territorial representative, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

Why is it important to underline the fact that the welfare system in Denmark is not only more spread, but also free? Because a common point between the two countries is that in this company – as well as in all the retail sector – **the salaries are lower** compared to other labour sectors (even lower if working part-time, as the majority of workers do) (Gautié *et al.*, 2010).

What described so far highlights a very strong *potential* vicious circles, where is thus evident that the **Danish case presents, once again, a "less problematic match" between all of these variables.**

On the contrary, in the Italian case the **higher presence of women who have to take care of their families, the absence of adequate welfare measures in order to help with that, the difficulties in finding an equilibrium between work organization and the lack of decent salaries** are something felt as much more problematic and underlined several times by trade unions representatives, as structural problems with difficult solutions.

Figure 12 - Summary of the flexibility's consequences in both the countries



Source: author's own elaboration

8.6. Job's tasks and workers' recognition

8.6.1. (Low)skilled workers, (un)recognized professional categories and voluntary turnover rate

Inside this company, among the ones who the managers calls "operative workers", there are: the cashiers, the sales' assistants, the dispatchers and the responsible for some specific areas of the store (for example, the bread corner, the meat corner and so forth).

The definition of "cashier" is however not really sufficient to describe the different tasks these workers have to deal with. In fact, they can spend some of their shifts at the cashbox, but they are also in charge to put the items to the shelves, for example, or to organize the department of the fresh fruits and vegetables, or to control the frozen products and so on: the request, from the management, to fulfil different tasks is something not unusual in the food retail sector, thus *FoodForYou* is not an exception, in this sense (Carreri, 2022). In fact the company, as outlined in chapter 6, has several departments, fruits, vegetables, but also meat, the frozen department, and the bread department, where workers finish cooking pre-cooked products. **Based on the size of the shop,** there can be a maximum of 20-25 workers or even less. But despite their number, most of them usually work under part-time contracts, thus often the workforce is "not enough", **and therefore the workload is quite high.**

This premises is important because, as outlined, the lack of recognition or the awareness of doing a "bad" and low skilled job could be a reason for voluntarily leave the workplace, something that thus increase the level of turnover rate.

Also in this case, however, the consequences behind this choice are different in Italy and Denmark, even if the job's tasks are the same – as well as the problems deriving from an economic "not fair" recognition.

In the Danish case, the causes of the voluntary turnover can be much more structural, regarding, once again, the workforce characteriscts. It is not a coincidence, in fact, that the problematics related to the lower recognition perceived by workers have not emerged so much from the interviews.

> "[…] But I would say this is not where I'm going to stop. I am hoping to get more into the union work now, and that's kind of the way I want to go. So I'm definitely not staying in the store for the rest of my life. Also, I don't need to prepare myself to go to work except taking on my work outfit because I know how to do everything and it's the same every day… It is kinda boring." (Shop steward, HK HANDEL, DK)

Thus, turnover is higher in Denmark also because most of the time young people and students consider these jobs as temporary, and this is something positive in terms of job quality because the bad working conditions present in these sectors are not permanent. **Furthermore, as emerged in the quote above, if the workforce is more educated (like in Denmark), the lack of skills and discretion – especially for young people, is surely a variable that pushes young workers to approach these jobs as a transitory one.**

The Italian case is once again more complex to analyse. Regarding the issue of the low skill levels, something emerged several times in the interviews conducted in the Italian fieldwork relates the low level of professional categories[11] ("inquadramenti" in the Italian contractual terms).

Talking about the level of professional categories is important because, depending on them, there can be several differences for the workers. **The most important concerns the salary: having a higher level of professional category in the contract, in fact, also implies a higher salary.** Of course, at the same time, the second implication regards the tasks asked to workers and the mansions they have to fulfil, as well as a different level of responsibilities (Carreri, 2022).

[11] According to the Italian national collective agreement, the classification of the professional category is decrescent: thus, the higher the number reported in the contract, the lower the professional category. A worker employed with "first level" has a more important professional category than the one hired with the fourth level".

Having in mind this premises, this issue has emerged in Italy because what happens is that, usually, the company's workers are hired with very low level of professional categories. This is an aspect that has been underlined mainly from the Italian trade unions representatives and also from the unions' delegates: interestingly, this aspect has not been underlined **when talking about the low salary, but when talking about the presence of a gap between the salary and the tasks required to the workers**, that are more difficult and stressful in relation to the income gained. Actually, this issue is something that was already present when the working conditions in the company were worst, and before the arrival of the trade unions. However, despite the several improvements happened in the company (see chapter 7), this specific theme still remains:

> "Something improved, something else is still the same. For example, for us a very important issue relates the low professional categories. And also, the fact that the company does not respect the contract, because they ask workers to do tasks they are not required to do: they clean the toilets…" (National Secretary, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

This is even truer considering that some of these tasks are not even formally foreseen in the national collective agreement.

An example of this, as reported in the above quotation, is the issue of **the cleaning,** that is peculiar in this company, something that is worth to analyse separately. Workers most of the time are required to clean the stores. However, this task should not be done by a worker employed with a "fourth level" category: the alternatives, in here, would have been **either to externalize** the cleaning service to workers employed with the contracts **of "cleaning services" ("multiservizi" in the Italian contractual terms) (that presents very much worst working conditions), or to public cooperatives or companies** (Pedaci, Di Federico, 2016), **or to hire new workers with the contract of the mass distribution but with a lower level of professional category (usually, the sixth).** The alternative, as outlined, could have involved to hire workers using the Italian system of the externalization of the services to private companies (Buldeo *et al.*, 2019).

Regarding the problematic concerning the cleaning, thus, trade unions played a fundamental role in making the company stop this practice, also thanks to a series of judicial sentences:

> "There is also a sentence from Milan and Reggio Emilia courts because they [the company] fired workers who refused to clean, and they had to hire them again. And the company… until 2009… it closed any kind of bargain for 18 years; they did not want to hear about these topics… we had to clean and stop. Thus, there was not even some

dialogue with the trade unions. And then, starting from 2009, the dialogue started again…" (Territorial delegate, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

After unions' intervention, the company is now hiring workers with the sixth level of professional category, thus they opted for not externalizing the service but to hire new people with this specific task**.**

Another issue concerning the low professional categories, emerged in the Italian case, is an evident **disparity between the occupational figures present in the stores, because, beside the store manager, all the other workers are cashiers or dispatchers.**

Actually, from the Italian interviews it has been pointed that, before, the company used to have some "vice-managers" inside the stores, who had slightly lower level of professional category (in comparison with the managers) but still who had much more responsibilities (and who gained of course a higher salary) than cashiers or dispatchers.

During the years, the company eliminated the figures of the second level and started to apply a contractual framework that sets the tasks and the salaries of the workers ("demansionamenti"). There was a testimony, among the interview, of a union delegate who used to be a vice-director, and who, later, was "asked" to accept a lower professional category. **This fact, apparently, was not an isolated episode,** while on the contrary it has to be approved from the labour judge in order to avoid judiciary sentences against the company (that could have been otherwise accused of mobbing procedures). The use, from the company, of these "semi-mobbing" policies have consequences in terms of career prospects (Eurofound, 2012), where workers do not advance in their careers.

"I used to be the second store manager, I was his substitute, a figure that slowly disappeared in the company workforce, maybe there is still someone but I am not sure […]. The company pushed workers to these "lower" categories, because they prefer to have only a first level [store manager] and not anymore the store managers assistants, […]. I wonder, why anybody makes questions about this aspect? I mean, a lot of workers passed from the first to the third level, I mean, usually you are supposed to grow in a company, not the other way round. I do not know the exact numbers at national level, but when I came to Verona to sign the new contracts in front of the labour judge… because I had to go there, in order to clarify that it was not mobbing… By the way, only that day, we were 16. […] How is that possible that so many people… I mean, it should be… but it is everything hidden behind these little things they do unilaterally… in order not to lose the recognition of "the best place of work". Best place of work that was… the year

before… it was McDonald's. What best place of work?" (Territorial Delegate, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

According to the interviews, the Italian company might make a strong use of the policy of the lowering of the professional category as strategy to cuts on labour costs.

On the other way round, a lot of workers ask for a new contract with a lower professional category. **Thus, this choice is considered by the workers as an alternative to the turnover rate**; **workers will not quit because they are maybe afraid not to find something else, and then they ask to work less even if this choice means, necessarily, a decrease in their salary**. And workers ask for a lower level of professional category in their contracts because they **feel too much pressure in relation to the pace of work**, too much responsibility that is not follow by a proper salary. Plus, this lack of a proper recognition between the responsibilities workers have to fulfil and an adequate salary is accompanied by a strong fatigue and extremely high pace of work that pus workers opt for a lower salary in exchange for a less stressful job. **This also force trade unions' representative to help the workers in this process, even if this represents something that, in principle, unions do not see as positive, while on the contrary they will for an increase in workers' careers.**

"In this company every minute there is someone who ask for this. Because… most of the time the reason workers tell us is "I can't do that anymore". Because look, we, from a trade union's point of view… we usually are not willing to follow workers in these kind of processes. We always try to face these issues with a proactive approach, like "let's try to figure it out". But most of the time they come to these decisions so tired that they tell you "either you help me through this process or I will quit." (Territorial Representative, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

8.6.2. "Horizontal" career prospects?

After having analysed the issues related to job's tasks and workers' recognition, this paragraph then focuses on the element of the career prospects. It is useful in here to briefly remind what already explained in chapter 6: the Human Resource Management are strongly centralized, and for this reason trade unions cannot influence, for example, new hiring procedures. At the same time, however, labour laws do matter in shaping the types of contracts chose by the company, especially in the Italian case (see also chapter 7): thus, this influences, positively, the career prospects (Eurofound, 2012).

At the same time, however, the previous paragraph underlined how, also in this case, the institutional impact is limited: in fact, the company still can opt for lowering the professional categories of the workers, affecting the salary.

The reliability on the possibility to grow in the career has been pointed clearly also from the Danish company's branding responsible, who described how the company invests a lot on this topic, at all levels, from the management to the operative workers:

> "Besides.. we also have like this "on boarding plans", so a station where you have to go when you join the team, so you are told everything you need to know about your job. And then we also have for every level in the stores… and also at the Head Quarter.. you get an education that you can get to become like a next level… you do not have like leader responsibilities but you are able to close the store, for example, as next step… ehm… and once you did that you could take an education to get store manager… and then there is the store manager, like they will give you the proper education… like they teach you, and prepare you for the next step in your career. And that's the same way about the passage from manager to team leader, and so on, so you can grow… And they also, for the stores… They have multiple courses like cleaning, you know all these things that you always use if you work in a store. And the same is true for the head office, like you can take multiple… courses… for example the time controlling, the time management course… And presentation, training… so you get trained I guess about what is relevant for your job." (Branding Manager – national level, *FoodForYou*, DK)

From the Italian fieldwork it has, also, emerged how these processes of careers' advancements involve **a series of evaluation processes based on standard criteria chosen at centralized level** (something that is usually delegated to the store manager despite the more or less high level of decisional centralization, as explained - Newsome *et al.*, 2013). These evaluations present, **as a positive aspect, the element of furnishing an objective criteria when deciding about workers' careers' growth**. Annually, there is a process of evaluation of the staff to identify strengths and weaknesses of the workers: once the "weaknesses" are identified, managers set up specific and targeted programs, in order to let the workers to improve and then consequently vertically grow inside the company.

However, from the Italian interviews have emerged that in here there are some **grey zones, because in any case there is the presence of some decisional marginality from managers' side**, as stated by a manager:

> "Usually in the stores there are the store manager, 3, 4, 5 or 6 specialized workers, depending on the dimension of the store… under the specialized workers there are the workers in charge of the selling, the cashiers […] So the aim is to catch the ones who are, we called them highflyers, those workers who can, in the future, have biggest

> responsibilities. This process is not so formalized, I mean… […] there are not particular training courses or something like that…differently from when you have to choose a new store manager. In there, you also have to make evaluations…" (Manager – macro area level, *FoodForYou,* IT)

In the Danish case the career prospects seem to follow a much more structured process than in the Italian case, maybe due to the fact that the educational system foresees a more "professionalizing" path.

Despite the (more or less) formal procedure behind the possibility to grow in the career, it is not always true that the workers perceive to be "an essential" part of the company, or to give a proper contribution. On the contrary, many **times it has emerged that due to the repetitiveness of the tasks they do not feel autonomous – at least in the Italian case:**

This lack of autonomy, together with the high standardization present in the company, creates, sometime, frustration and sense of being completely replaceable.

> "Company structure is really… there is a lot of verticity, thus you start from above and then all the relevant information come to us. What makes me feel a bit sad is that often the Head Quarter does not listen to us, simply. I mean, we, we work inside the store, and we are subject to decisions coming top-down, and often we do not have the decisional power to manage the store… […] But in the company things work like that. […] And this is something that I… I mean, this is what I was talking about before… it is annoying that they do not directly ask to whom work there. And that know how things work. I mean, if you look at your store and tell me "this goes here", and I… I know that there it does not work, so I move it somewhere else, where it works more… they just come to us saying that that item must go there. And you have to do that even if you know that it doesn't work. I mean, I don't have the power to decide where to put things, even if I know that maybe another spot would be better!" (Territorial delegate, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

This lack of autonomy affects the subjective feeling to be part of a bigger mechanism and to not have any kind of voice. Actually, these insights are also in line with what already described in chapter 5 about the **job quality indices, that for the retail sector present a very low level of autonomy and discretion, even lower than in the industry** (Eurofound, 2012).

The lack of autonomy is perceived in tandem with **the feeling of control** – something particularly felt by workers – especially in the first period of activity of the company, in comparison to nowadays:

> "Let's say that, at first, the managers had always to control that everything was perfect, in the store, because they [from the district or from the Head Quarter] came to the shop to check its status…" (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

Also this aspect is important, because the condition of stress deriving from being subject to an external control is another element that negatively affects job quality, and that emerges more clearly in the case of a multinational corporation, confirming how some forms of work organization and management triggered in a heavier way the institutional potential impact:

> "Thus, this is the structure, the district managers directed by the regional manager, who follows the directions of the Head Quarter guided by the President. It is a very vertical structure. I mean, long story short, from above they decide and then we have to obey. And we are controlled on how we do things". (Territorial delegate, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

This perception of a strong hierarchy and verticality is somehow in contradiction with the depicted career's advancement. If this is true, also in this case the Danish case present a "better" picture, because the workers, being younger and working voluntarily in this company for shorter period of time, experience this lack of autonomy to a lesser extent – or simply care less.

8.6.3. Male managers, female cashiers: gender gap

As already outlined in the previous chapters, in the Italian case the insights reported by trade unions' representatives may be sometimes different from the ones reported by trade unions' delegates. In fact, they have a different point of view, more internal, and for this reason they underlined some aspects that are probably far away from trade unions' representatives perceptions, aspects related to what really means working inside the company and that do not concerns issues just related to the salaries, the contracts or the respect of the norms.

An example of this regards the **clear perception of the presence of a gender gap in relation to the job's positions**, something that confirms the necessity to integrate the job quality's theoretical framework looking with a more specific attention at the issue of the feminization present in the service sector (Reyneri, 2013).

This perception of a gender gap creates, sometimes, also frustration among the cashiers, derived from the awareness of being the main core of the business, but of being considered as mere operative workers who struggle more in order to achieve higher positions.

> "Yes, in the store we are mainly women. But… and you can bet on this, managers are always man. Then some stores have female store manager, like in my case, but it is an

exception. But they are very bad under this aspect." (Territorial delegate, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

This is especially true in the south of Italy, where the quota female cashiers who feel a higher sense of responsibility in the family care is higher, something that also affects their careers' prospects:

"… Just simply thinking about hiring the store manager or the district manager. In the south is more difficult to hire a female district manager, even if you want that, because there are in principle less applications…" (Manager – macro area level, *FoodForYou,* IT)

Because of the presence of this sort of gender gap, **it has also emerged the interesting aspect related to a sort of "gender solidarity",** and how, also, it is not easy to be a women especially in a job that requires contacts with the clients.

"Most of us, the ones who really run the place… because at the end of the day, the job is to be cashier or put things on the shelves… we are mainly girls […] But we, girls, we make our role, we speak up! […] We take care of each other. Not all the costumers are, let's say, polite… We know that, and we pay attention." (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

8.6.4. Relations with costumers

The presence of the costumers of course plays a role, as seen, both in "guiding" the management of the work organization (as explained in paragraph 8.3.) and on the workers' perceptions, that can be affected by costumers in terms **of pace of work** and in terms **of personal recognition,** both elements that affect the good social environment and the skills and discretion spheres (Eurofound, 2012).

In fact, regarding the first aspect, when the peak of costumers is really high, workers have to fulfil their duties efficiently and in a fast way, while being at the same time respectful and pleasant (Hochschild, 1983; Korczynski, 2009; Lopez, 2010). And all of this becomes particularly hard when the workforce is not enough, something that happens quite often in this company, as seen:

"[…] And costumers in these stores want to find the products in the shelves, of course, and someone has to put the products there. In the large scale distribution, especially regarding food, where there is always a lot if new items coming, you need people. If they are not enough, it is really hard. And costumers can be really unpleasant if they do not receive an answer about what they are looking for in few minutes… so workers have always to be fast and functional". (National Secretary, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

Because the presence of costumers is something structural in a sector like the retail (Annual Retail survey, 2019), usually companies foresee, as part of their training, some guidelines dedicated to the relations with them.

> "The issue of the relation with the costumers is not simple, because it is true that "costumers are always right"… and this is the milestone, the most important thing… but sometimes there can be dynamics more complicated than that. The most important thing in those cases is to recognize that you do not know what to answer, or that you are affected by what you are feeling in that moment. So if you recognize that [when talking to a client] you are **personalizing** the answer you are giving to him, you should let it go and go ask for advice to some other colleague who is for sure more trained". (Manager – macro area level, *FoodForYou*, IT)

Even in unpleasant situation, the company's concerning is to maintain the standard. This means that workers' discretion are completely absent. But looking at the macro group of the training policies implemented by the company, there is not a common rule on how to behave with costumers but "smiling and being ok".

The relation with costumers might be a variable that affect job quality and especially job satisfaction (Jeantet, 2003; Bernard, 2005), and it is not always easy to distinguish and govern this aspect. However, in here trade unions could play a role.

In any case, in Italy, **unions do not see this aspect as a priority: because in this sector the main problematics relates to low salaries, flexibility, work-life balance and so forth.**

In Denmark, on the contrary, the interviews underlined how a possible solution to this problem might be to start with some informative campaigns, as reported by the Danish trade union:

> "So we have this campaign, going on and off, from the retail sector, appealing to costumers, how to treat the employee, how to treat service employee in a good way, tell them "have a good day", and say, "thank you" and look them in the eyes, because, worst case scenario, they yell at them, best case they are just get ignored. And it has been very actualised in the pandemic period, because with it, they would have face people to stand in line, keep the distance, wash your hands… so the government made all of these rules but they were the ones who implemented the rules in the stores. Yes, they made a campaign, they went to the media, went public speaking on behalf of the employees, telling the citizens and also the.. to behave like that because they were trying to take care

of all of them. So they try to do something about that behaviour." (Career counselling responsible, HK HANDEL, DK)

Interestingly, from the interviews conducted both in Italy and in Denmark it has emerged that the company is pushing for a service to the clients more and **more targeted, in order to offer a better experience. However, how can standardization, stressful pace of work and higher level of "caring" to the costumers work together?**

This is an element of the retail sector that can be recognizable in different countries and contexts, underlining that some problematics, being hierarchically less diriment, not always (as in the Italian case) can be solved through an institutional impact – in this case, unions' presence. This makes retail subjected to a variable that is different from the other labour sectors. **It would be interesting, though, to understand if a supranational campaigns would be more effective in relation to this theme: the training offered to the workers to manage the relations with the costumers.**

8.7. Finding the time to be trained

It has already been described in chapter 6 that an element where the standardization of the company is highly recognizable is the training. Looking at the training policies is important for two reasons. Firstly, on the one hand, **training policies can increase workers' skills and offer growing opportunities**, and thus can represent an increase in the job quality; on the other hand, of course, **training policies can make feel employees more skilled and prepared, and thus have an impact in the final perception of job quality, especially taking into account the indicator of the skills and discretion**. Secondly, as already explained in chapter 6, **training policies are part of the macro group of elements that seem to be very much standardized,** and thus they represent a further test to see the impact of different host countries institutions: can in these sense, for example, different trade unions play a role?

In both the countries has emerged that, in this company, the training takes place *"*both on-job and off-job". According to the interviews, this company invests a lot in workers' training, usually starting from the beginning – such as, from the entrance in the company of a new worker. On the "boarding phase", there is generally an individual training plan that substantially aims at making the newly hired worker feel part of the company and "feel the sense of what the company does".

Regarding the "off-job" training, the company, then, has a centralized and standardized training system (in all the stores, in Italy and in Denmark) called "*FoodForYouPlatform*", a digital platform where workers can visualize short videos with the aim to collect a fixed number of scores, confirming they have attended these online courses and the relative competencies – something that, according to

the Italian managers, happens during the working hours. Another element that is a consequence of the "digital" training concerns the fact **that workers approach this program alone, something that negatively affects also the relations between colleagues and peers, and that makes the job even more "solitary" and somehow heavy** (Carreri, 2022).

As "on-job" training, the company offers a supporting senior colleague who follows and teaches the tasks required to the new employees, so that workers have the opportunity to understand the activities. So, workers visit the warehouses and the store, and get an idea of what is the core business of the company. From the Italian fieldwork, some territorial trade unions' representatives have made a great deal of emphasis on the on-job training and on the role that senior colleagues have on this.

In other cases, at least in Italy, when delegates were asked about their training, most of them mainly referred to courses on safety at work, firefighting team, first aid, HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points, the course on hygienic food safety).

How do the workers really perceive the training policies implemented by the company? From the interviews, two aspects in particular emerged as the consequences of a training policies system that is highly standardized: **the lack of autonomy and discretion and, most importantly, the consequence on the pace of work.**

Regarding the first aspect, despite the fact that some compulsory courses are more related to the different host countries labour or safety norms, **the training policies implemented by the company are, however, strongly dependent on the home country directives.** This is true in both the countries, as in the following quotations used as example:

> "And it's also… I didn't have any training moving from store to store. Okay?" (Shop Steward, HK HANDEL, DK)

This quote is very interesting because it underlines how the corporation takes for granted that once the workers are "inside" the system, they are already enough aware of how the company works, and thus they do not need to receive further training. **This underlines how workers' autonomy and discretion is not high, because even from the training policies it is evident that the tasks are more or less always the same.** And this is eve truer having in mind what already explained in the paragraph dedicated to the career's prospects, that underlined that it is not always easy to grow in this company, even when formally trained, something that in the long run negatively **affect the feeling of autonomy.**

Regarding the second aspect (the consequence on the pace of work), according to the interviews conducted in Italy, the highly standardized training management *should* foresee specific moments to access to the training, but actually, **according to the delegates, this rarely happen, because the pace of work is so hard that if workers want to have access to the digital courses, they must stay after the working hours.** This pushes workers to follow these classes without the right attention, making, sometimes, this training not really efficient. In fact, most of the Italian delegates have described this system as "not useful, it is not a real training", while they find much more useful to be accompanied by a senior worker during their firsts weeks.

As anticipated at the beginning of this paragraph, the training policies are something decided from the general Head Quarter: the question in here is whether the national trade unions' can play a role in making the training policies, for example, been followed outside the working hours.

It is however very difficult for trade unions' representatives, both in Italy and in Denmark, to intervene in the kind of training offered by the company, at least on the moment that the workers have to access to those courses, because it is a policy present in all the host countries. Also, on this issue the confrontation between the unions and the company never happens at the local level, but only at the national level: this means that is also impossible to push for differentiated policies – maybe starting from and looking at the characteristics of the workforce. This means that, on the one **hand, corporations standardization is stronger than unions' capacity to guarantee a "controlled" training** to the workers; on the other, as stated by trade unions' themselves, the problematics in this sector are so many that the training is somehow less perceived as an "urgent" element.

Also in this case, considering that the company is a multinational one and that the training policies are the same in all the countries where it operates, the potentiality of a supranational trade union campaign remains without an answer.

8.8. Final considerations

This chapter has underlined how much working conditions in this sector, and in this company in particular, can be very similar even in two countries where the institutional setting is very different. **The standard characteristics of the retail sector**, combined with the standardization present in a multinational corporation, **seems to have a "stronger" impact on job quality** than the labour regulation and, especially, than the trade union' actions. In particular, on the issues of low wages, it seems not to be much differences in the two countries. And this is even truer considering the other common point between the two, that is the strong difficulties that trade unions have in bargaining the salaries in this sector.

However, some differences have emerged.

Some of these differences are related to the two countries. **In fact, notwithstanding the high level of standardization, as said, the Danish welfare system can definitely play a major role in positively affected job quality in respect to the Italian ones**, especially regarding the family care and the work-life balance.

Another difference that plays a role in the perception of the job quality is however not directly connected with an active institutional setting, but on the contrary derives from the different workforce characteristics. As said, in fact, Denmark presents a "less problematic match" between the standardization of a series of policies implemented by this company, a different welfare system and the age and the gender of the workforce. This is in particular true regarding some of the problems emerged in this chapter, **such as the lack of the career advancement (that is less felt by Danish young workers who do this job in a temporary way), the difficulties in coping with the work-life balance (that is felt more negatively by Italian women, who are older and who cannot rely on adequate welfare policies) and the high flexibility in the working schedules (that has less severe consequences on young people, thus in the Danish case).**

Due to this, trade unions know that they can play a role only regarding some parts of this group of problematics – and this is why they focus, most of the time, on concrete elements such as the salary of the work-life balance.

In a picture that is thus very similar and standardized across the countries, something that can play a difference, again, relies **on the possibility to be "stuck" or not in this kind of jobs.** This is why the Danish case is somehow less hit by the characteriscts presented so far: the workforce in this sector is younger and the active labour market policies consent an easier (re)entrance in the labour market. And of course welfare policies complete this framework offering a support. So, among the institutional elements taken into account at the beginning of this work, it can be said that in this sector, as expected, trade unions alone, even if fundamental, cannot solve this intricate mechanism, and labour norms can do that only partly: this highlights, once again, the importance covered by welfare policies.

IX

FRONT-LINE WORKERS DURING THE PANDEMIC

9.1. Introduction

This final empirical chapter presents a focus on the consequences of the pandemic of Covid-19 on job quality.

At the beginning, the research did not foresee to investigate this theme, but, as explained in the chapter dedicated to the methodology (3), **during the course of the work it became evident that it was not possible not to take into account this topic in this project**. The reasons behind this choice are mainly two.

The first one is related to what is, in fact, the main research question of this research: what is the impact of the institutions in affecting job quality? What is in particular the role of the labour norms, of the industrial relations' systems and of the welfare policies present in Italy and in Denmark? Thus, considering these questions as the main drivers of the research, **the pandemic had represented in this case a further element that, more than many others, have somehow triggered these institutions, representing, so, a further test to deepen even more their potential impacts**. And this is even more true given that the Covid-19 viral outbreak has affected all of the countries, spanning the national boards. Thus, the first reason that justify the insertion of this new theme in the research is related to the impact that the pandemic have had on a ***macro level***.

The second reason concerns the labour sector selected as unit of investigation of this research, and in particular the job carried out by the workers employed in the company. These are, in effect, mostly the only workers who, with some exceptions (for example, the health care service workers), **had to be constantly exposed to the virus, and who could not count on the privilege deriving by working from home.** In fact, and this is something common in all the countries, supermarkets represent one of the few places that stayed open during the emergency. In this case, thus, the impact of the pandemic had represented **a further element that affected the job quality both objectively and subjectively**: looking in particular at the workers' testimonies and perceptions – in other words, the consequences happened at **a *micro level*** – makes possible to deepen additional aspects: how did the work organization change because of the pandemic? What was the company answer? What is the perception that trade unions' delegates have in respect to their peers' feelings of being exposed to the virus?

This chapter is thus structured as follows.

Paragraph 9.2. offers an overview of what happened during the pandemic in Italy and in Denmark, considering in particular the presence or absence of specific labour norms and/or implementations of new and targeted social protections, underlining the causes that explain why the workers' employed in the food retail sector in particular have significantly suffered from the arrival of the virus.

Paragraph 9.3. on the other hand focuses on the consequences of the pandemic on the workers' employed in this company, considering in particular its impact on the work organization (9.3.1.), on workers' tasks (9.3.2.), and finally looking at the issue of the safety and health (9.3.3.).

Finally, paragraph 9.4. describes the role of the trade unions during the pandemic period, analysing especially their concrete action implemented at supranational, national and company level.

Paragraph 9.5. presents, then, some final remarks.

9.2. The challenge of the Covid-19

Something that is worth to underline in respect to the measures for the citizens is that the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (Hale *et al.,* 2021), which daily classifies nations according to the extent of workplace closures on a scale from 0 (no restriction) to 3 (require closing, work from home, for all but essential workplaces, e.g. grocery stores, doctors), reveals that Nordic clusters experienced the fewest closures.

Despite the different policies implemented in relations to the closure, it is still true that the abrupt onset of the global pandemic rocked European society, the economy, and the operation of labour markets in the first months of 2020, and it represented the most important economic shock for the European countries since World War II. **Its main effects regarded the decrease in the labour market participation, the differences in its negative consequences on the employment in relation to workers' skills and economic activity and different welfare policies implemented** (Pavolini *et al.,* 2022).

Because of this, several scholars focused on how social policies and labour market regulation were changed to reduce the pandemic's negative effects on unemployment, maintaining income, and poverty (Beland *et al.*, 2021).

Following the report proposed by Eurofound (2020), the majority of the measures implemented by the European countries can be divided in some macro groups, that include: **measures for business; measures for workers; measures for citizens.** Among these groups, in here are briefly reported the measures useful to understand what happened in the sector taken into account in this work, the food

retail. In fact, the measures implemented by the governments varied **depending on the sectors, considering that a main difference regarded those activities that could "close" and the ones that could not -** in fact, according to the report proposed by the ETUI written by Purkayastha *et al.* (2021), differences have emerged in relation to several aspects.

In Italy, the main **measures for business** implemented regarded, first of all, the guarantee of the business continuity and the s**upport for essential services – that could not terminate their activity even during the worst period of spread of the virus**. The same happened in Denmark, where **the measures for business** in particular focused on the guarantee of the business activities and especially the support for essential services, implementing in particular changes in the work arrangements and eventual reallocation of workers.

Regarding the **measures for workers,** the Italian government disposed several and important new arrangements during the period of the Covid-19, for example, pushing for a strong occupational health and safety in the workplaces by the obligation to wear the protections' tools (among all, masks). Most importantly, in Italy an important quota of public finance was used to extent income support to workers not covered by any sort of protection scheme, while, at the same time, instrument such as the paid sick leave or support for parents have been maintained. Danish policymakers also ensured the health in the workplaces, and increased the income protections, especially through an extension of income support for workers without any other protection scheme (as in Italy).

All of the elements reported above can surely stand looking at the case of the supermarkets. However, something interesting is that the *sector of the food retail did not suffer from the pandemic, in economic terms:* on the contrary, it was one of the few that did not face difficulties in terms of business. **Thus, in this case these workers did not receive any kind of income support, because they kept going to their workplaces**. Nevertheless, some measures of different nature have been implemented. In the Italian case, for example, for these workers there was the possibility not to go to work in specific cases, like for example **taking care of their children who could not go to school, or to take care for other family members with proven "health difficulties and disabilities"**. These measures however did not always guarantee the access to a full income, but only the guarantee of not being fired from the work.

What underlined so far makes the company selected for this case study a perfect example to really see what was the impact of the Covid-19 for these workers. The next paragraphs are in fact dedicated to deepen what happened inside the company.

9.3. Working in a supermarket during the emergency: "We were in the front-line without weapons"

After having presented a general framework about the policies implemented in Italy and in Denmark during the pandemic, this section is focused on the consequences of the virus occurred in particular in this company. As outlined, in fact, the food retail sector was one of the few that continued to operate in the labour market, **and the testimonies of the workers have been very useful to understand the impact of the Covid, both in relation to its concrete implications in the company and regarding workers perceptions**. The following paragraphs thus focuses on the three major elements emerged during the interviews with the Italian delegates[12]: the impact on the work organization, affected by a further element of pressure due to the absence of the workers (9.3.1.); the impact of the pandemic on the job, especially in relation to the changes on the workers' tasks (9.3.2.); and finally the consequences of the pandemic in terms of safety and health in the workplace, looking in particular at the cleaning, the access to the personal protection security equipment and the social distancing (9.3.3.).

9.3.1. An organization under pressure

It has already been explained (see chapter 7 and 8) how working on a supermarket already requires a very high use of the flexibility, both external and internal, and how much this affects negatively working conditions, especially in terms of work-life balance.

Also in this case, **the pandemic triggered and put under pression the organization of the company**.

As said, working in the food retail sector already implies that the work organization depends a lot on the costumers flows (that can change, and is usually higher in the weekends and in specific hours). This meant that managers organized the daily shifts also based on the expected clients' presence – as well as on the basis of the economic target to be reached.

During the pandemic, the different amount of pace of work derived by a different number of clients was even more stressed due **to the lack of an adequate number of workers**. It could happen, in fact, that the employees were positive to the virus, in quarantine, or had contacts with someone else and thus needed to stay at home**. When this happened, the company sometimes opted to increase the use of the external flexibility, covering the absences through the use of workers employed with on-call contracts:**

[12] For the sake of clarity, it is important to remind in here that this part refers only to the Italian case, considering that in the Danish fieldwork it was possible to interview only one trade unions' delegate (shop steward).

> "Yes sometimes the managers used the on-call contracts to cover some shifts. It was not always possible, though, and sometimes we just needed to resist and to re-organize our shifts." (Territorial delegate UILTUCS UIL, IT)

As explained in this quotation, however, there was not always the possibility (or the will) to cover the organic workforce's absences by hiring new workers. When this did not happen, of course the pace of work increased for who remained in the store:

> "It was very difficult, because if someone was positive… we were less and less and less, and it was difficult to find people who could cover the shifts… And I was so stressed to go to work, it was very hard, I mean, also the physical fatigue, and the rush…" (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

Workers absences were not caused only by the fact of being actually ill.

Many workers did not come to work also because they were worried. Of course, this was something that was not legally permitted by the normative, but, especially in the first period, when the pandemic situation was still no very clear, some workers opted to claimed themselves sick, or even using their (paid and legally recognized) sick leave days.

> "I know about colleagues who were terrified and used as much as they could their sick leaves. And then they had to reorganized everything, as well as us. I do not blame them, even if, I mean, it was terrible for us, who kept going to work." (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

Finally, something interesting about the Italian case regarded the possibility to stay home and not to work if parents of children who were following their school classes from home, via online streaming systems, as outlined in paragraph 9.3.

Under the traditionally familistic Italian welfare state, also during the pandemic it was recognized the essential part played by the (parents) mothers in the children care. With the schools closed and with the impossibility to rely on the help of other family members (such a grandparents)**, Italian laws permitted to ask for special permission – increasing, thus, the pace of work for the workers who on the contrary kept going to the workplace.**

> "And also all the issue of the home schools, people with children struggled a lot. Because there was the possibility, for the workers with children in DAD ["Didattica a Distanza", home school] to ask for special permission. And of course people did that. So, the workers who stayed… we really had a bad time." (Territorial delegate, UILTUCS UIL, IT)

9.3.2. The impact of the pandemic on job

One of the aspects that had emerged more often in the interviews regarded the consequences of the pandemic on the job, meant in this case as the changes occurred in the workers' tasks. If it is easy to imagine why the pandemic affected the work environment, it is also true that, according to trade unions' delegates testimonies, it also influenced both the pace and work and the lack of recognition (Eurofound, 2012; Gosetti, 2012).

Two elements in particular have emerged in relation to this topic.

The first one concerns the **increased need to have a workplace always clean and sanified**. This was particularly true in the first phase of the pandemic, when also the governmental guidelines advocated for a disinfection of the surfaces in order to avoid the spread of the virus. This meant that the workers employed in the supermarket could have faced two possible solutions: finding their workplaces cleaned by other workers, hired with these specific tasks, or clean by themselves. It has already been explained that the issue of the cleaning was already problematic in this company (see chapter 8): in fact, cleaning the workplaces was something that most of the time was fulfilled by the workers who should not have done that task, according to their contracts, something that had also pushed the Italian trade unions to act via legal disputes.

During the period of the pandemic, of course, **due to the strong pressure present in the workplaces, and due to the lack of specific workers hired to clean the surfaces constantly, the cashiers and the other professional figures present in the company had to re-invent and change their "ordinary work", adapting their daily tasks in order to also include the cleaning of the surfaces.**

> "We cleaned our personal spaces by ourselves. I did it by myself, always, also because I did not want to be sick… But it was hard to do our regular job and always remember to clean." (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

> "During the pandemic it was already more difficult, because, you know, people came to the store and they bought a lot of things, because you know, we all did it, like, going to the supermarket just once a week in order to avoid to go out… thus the lines were long, people looked for their products, every client had a lot of things to put in the bags and so forth… and plus, we needed to clean the cash boxes, the surfaces, to open the windows, to…" (Territorial delegate, FISACSAT CISL, IT)

A second element that relates how the job's tasks changed regarded the presence of "aggressive" costumers. From the interviews it has emerged that during that period clients were not

always willing to respect the normative decided by the government: many of them did not wear the masks in the correct way (or did not wear the mask at all), did not maintain the required social distances, did not clean their hands with the sanitizers before entering the stores and so forth: this aspect also played a (negative) role in affecting the good social environment (Eurofound, 2012). **In order to be safe, workers had to add this further element to their daily tasks, namely asking to workers to respect what prescribed by law. This stressed in a significant way the workers, who were already under an increased amount of pressure, and who had, then, also to pay attention to these further elements**. And all of this was particularly difficult considering that clients could have been aggressive or nor available to collaborate:

> "Some clients were a nightmare. They blamed us for the rules, like we were politicians, they called us names sometimes, if we asked them to wear the masks. Or on the contrary, they were afraid, and they pushed us to do our job faster, because they wanted to leave and go home…" (Territorial delegate, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

The presence of the costumers thus affected in particular **the pace of work**, and plus marked an element that increased the discomfort felt by the workers.

9.3.3. Be safe at the workplace

The last element emerged the most during the interviews regarded the consequences that the pandemic had on the **issue of the safety and health of the workers**. In particular three element were underlined as more problematic: the **cleaning of the workplaces**, the **access to the personal security equipment** and the **respect of the social distancing**. The next quotations, as already outlined, refer only to the Italian case, because in the Danish fieldwork it was possible to interview only one Shop Steward.

In relation to the first aspect, it has already been described how the need to clean the workplaces represented something that stresses the job, forcing the workers to add further tasks in addition to their daily duties. **However, of course the issue of the cleaning is something that is also related to the workers' health, because if the workplaces were not adequately cleaned, the risk to get sick increased**. During the COVID-19, the overall cleaning of the entire store, including disinfection, took place on average every 15 days, as reported by trade union's delegates. This was felt as both something that undermined workers' recognition and as an **additional risk.**

Among the others, what was perceived as the most complicated aspect is the access to the personal security equipment. In fact, especially at first the access to the personal security equipment was not immediate. On the one hand this was something generally true, because at the beginning, in every

country, there was a shortage of the personal security equipment. However, for those workers who had to go to work in any case, the lack of PPE not only undermined workers' health, but also **represented a further burden also in economic terms, because workers most of the time had to buy masks and gloves by themselves**:

> "At first obtaining the masks was a disaster. We had to buy them by ourselves… and it was very difficult to find them. And plus, they were very expensive…" (Territorial delegate, FISACSAT CISL, IT).

When the shortage of the personal protection equipment decrease, it became easier for workers because their distribution became a responsibility of the company, but workers complained about their quality:

> "The company decided to give us very bad masks. They were cheaper, but not safe at all. And so, here we go again with the issue of standardization… because once they decided that that was the decision, you could not do anything, everyone had to apply that." (Territorial delegate, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

A common thread, also, seems to be the delay: at first there was a lack of attention regarding anti-Covid regulations. In the last period of the pandemic, the company offered to the workers some "packages" of Covid-19 tests, and many workers have found that this thing happened very late (this policy was implemented after the vaccination period).

Finally, the **maintenance of the social distancing was also something perceived by the workers as very stressful and as something that could have been very dangerous in terms of contagious.** According to the workers, there was little attention from the company in maintaining the required distance:

> "The pandemic underlined several problematic, and at first the company, as all the other companies, had to align to this new factor. Of course at first it was in difficulty. Then, really slowly they tried to maintain, with difficulty, the social distancing…" (Territorial representative FISASCAT CISL, IT)

> "I used to go and check also in other stores; I mean it is still my company… there was not at all an attention in maintaining the social distances […]" (Territorial delegate UILTUCS UIL, IT)

All of the elements emerged during the interviews had helped in making a reflection on how much these workers are often "not seen", and left apart, even in a difficult period where their fear emerged clearly, and very touchingly, in the interviews:

> "I can't describe how hard it was. The fear to get Covid and then go back home to my girls… and the costumers could be very unpleasant and rude… like I am the one who decided that we must keep social distance… let's skip this part, I do not want to think about that. We were at the front line without weapons. We did not have gloves, we did not have masks, we had to buy them. Then they paid us back, but I had to go to the pharmacy before going to work… you can't imagine the stress of that period. They could have done more." (Territorial delegate FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

The lack of an adequate attention to these workers was even more evident looking at the access to the vaccines. In Italy, for example, front-line workers did not receive any kind of priority getting the first dose of the vaccine, while on the contrary other professional categories (such as university professors and researchers) got the privilege to have it (even if they were working from home).

The pandemic thus underlined how much these workers are under considered, most of the time, by the policy makers – something that was already true before the pandemic: this is in fact a sector where the social protections have already been characterised by being insufficient and fragmented.

From the delegates' testimonies, so, it seems that **the burden of the pandemic relied much more on them than on the company's responsibilities**. In here, however, the trade unions played a very important role, as explained in the next paragraph.

9.4. Trade unions' role at supranational, national and company level

As explained in paragraphs 9.2., never like in the pandemic period there was a strong state and public intervention in order to protect workers' employment status, at least in the two countries analysed in this research, Italy and Denmark.

In this process, the role of the trade unions have been fundamental, not only to guarantee that the legislation implemented during the pandemic was respected, but also to **proactively monitor the situation and when possible propose specific interventions in order to protect the workers**. This has been particularly true in those sectors that required the presence of the employees, because the activity could not close (as in the case of the supermarket). This paragraph, thus, focuses on the role played by the trade unions, at supranational, national and at the company level.

On the **supranational level**, trade unions implemented a series of actions with the aim to, somehow, "cross" the European borders, underlining aspects that were common in all the countries. Of course, considering that higher level of action, supranational trade unions' could not directly intervene in bargaining the social protection's policies implemented by the member states. For this reason, they mainly focused on **promoting a series of campaigns in order to help the workers forced to be in an "unprotected" situation, to be recognised by the society**, looking in particular at the ones employed in those sectors that could not rely on the possibility of working from home and that required a contact with other people, taking an advantage by the fact that these workers gained (for the first time) enough visibility as "essential workers".

> "As Uniglobal we did… we launched a series of campaign, the most important was the one called 'Essential rights for essential workers'. Thus, what we did… representing some of the weakest workers who have been in any case essential during the pandemic, being them trade workers or industrial cleaners, security guards, private studios workers and so on… we launched this campaign because we wanted to say that the pandemic underlined how much these workers are underpaid… underrepresented… most of the time they have working conditions below the common standard. The pandemic put in evidence that these are on the contrary essential workers, meaning that without them it would have been impossible to maintain at least the minimum level of services. While we were at home in front of our computers, these people were at risk of exposition… thus we promoted, for example, to have a different priority in the vaccinal plan; […] and not at country level… […] but we are doing this globally […]" (Uniglobal representative, Bruxelles)

On the **national level**, on the contrary, trade unions had the opportunity to carry on proper concertation with the government. Both Italian and Danish unions distinguished among the European countries especially because of their constant presence, strong dialogue and proactive role they had during the pandemic: this similarity was not to taken for granted, but these two countries resulted to be very much on the same page regarding the relations between trade unions and governments. **This was particularly evident for example in the Italian case, when trade unions pushed for a law that did not allow to fire workers.**

> "It is clear that on the theme of safety we as unions played an important role participating in the sign of the various protocols… sign also by the government. This is true also regarding the part of the protections […]. There has been a strong confrontation and many proposal from us… that the government took into account […] And of course we wanted

to protect the employment status… thus we asked that workers could not be fired during the pandemic period". (National Secretary, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

"We were constantly in touch with the government. We push for maintaining workers' protections, and to extend them when possible, especially for those workers who perceived a very low salary. But I have to say that during the emergency a clear collaboration between all the social parts was evident…" (National Secretary HK HANDEL, DK)

However, the most evident positive role that the unions played during that period emerge if looking at what happened inside the company.

During the pandemic unions have been fundamental in **making the rules established by the national governments to be respected.** From the interviews with the delegates this aspect has emerged several time. Being the delegates both workers in the company and part of the industrial relations' system, they have a privileged point of view and their testimonies – regarding this aspects – are the most precious. And also they have information about other stores of the company, even the one where delegates are not present – so that they can easily make a comparison between them.

Summing up, it is thus possible to say that unions have contributed to three different aspects: **speed in obtaining the personal security equipment; maintenance of the social distance; acceleration in the confrontation with the company**. In here are reported some testimonies of the workers interviewed:

"I would say that there are two different types of stores, even "first class" and "second class". I call them like that because for example, we have the trade union delegate in the store…. About the COVID-19… it is difficult that they do not give us all the things that we need." (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

In Italy, stores with unions' delegates have also been able to have **safer** protections. In particular, in some stores, social distancing has been respected more after **targeted requests from delegates to enter a figure in charge of quota entries**:

"Because I tell you… in the period of lockdown, our shop… that is a 700 square meters of sales area… we did not let people enter, if they exceeded 15 people… But there were shops where… they told me… there was not even a queue... even during the lockdown. So, you really see it, there's data... from here you can see who supported the security measures and who instead thought only about the corporate good, the revenue. […] And

it is not a coincidence that when unions are present, things like that do not happen." (Territorial delegate, FILCAMS CGIL, IT)

The most important actions pursued by the unions, however, have been concretised through the **complaints to the national institutions for the health and safety**. This was fundamental because, as said, being the company so much standardised and centralised, the processes to do basically anything are very long. And during the pandemic, the tendency to operate generally slowly has been spread.

"For a simple plexiglass… we are asking it for a long time now, to protect the workers from the infection. Considering that the pandemic is still not over… but if we do not get a green light from the national Head Quarter, we cannot do nothing." (Territorial delegate, FISASCAT CISL, IT)

This last passage, together with the fact that, in some territories, Italian trade unions' representatives opted for "legal complains" to the ASL, **obtaining plexiglass and the supply of masks, underlines a "new" role covered by the unions during the pandemic period: not only they contributed in controlling that the norms were respected, but they also proactively proposed the new instances coming from the workers.** The example of the plexiglass on that is very useful: unions, where present, were able to intercept workers' needs and pushed enough to obtain them, positively affecting the job quality – something even more evident when comparing the unionized and the non-unionized stores.

9.5. Final considerations

This chapter had underlined how much, in general, the pandemic represented a very difficult period especially for the labour market. As outlined, it also represented a further element that stressed the institutions, that in fact acted in different ways all over the countries.

Both Denmark and Italy somehow demonstrated a very important proactive role, in particular on the issues of the employment protections and financial helps. Italian government in particular intervened much more than usual in the political economic during the pandemic period.

Among the various institutions, trade unions in particular had played a significant role in monitoring this difficult situation, at all the level of the concertation. Not only they had contributed in preserving workers' employment status, but their presence marked a real difference especially at the company level, helping the workers to have a faster access to the social security equipment and in maintaining the right social distancing.

Thus **the pandemic highlighted how much, even in very much standardized sector, the institutional impact can still surely play a role in affecting workers' job quality**: in countries where national legislation guaranteed, for example, economic protections during the quarantine, the workers experienced for sure a different job quality; or the same is true if looking at the proactive role of the trade unions, that could guaranteed to the workers safer work environments.

However, the analysis carried out inside this company also underlined how some sectors had been hit in a more difficult way. Even if, as said, supermarket did not suffer economically speaking, workers did had to face much more than others all the risks that the pandemic implied. **And something that had emerged quite clearly is that it is not to taken for granted a proper and right responsibilities from the companies,** while on the contrary it seemed that the major difficulties had been experienced by the workers themselves.

X.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: ESSENTIAL, BUT INVISIBLE WORKERS

The aim of this work was to **investigate the impact of the institutions on the job quality for workers employed in a multinational corporation, operating in the retail sector, in a comparative way**.

As seen in the introduction and in chapter 2, job quality can be analysed from various angles (Lucchini, Negrelli, Zaccaria, 2014): starting from the concept of the ***employment quality,* that especially looks at the occupational characteristics** (type of contracts, salary, careers' prospects), to the ***work quality,* that looks at how the job can affect the well-being of the workers** (looking at dimensions such as autonomy, social environment, physical environment etc) (De Bustillo *et al.*, 2011). Research on the job quality have represented an important field inside the sociology of labour, and this work had the aim to apply this lenses of analysis looking in particular inside a **multinational corporation**.

Multinational corporations are, in fact, important players in a globalized labour market, and their spread, by definition, represents a form of overcrossing the national borders. Thus, it is not uncommon to find a **high level of similarities on their functioning** (Edwards *et al.*, 2013), even when they operate in different countries - similarities that can let imagine that also the job quality would be the same everywhere.

This high level of similarities is even more present in a corporation operating in the **retail**. The reasons to focus on this particular sector, as explained in chapter 3, are three. First of all, since the shift occurred between the industrial economy to the service economy, despite the fact that retail's number of employees had increased (Wren, 2013), it is a sector still not deeply investigated in literature. Secondly, retail sector presents a series of **standardized characteriscts, somehow transversal across different institutional contexts**: low salaries, high level of turnover rate and contingent employment, difficulties in the unionisation processes, lack of careers' prospects. **These are exactly those dimensions that can have an impact on the job quality**, that is usually considered very low in these jobs, also according to statistical surveys (see Eurofound, 2012). Thus, taking into account a very standardized form of work-organization (a multinational corporation) operating in a very standardized sector as well, makes more interesting to take into consideration the **potential**

institutional impacts on the job quality – and even more, to take into account *different* institutions.

Having in mind the standardized characteristics of the retail sector and the standard policies implemented by multinational corporations, the research took into account specifically three institutions and their potential impact in the job quality: **labour market regulations, industrial relations' systems and welfare policies**. Firstly, labour market regulations can play a role in affecting the job quality especially concerning the liberalisation of the products markets (for example, the opening hours), the level of contingent employment or other forms of atypical contracts (vouchers, on-call jobs) and the stability of the job (easiness on the firing procedures, but also presence/absence of active labour market policies). Secondly, industrial relations' systems and the bargaining modalities and contents play a role not only on the workers' representativeness but also on the stipulation of company-level contracts, access to training policies and set of the minimum wages (if not covered by the national norms). Finally, welfare policies can affect job quality too, even if in a less direct way, especially when talking about family care, sick leaves and work-life balance.

For the reasons presented above, the research adopted **the comparative case study methodology** (Gerring, Cojocaru, 2016), looking at the same working context, a multinational corporation operating in the food retail, called in here "*FoodForYou"*, in **Italy and Denmark,** that present very different institutional settings. These differences are particularly evident in relation to the three institutional dimensions considered in this work: the labour market regulation, the industrial relations' models and the welfare systems. Firstly, **Danish labour market is more liberal and deregulated in comparison to the Italian one**, that presents more rigidities especially on the issues of the external flexibility (in particular concerning the firing procedures) and of the internal flexibility (for example, on the regulation of the opening hours). At the same time, however, Italy is characterized by a lack of adequate active labour market policies, while on the contrary they represent a social pillar in Denmark, contributing to the well-known *flexicurity system* (Andersen *et al.,* 2012). Secondly, **Danish industrial relations are based on a system where the dialogue between the social parts is well structured** and clear, and where also the sectorial bargaining processes follow a centralized framework (Mori, 2020); on the contrary, **Italian picture is more fragmented**, both in terms of collaboration between the social parts and of national collective agreement structure (Cella, Treu, 2009). Finally, **the universalistic vein of the Danish welfare systems foresees a series of public services, especially in terms of family care** (de la Port *et al.,* 2020)**, that are notably insufficient in Italy** (D'Apice, Fadda, 2023) – an aspect particularly relevant for the work-life balance.

The analysis followed specific research questions: in which way the different **labour market regulations** affect the *quality of employment* (meant as wages, working hours, labour contracts – part-time, apprenticeships, fixed-term, on-call)? What is the relevance of the **different industrial relations systems** (meant as trade unions institutional recognition, industrial relations structure) in affecting working conditions and workers' voice and discretion inside a multinational corporation? What is – if present – the supranational trade unions role? What is the impact of **welfare policies** (in particular, child and eldest care and parental leavings) on the work-life balance for multinational corporations' workers?

Thus, starting from these considerations, the research started from three hypotheses related to the impact of the three institutions on the job quality: *the less liberal labour market in Italy has a stronger impact on the dimensions of the contingent emplyment and careers' prospects; the industrial relations' system in Denmark can consent to achieve more results in terms of control of the norms, due to the strongest collaboration between the social parts and because of its higher level of unionisation rate; and Danish welfare system can cover more broadly workers' needs, outside the work-places.*

Plus, the research wanted to better investigate the relations occurring between the labour workforce's characteristics, the corporations' strategies and the final impact on the job quality (Askenazy *et al.*, 2012). A further question, thus, regarded this aspect: in which way the differences in the labour supply characteristics (age, gender, education) analysed together with the impact of the institutions, affect the dimensions of the job quality?

In order to answer these questions, the empirical material was collected **through semi-structured interviews,** both in Italy and in Denmark, to trade unions' representatives, the company's unions' delegates and the company's managers. The main insights resulting from the fieldwork have been also enriched by a **quantitative secondary data analysis** that specifically had the aim to contextualise the case study in a more general framework. In fact, as seen in chapter 5, the research looks at two further elements. Firstly, it considers the retail workforce characteriscts in the two countries (on the Labour Force Survey dataset, from Eurostat); secondly, it analyses the job quality indices proposed by the European Working Conditions Survey, by Eurofound, comparing the retail, the industry and the service sector as a whole in the two countries. These contextual data results to be really important, on the one hand, to better understand the insights emerged from the interviews; on the other, to see how much this case study is in line with the retail sector in general, in order to try to make some general considerations.

As explained in the introduction and in chapter 3, **the theoretical framework that guided the analyses took into account, together with the literature on the job quality, both the comparative political economy literature** (Hall and Soskice, 2001; Amable, 2003; Burroni, 2016) **and that on multinational corporations** (Femer, 1987; Ferndale and Paauwe, 2007; Edwards *et al.*, 2013).

The use of both the literatures was fundamental for two reasons: on the one hand, understating the specificities of these institutional elements was necessary to really compare their potential impacts. On the other hand, the study of the multinational corporations' functioning permitted to understand the strategies usually implemented, and to analyse them looking in particular at the presence of *convergence* processes, especially in terms of managers' autonomy, highly hypothesized in this literature as a consequence of globalization (Shaw *et al.*, 2019).

In order to understand the research's findings, it is helpful to first describe the aspects of job quality that emerged as more problematic in this case study; then go on to detail the pertinent institutional impact that emerged from the study, always keeping in mind the comparison between the two countries.

- ***External flexibility and precarity of the work***

It has emerged many times from trade unions' representatives and trade unions' delegates how the issue of the external flexibility, and thus of the precarity of the work, is particularly felt by the workers. In this case, a potential positive impact could be played by the **labour market legislation, more specifically from its level of deregulation, as also hypothesized in the introduction**. In fact, one of the main negative outcome of the external flexibility regards the possibility of losing the job; it is clear, then, that the rigidities in the regulations on dismissal procedures can deeply affect the picture of precariousness. At the same time, the presence (or absence) of active and/or passive labour market policies plays a role when workers are unemployed. **This is even truer when considering that the deregulation of the labour market, if not properly followed by a strong system of social protection, contributes in increasing the "gap" occurring between the *insiders* and the *outsiders*** (Dekker, Veen, 2015).

As seen in chapter 4, **Italy and Denmark are very different in relation to this aspect**. On the one hand, despite the progressive shift towards a more and more deregulated labour market, Italy still presents a series of protections in the labour market in comparison to Denmark. For example, firing workers is not easy, according to the national collective agreement and to the Workers' Statute of 1970; and this is especially true for workers employed with a permanent contract. Also, in the collective agreements it is clearly specified that there is a limit concerning the percentage of part-time

contracts (or other forms of atypical contracts) that the companies can use. **Thus, according to this picture, the Italian framework might appear more protective in this respect; while in Denmark there are much less contraints in relation to these aspects**. In fact, from the empirical material the issue of the (un)voluntary turnover rate inside *FoodForYou* has emerged more often in the Danish case.

However, the initial hypothesis to find a more protective picture in Italy – and consequently the impact on many of the dimensions of the employment quality – is only partially true. In fact, Danish trade unionists did not appear concerned about the presence of a higher level of external flexibility. This is due to the general structure of the Danish labour market, based on the model of the **flexicurity** (Mailand, 2004; Ibsen, Mailand, 2009). In fact, Denmark invests much more than Italy in active labour market policies – presenting at the same time a higher level of generosity, in terms of both time and fundings, in the passive labour market policies. **Thus, the feeling of being "precarious" is much less perceived by Danish workers** – something actually also in line with the analysis of job quality indices analysed in chapter 5.

In respect to this first point, it is clear that the level of rigidity of a labour market cannot explain, alone, the impact on the external flexibility – and in fact, regarding this aspect, Denmark presents a picture where the job quality appears better, despite being more deregulated.

This element thus partly disconfirm the first hypothesis presented in the introduction: if it is true, in fact, that Italian labour norms do guarantee more stable contracts and careers' perspectives, it is also and especially true, however, **that taking into account *other* institutional elements – especially welfare and social protections, the picture changes.** Italy does not present a "more functional" model regarding how labour norms affect the job quality, because, as seen especially in chapter 8, due to the high use of part-time contracts and the lack of prospects in case of losing the job, the sense of precariousness emerged much more in the Italian case.

This does not mean, however, that the deregulation processes in the labour market are not problematic: this means, on the contrary, that **they have an even worst impact on the job quality if not properly accompanied by other social protections** – that is exactly what happens in Italy. This finding requires to pose much more attention to other institutional elements, **especially the welfare policies, something that is not always taken into account by the Comparative Political Economy field of study, as explained also later.**

- ***Internal flexibility, low salaries and work-life balance***

Another issue, which emerged in both the fieldworks, probably perceived as even more challenging**,** regards the **internal flexibility, due to the very important use of the part-time contracts in this company** (and in general in the retail sector) (O'Brady, 2019; Cianferoni, 2019). This has two main consequences: **low salaries and difficulties in the work-life balance.**

Regarding the first issue, a fundamental premises is that both in Italy and in Denmark there is not a law that regulates the minimum wages. On the contrary, the level of the **salaries are bargained in the national collective agreements** (Della Rocca, 1998; Greve, 2001). But retail sector structurally presents a series of peculiarities that contributes in maintaining the **salaries very low, and trade unions' margins of intervention are limited.**

As said, the **low salaries** are a structural consequence of the use of the part-time contracts. In this picture, unions possibility to ask for higher salaries is weakened by the fact that retail sector is characterised by a high level of turnover rate, fragmentation of the workplaces and work organization based on shifts (ILO, 2015): these aspects contribute in making the unionisation processes very difficult, decreasing unions' power in the confrontation with the employers' associations. These premises are true both in Italy and in Denmark.

However, as explained, the industrial relations inside this company are in both the countries quite structured, and there is a dialogue going on for years. So, considering the instrument of the **secondary level bargaining, it is not unplausible to expect that trade unions could play a role on the issue of the low salaries**.

But in the integrative contract it is not foreseen any rise in the salary, something that, according to the Italian trade unions' representatives, is a consequence of the company home country head quarter's guidelines. Even if this issue did not emerge in the Danish fieldwork, this is something still quite surprising: it could have been hypothised, in fact, to find an economic premium in the integrative contract, something quite common in very big and structured companies. Thus, the issue of the **low salaries (consequence of the internal flexibility) appears to be an "unavoidable" element in this company**, where even trade unions could not play a significant role. **This partly confirms the second hypothesis presented in the introduction: trade unions, in this sector, have to cope with a series of difficulties that do not consent to play an effective role on the job quality**, ad this becomes even truer when the *standardization* triggers and pose under pressure unions' claim. However, knowing in advance that the Danish industrial relations' system is less fragmented, the expectation was to find more margins of actions. While, thus partly disconfirming the second hypothesis, in

respect to this case study, trade unions' limited impact on job quality results to be true for both Italy and Denmark, **underlining once again how the presence of social protections is even more important**, as explained later.

As anticipated, the second consequence of the presence of the internal flexibility concerns the **difficulties occurring in the work-life balance**. This is an issue emerged several times from the interviews, and it has been described as one of the most difficult aspect of being employed in this company.

It is exactly in here that the welfare policies become fundamental. As explained in chapter 4, also in this case Italy and Denmark presents a very different picture (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1996). If, on the one hand, Denmark is characterised by its well-known **universalistic welfare system**, that foresees, in relation to the family care, public nursery schools and facilities for elderly people, on the other hand Italy, as part of the "familistic model" of the welfare systems, still **lacks a series of targeted policies for the family care**; on the contrary, the majority of the family burdens rely on women.

This is particularly important in this case study (especially in Italy), where, as emerged from the interviews, the female quota of the workforce is very high, something in line with the retail sector in general (**42.9%** in Italy and **45.4%** in Denmark). And, if considering the already presented issue of the low salaries, **in Italy this lack of family services is even more problematic, because the ones offered in the private market are too expensive for these workers.**

It is not a surprise, so, that in relation to this aspect the Danish welfare system is more "efficient" than the Italian one, and that its impact on job quality is more significant, especially looking at the spread/the access to family-care policies, something that is in line with the third hypothesis. **Once again this aspect gains importance especially considering the difficulties occurring in the bargaining processes.**

This picture becomes even more severe when considering the quota of **involuntary part-time**, meant as the percentage of workers who would prefer to being employed with a full-time job, but who cannot because of the impossibility to find it. If in Denmark the percentage of involuntary part-time workers, in the retail sector, is of only 5,9%, in Italy the number is incredibly high: 61,7%. However, this data can be better explained only when **looking more deeply at the characteriscts of the workforce, as explained in a while.**

As said in chapter 5, the use of part-time contracts in the retail sector is higher in Denmark than in Italy **(42.2%** against **21.2%)**; and, as seen, the Danish market is even more liberal in terms of opening

hours. Thus, finding a balance between work and family care might result problematic also in this case, especially if the part-time contracts allow to change with short-notice the working schedule. Why, then, the percentage of involuntary part-time rate is so low in Denmark?

The answer can be find looking at the Danish workforce in the retail sector, and specifically at the quota of very young people: the percentage of people between 15 and 24 years old employed in the retail sector is, in Denmark, of **37,5%,** while in Italy only **5,7%**. Thus, these workers are still studying or are employed in the company (and in the food retail sector in general) also for transitory period and most of the time working part-time is something that meets their needs.

Thus, considering the welfare system *and* the workforce characteristics together, Denmark presents a picture that somehow fits better with the characteristics of the retail sector *and* with the companies' needs: in proportion, much less workers "suffer" from the difficulties occurring in the work-life balance, and also regarding the low salaries (at least referring to the students). **The importance to look at the workforce characteristics emerges also in other aspects, as explained later.**

- ***Trade unions' role at different levels***

There are some aspects that can impact on the job quality, emerged as very relevant for the workers, where any form of institutional impact could be considered as relevant. These are the management (and the contents) of the **training** present in *FoodForYou;* and the evaluation processes conducted in the company to identify those workers considered "valuable" to **advance in their careers.** Both of these elements are decided at **centralized (home country)** level.

This impossibility to intervene on such a centralized element is visible also in relation to the human resource management. In fact, as seen, especially concerning the recruiting procedures and the evaluations process, the company's structure is so gigantic and pyramidal that trade unions' representatives do not have much room for actions.

What is relevant in here, not necessarily obvious, is that something that is already true in the retail sector – the difficulties in advancing in the career and the impossibility for trade unions to play a role – is somehow **fuelled by the company dimension,** by its structure and by the distance occurring between the local institutions and the company's head quarter. This aspect makes wonder about the agency of trade unions at another level – the international one, as seen later.

This last passage is useful to introduce the next piece of discussion, that relates the role of trade unions in the company in Italy, in Denmark *and* at the international level. As seen, industrial relations

systems are quite different in Italy and in Denmark (Mori, 2020). In the Italian case, there are three main confederations operating in the service sector (Ambra, 2018): FILACMS CGIL, FISASCAT CISL and UILTUCS UIL. At the same time, also the employers' associations are not unified, being them FEDERDISTRIBUZIONE, CONFCOMMERCIO and CONFESERCENTI. This is a picture where it is already quite visible one of the peculiarities of the Italian industrial relations' system, that is the **fragmentation of the social parts**.

On the contrary, in Denmark the main union operating in the retail sector is HK HANDEL (*Handels- og Kontorfunktionærernes Forbund*), that dialogues, as representative of the employers' part, with the Chamber of Commerce (*Dansk Erhverv*).

The second significant difference, in addition to the presence/absence of fragmentation between the social parts, is the bargaining structure, where, in the Italian case, there is once again more fragmentation *between* the sectors, while in Denmark the national agreements of the various sectors of the labour market are established following the general framework decided at confederal level. Finally, also due to the presence of the Ghent system that guarantees to Danish trade unions the management of the social insurance system, **also the unionisation rate is different, being higher, in fact, in Denmark.**

Despite these differences, trade unions' presence is remarkable in terms of the impact on the job quality, as proved by the history of the unionization happened in Italy. **The differences occurred between the "pre" and the "post" unionization phase are in fact remarkable**: nowadays, the company had signed an integrative contract, that, even with some shortcomings (according to the trade unions' representatives), still offers some advantages (for example, economic vouchers, supplementary health insurances and so forth, as seen in chapter 7), before absent. The same is true regarding the introduction of the badges, that allow the workers to have recognized in a proper way their working hours (and the related salary).

But the period of the pandemic was absolutely the one that confirmed how much trade unions play a fundamental role in terms of job quality: both in Italy and Denmark, unions had contributed to furnish in a shorter period of time the protective security equipment to the workers, to make respect the social distance required by the law and so forth. Once again, however, in the case of *FoodForYou* Italy could count, differently from Denmark, on a more diffused level of control and protection, having much more delegates in the stores.

Also nowadays the presence of trade unions is fundamental, but different in the two countries. In Italy there are more delegates in the stores, while, partly surprisingly (knowing in advance how strong are

the industrial relations), Danish trade union only has three delegates inside this company. **The presence of the trade unions is significant under many aspects:** from the security in the workplaces, the way through which the managers behave, and most importantly the management of the flexibility. In fact, when in presence of a union delegate, it is more difficult (even if not impossible) for the manager to change the working schedule without the proper period of notice defined by the collective agreement, while this happens much more easily in those stores where unions are absent.

However, as explained, retail sector presents a series of peculiarities and difficulties that somehow shorten the distance between the two systems – and that negatively affect unions' margin of actions in both the countries. In fact, in both the cases trade unions' representatives have underlined as particularly difficult to make the workers enrol to the organizations. Most importantly, even if because of different reasons (as explained in chapter 4), **the "traditional" instruments of pressure are not useful**: the strikes, for example, cannot be used as an "everyday strategy". Finally, considering that retail, by definition, relies on the presence of the costumers, the internal flexibility is, as said, very high, and justified from by the *demand side:* in this sense, it is very difficult for trade unions to push for a more rigid work management.

This picture is even more complicated considering that the relation occurring between the trade unions and the company is a relation that must happen only at the host country level, while it never happens with the management in the home country.

Plus, despite the fundamental role played by unions (in particular during the pandemic), it is still true that, in respect to what have been described as the most problematic aspects present in this company (and in the retail sector), namely the extreme structural **high use of internal flexibility and the low salaries, both Danish and Italian trade unions cannot really have a significant impact.** The question in here, thus, is about the **supranational trade unions:** and this is even truer considering that the company selected is a multinational one.

Quite surprisingly, supranational trade unions' are not sufficiently efficient in affecting these dimensions of the job quality. **In fact, in the case of this company, there is not an European Work Council (EWC)**. Thus, everything concerning the trade unions' potential actions happens at national level (and even rarely at store level, at least in Italy).

When asked about their opinion about supranational trade unions, unions' representatives in Italy and in Denmark gave very different answers. Italian unions see as positive the presence of a supranational institution, especially when talking about multinational corporations, but they also are well aware of

the fact that, at the state of the art, supranational trade unions are useful as long as they help in the **theoretical elaboration of the processes happening in the labour market.** When it comes to the actual and practical actions, supranational trade unions are still "too far away from the reality": and, most importantly, due to the differences among the European industrial relations' systems, it is very **difficult to "shift" the bargaining processes with multinational corporations at that level**. On the contrary, Danish trade unions' representatives do not see as positive the eventual implementation of actions pursued from the supranational trade unions. This is because, according to them, Danish industrial relation system is already strong enough to even face the confrontation with the multinational corporations.

Is this really the truth? As emerged in this case study, the capacity of the Danish trade unions to bargain all the relevant aspects that can affect the job quality in a multinational corporation is only partially true: in fact, for example, in relation to the training policies or the recruitment strategies implemented by the company, **being something decided at the home country level, maybe a supranational trade unions' actions could be more effective**.

Something that is also quite interesting about the supranational trade unions regards the fact that actually its strengths and efforts are notably very visible in the case of those companies where the working conditions are extremely bad, or where there is a clear "anti-unionism" behaviour (see, for example, the digital platforms and so forth). Referring to this kind of benchmark, of course **supranational trade unions do not see as a priority** to pursue any kind of actions against those companies that, formally, do apply the national collective agreements, do pay the workers, do respect the legislation and so forth, as in the case of *FoodForYou.*

But of course, as seen, being the retail sector so "difficult", **behind the formality of the bargained contracts, there are many "grey zones"**, where the inner problematics of this sector clearly emerge, such as the extreme high use of the internal flexibility (that contributes in maintaining low salaries). Thus, a confrontation at a supranational level could be really useful and could give a more important contribution in respect to what can be done at national level.

All of this becomes even more relevant because, on the contrary, on the multinational corporations' sides the difficulties regarding "crossing the borders" are much less felt. Thus, in the confrontation between the parts, on the one hand, for trade unions it is difficult to find a common way to act, while on the other multinational corporations do that by definition: as seen in the case of the training policies, this increases the corporations' possibility to always apply the same guidelines.

- ***Final considerations. An underrated but fundamental dimension: the welfare systems***

Trying to make some final considerations, it is useful to distinguish two different levels of analysis: on one hand, a summary of what has emerged as most significant in relation to this case study; on the other, what can be considered in a more general way.

Starting from the question related to the institutional impact on the job quality in a multinational corporation, it has emerged that, when talking about this company, dialoguing with a multinational corporation also offers some advantages to trade unions. **However, something emerged quite clearly is that more than its provenience, what make a difference on this aspect is the dimension of the company**. In fact, companies of bigger dimension tend to "accept" the trade unions role more significantly, and thus, most importantly, to apply the national collective agreement. This is particularly significant especially in the Italian case, characterised by a strong presence of small companies, that can be more problematic in relation to the application of the bargained contract.

Despite this, even if some aspects can actually be affected by host countries institutions, some others, due to the higher level of centralization and standardization, typical of multinational corporations, cannot. Specifically, for example, regarding the training policies and the human resource management and the career's prospects, local institutions cannot do anything, both in Italy and in Denmark.

In general, from the case study it has emerged (in line with the initial expectations) that Denmark presents a more favourable framework in terms of institutional impacts on job quality. But what is most interesting is that, **together with the welfare system, what really plays a role are the workforce characteristics:** in fact, especially in relation to the issue of the **low salaries** and of the difficulties of managing the **work-life balance** (the aspects underlined as more difficult in the company *and* in general), the fact that the Danish workforce is made mainly by very young people offers, at the end of the day, a very different picture.

The second very important element to underline in relation to the case study is that, in both the countries, trade unions present a lot of difficulties, first of all, in increasing/maintaining high the level of unionisation; and secondly, their room for actions are very few. This is true even if, *ex ante*, the Danish picture presents a lower level of fragmentation between the social parts and a higher unions' rate. But finding the very same difficulties, from unions' side, in this company, **underlines the importance to consider *all* the relevant institutions *and* the workforce characteristics** when analysing a sector where the traditional strategies of the trade unions are nor efficient, due to the difficulties it presents.

This brings the analysis to the core of this conclusions: in a company operating in the food retail and (with all the precautions of the case) in general in the retail sector, **it is fundamental, both from an academic and a policy making point of view, to remember that trade unions' actions are limited: thus*, in these sectors*** **the social protections acquire a much more important role than in other ones** (Carré, Tilly, 2017).

This work thus also underlined **a limit in the comparative political economy** literature, that tends to focus primarily on the industrial relations' systems, **underestimating the impact of the welfare systems**. And the presence of this limit risks to not really grasp *what really plays a role, and how, when analysing the institutional impact on the job quality*. Even more specifically, if the aim is to apply the comparative political economy as main lenses of analysis, it is necessary to start from the sector's characteristics.

And this leads to the second fundamental point in terms of gap in the literature: **the workforce characteriscts should be taken more into account when looking at the job quality and at the role of the institutions.** This case study has demonstrated how the job quality change in Italy and in Denmark not only depending on the institutional impact of the labour regulations, of the trade unions and of the welfare policies; most of the time, job quality perception changes depending on the fact of being young, women, with a family or alone: this is an aspect not really considered, nor in the literature and neither in the policy making debates.

Finally, it is clear that, considering the difficulties occurring in the bargaining processes in the retail sector, a higher percentage of targeted welfare policies for the family care should be implemented.

In particular because, **as clearly emerged during the pandemic, these workers are the ones who most of the time are unrepresented, not considered and not protected, even if they are a fundamental part of the engine that fuels our economic and labour market system.**

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Annexes

- **Annex I. The job quality indices**

List of questions used to define the indices

Skills and discretion index:

- Q61A. Over the past 12 months, have you undergone any of the following types of training to improve your skills or not? – A: Training paid for or provided by your employer or by yourself if self-employed
- Q61C. Over the past 12 months, have you undergone any of the following types of training to improve your skills or not? – C: On-the-job training (co-workers, supervisors)
- Q49C. Generally, does your main paid job involve ... ? – C: C – solving unforeseen problems on your own
- Q49E. Generally, does your main paid job involve ... ? – E: complex tasks
- Q59F. Generally, does your main paid job involve ... ? – F: learning new things
- Q50A. Are you able to choose or change ... ? – A: your order of tasks
- Q50B. Are you able to choose or change ... ? – B: your methods of work
- Q50C. Are you able to choose or change ... ? – C: your speed or rate of work
- Q51C. For each of the following statements, please select the response which best describes your work situation – C: You are consulted before targets for your work are set (NEW)
- Q51E. For each of the following statements, please select the response which best describes your work situation – E: You have a say in the choice of your working partners (MODIFIED TREND)
- Q51L. For each of the following statements, please select the response which best describes your work situation – L: Your job involves tasks that are in conflict with your personal values (NEW)
- Q51O. For each of the following statements, please select the response which best describes your work situation – O: You can influence decisions that are important for your work (NEW)

- Q24H. Please tell me, using the same scale, does your main paid job involve ...? – H: Working with computers: PCs, network, mainframe (TREND)

Good social environment index:

- Q51A. For each of the following statements, please select the response which best describes your work situation – A: Your colleagues help and support you (MODIFIED TREND)
- Q51B. For each of the following statements, please select the response which best describes your work situation – B: [ASK EMPLOYEE ONLY, Q6=3] Your manager helps and supports you (MODIFIED TREND)
- Q58A. In general, your immediate manager / supervisor …. – A: Provides you with feedback on your work
- Q58B. In general, your immediate manager / supervisor …. – B: Respects you as a person
- Q58D. In general, your immediate manager / supervisor …. – D: Is good at planning and organising the work
- Q58E. In general, your immediate manager / supervisor …. – E: Encourages you to participate in important decisions
- Q77E. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements describing some aspects of your job? – E: I have very good friends at work
- Q70A. [formerly Q65] Over the last month, during the course of your work have you been subjected to – A: verbal abuse?
- Q70B. [formerly Q65] Over the last month, during the course of your work have you been subjected to – B: unwanted sexual attention?
- Q70C. [formerly Q65] Over the last month, during the course of your work have you been subjected to – C: threats and humiliating behaviour?
- Q71A. [formerly Q65] And over the past 12 months, during the course of your work have you been subjected to – A: physical violence (MODIFIED TREND)
- Q71B. [formerly Q65] And over the past 12 months, during the course of your work have you been subjected to – B: bullying /harassment

- Q71C. [formerly Q65] And over the past 12 months, during the course of your work have you been subjected to – C: sexual harassment

Good physical environment index:

- Q23A. Please tell me, using the following scale, are you exposed at work to ...? – A: Vibrations from hand tools, machinery, etc. (TREND)
- Q23B. Please tell me, using the following scale, are you exposed at work to ...? – B: Noise so loud that you would have to raise your voice to talk to people (TREND)
- Q23C. Please tell me, using the following scale, are you exposed at work to ...? – C: High temperatures which make you perspire even when not working (TREND)
- Q23D. Please tell me, using the following scale, are you exposed at work to ...? – D: Low temperatures whether indoors or outdoors (TREND)
- Q23E. Please tell me, using the following scale, are you exposed at work to ...? – E: Breathing in smoke, fumes (such as welding or exhaust fumes), powder or dust (such as wood dust or mineral dust) etc. (TREND 2005)
- Q23F. Please tell me, using the following scale, are you exposed at work to ...? – F: Breathing in vapours such as solvents and thinners (TREND 2005)
- Q23G. Please tell me, using the following scale, are you exposed at work to ...? – G: Handling or being in skin contact with chemical products or substances (TREND 2005)
- Q23H. Please tell me, using the following scale, are you exposed at work to ...? – H: Tobacco smoke from other people (TREND 2005)
- Q23I. Please tell me, using the following scale, are you exposed at work to ...? – I: Handling or being in direct contact with materials which can be infectious, such as waste, bodily fluids, laboratory materials, etc (TREND 2005)
- Q24A. Please tell me, using the same scale, does your main paid job involve ...? – A: Tiring or painful positions (TREND)
- Q24B. Please tell me, using the same scale, does your main paid job involve ...? – B: Lifting or moving people (TREND 2005)
- Q24C. Please tell me, using the same scale, does your main paid job involve ...? – C: Carrying or moving heavy loads (TREND)

- Q24D. Please tell me, using the same scale, does your main paid job involve ...? – D: Standing (MODIFIED TREND)
- Q24E. Please tell me, using the same scale, does your main paid job involve ...? – E: Repetitive hand or arm movements (TREND)

Work intensity index:

- Q45A. And does your job involve ... ? – A: working at very high speed
- Q45B. And does your job involve ... ? – B: working to tight deadlines
- Q46A. On the whole, is your pace of work dependent, or not, on ... ? – A: the work done by colleagues
- Q46B. On the whole, is your pace of work dependent, or not, on ... ? – B: direct demands from people such as customers, passengers, pupils, patients, etc.
- Q46C. On the whole, is your pace of work dependent, or not, on ... ? – C: numerical production targets or performance targets
- Q46D. On the whole, is your pace of work dependent, or not, on ... ? – D: automatic speed of a machine or movement of a product
- Q46E. On the whole, is your pace of work dependent, or not, on ... ? – E: the direct control of your boss
- Q51G. For each of the following statements, please select the response which best describes your work situation – G: You have enough time to get the job done (TREND)
- Q51L. For each of the following statements, please select the response which best describes your work situation – L: Your job involves tasks that are in conflict with your personal values (NEW)
- Q51P. For each of the following statements, please select the response which best describes your work situation – P: Your job requires that you hide your feelings (NEW)
- Q24G. Please tell me, using the same scale, does your main paid job involve ...? – G: Handling angry clients? (NEW)

Prospects index:

- Q77A. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements describing some aspects of your job? – A: I might lose my job in the next 6 months
- Q77C. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements describing some aspects of your job? – C: My job offers good prospects for career advancement
- Q6. Are you mainly ... ? -1: Self-employed without employees; - 2: Self-employed with employees; - 3: employed; - 4: Other; - 8: DK/no opinion; -): Refusal
- Q7. What kind of employment contract do you have? – 1: An indefinite contract; - 2: A fixed term contracts; - 3: A temporary employment agency contract; - 4: An apprenticeship or other training scheme; - 5: No contract; - 6: Other; -7: DK/no opinion; - 9: Refusal

Working time quality index:

- Q18. How many hours do you usually work per week in your main paid job?
- Q32. Normally, how many times a month do you work at night, for at least 2 hours between 10.00 pm and 05.00 am?
- Q33. And how many times a month do you work in the evening, for at least 2 hours between 6.00 pm and 10.00 pm?
- Q34. And how many times a month do you work on Sundays?
- Q35. And how many times a month do you work on Saturdays?
- Q39. How are your working time arrangements set? – 1: They are set by the company/organisation with no possibility for changes; - 2: You can choose between several fixed working schedules determined by the company/organisation; - 3: You can adapt your working hours within certain limits (e.g. flexitime); - 4: Your working hours are entirely determined by yourself; - 8: DK/no opinion; - 9: refusal
- Q40. Do changes to your work schedule occur regularly? (IF YES) How long before are you informed about these changes? – 1; No; - 2: Yes, the same day; - 3: Yes, the day before; - 4: Yes, several days in advance; - 5: Yes, several weeks in advance; - 6: Other; - 8: DK/no opinion; - 9: refusal

- Q43. Would you say that for you arranging to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters is ... ? – 1: No difficult at all; - 2: Not too difficult; - 3: Somewhat difficult; - 4: Very difficult; - 8: DK/no opinion; - 9: refusal

Earnings index:

- EF10. Please can you tell us how much are your net monthly earnings from your main paid job?
- EF11. Perhaps you can provide the approximate range instead. What letter best matches your total net earnings from your main job (SHOW CARD EF11)? Use the part of the show card that you know best: weekly, monthly or annual earnings
- Q18. How many hours do you usually work per week in your main paid job?

▪ Annex II. Trade unions and managers' interviews' guidelines

➢ *List of questions for trade unions' representatives*

1. General trade union's structure

- S*pecific trade union (FILCAMS/FISASCAT/UILTUCS/HK) structure (internal and external)*

- (Introduction on themselves)
- Can you introduce me your union, generally?
- Can you tell me something about the different branches? What are their main competences (for example, if they follow different labour market sectors)?

- *Institutionalisation rate*

- How trade unions relate with other relevant institutions on labour market issues (for example, Labour Ministry?)
- Does this relation affect the implementation of the collective/company agreements? If yes, how?
- As relevant trade union, are you involved in decision making processes about labour market issues?
- Does this involvement lead to trilateral agreements (unions, employers' associations, state?)

2. Relations with other trade unions

- *Service sector in general*

- Do you work with other unions in the service sector and if so in what ways?
- How are these relationships developed?
- Do you collaborate with any Italian/Danish/European trade unions within the retail sector?

- *FoodForYou case studies*

- How would describe the relations with other national and supranational trade unions are managed in the case of *FoodForYou*?

3. Retail and similar

- *Retail in general and job quality in retail*

- How has the Italian/Danish retail sector developed? What are its main challenges and opportunities?
- What is your general opinion on job quality inside retail sector? - Meant as, for example, types of contracts applied (fixed-term, part-time…), employment relations, social protections…
- How would you describe the Italian/Danish bargaining model in the retail sector? For example, can you tell me something about the limits regarding the election of the delegates/about the 50% rule?
- Which are the main categories of workers covered by collective agreements inside retail sector?
- Are there any relevant features about retail which are different from other service sub sector (tourism, for example)?
- Is there a sort of "worker type" among the employees, in your opinion? Do you think there has been changes in retail typical workforce?
- Which are the main strategies you implement as trade union inside retail sector?
- How much traditional forms of "conflict" (for example, strikes) are effective in this sector?

- *FoodForYou case study*

- What are the relations with *FoodForYou*?
- How strong it is the rate of unionisation inside this company?
- Which are the main problems you have encountered in the relation with this company?
- Is there a sort of "worker type" among the employees, in your opinion?

- As long as you know, which contract is more applied for workers employed in this company, also considering the distinction between part-time and full time and temporary and long-term contracts?

  - *Relations with home country and head quarters*

- Together with Italian/Danish *FoodForYou's* representatives, do you have any contact with the headquarters?
- How much the decision taken at home countries level affect the national branches?

4. Relation with multinational corporations

- What is the approach of your organisation towards multinational corporations, in general?
- What are the main difficulties you encounter in the bargaining process with multinational corporations, if present?
- In your opinion, is there a sort of "worker type" employed in multinational corporations? Are there any room for you as trade union to influence or manage human resource management?
- Are there differences in the relations you have with national and international corporations?
- From which country/countries are the corporations with which you have more problematic relations from (if there is a distinction?)
- Considering the international core of the multinational corporations, are there any coordinated table with supranational trade unions you participate in?
- Which are their strategies?

5. Job quality

- Which are in your opinion the pros and cons of being employed in a standardised company (a multinational corporations) which affect job quality (meant as HRM, shifts, timetable, types of contracts?)
- What are the main problematics in this company?
- What are your room for actions in relation to them?

6. Welfare and job quality

- Can you describe how job quality is protected by national level policies? (For example, job protections, active labour market policies, child and eldest care regarding work-life balance…)
- In your opinion, are there any advantages deriving from the implementation of welfare policies at firm level (for example, nursery), and would they be useful in the retail sector?

- As long as you know, does *FoodForYou* implement these kinds of services for their workers? Are there any room for you as trade union to push for their implementation, in the Italian/Danish branches?
- In which way the public welfare affect workers employed in retail?
- How much can you, as trade unions, influence the decisions related to welfare policies?

7. Future perspectives

- Which are the changes you would like to see implemented on the topics discussed so far? (institutionalisation rate, collective bargaining, unionisation strategies..)
- What should be done in order to push for some more structured and coordinated supranational trade unions strategies?

➢ *List of questions for trade unions' delegates/shop stewards*

1. Job quality inside *FoodForYou*

- *FoodForYou* case study: a company operating in retail

- What is your role as shop union delegate/steward? What are the implications on your job as *FoodForYou*'s employee?
- How are working conditions inside this company, in your opinion? (meant as: work-life balance, atypical shifts, salary, sick leaving permissions, pace of work, training, relation with costumers, career perspectives, autonomy and discretion…)
- Is there a sort of "worker type" among the employees, in your opinion?
- As long as you know, which contract is more applied for workers employed in this company, also considering the distinction between part-time and full time and temporary and long-term contracts?

- *FoodForYou* case study: a multinational company

- How would you describe *FoodForYou* company?
- What are the relations with *FoodForYou*'s managers?
- How is – in your opinion – the level of autonomy/decision managers have inside the store?
- In your opinion, were the any difficulties you have encountered with this company because of it being a multinational corporation?
- Together with other trade unions representatives, do you have any contact with the headquarters?

- How much the decision taken at home countries level affect the national branches?
- Which are in your opinion the pros and cons of being employed in a standardised company (a multinational corporations) which affect job quality (meant as HRM, shifts, timetable, types of contracts?)

    - *FoodForYou* case study: trade unions' role

- Which are the main problems you have encountered in the relation with this company?
- How strong it is the rate of unionisation inside this company?
- How is your relations with FILCAMS/FISASCAT/UILTUCS/HK structured? (how many times you have contacts with them, do they guide you in everyday actions inside the shops…)
- What are the main strategies you apply – as a delegate/shop steward – to unionise workers/to involve workers in unions' initiatives/actions?
- Are there any room for you as trade unions to influence or manage human relations management?
- How would describe the relations with other national and supranational trade unions are managed in the case of *FoodForYou*?
- How much traditional forms of "conflict" (for example, strikes) are effective in this sector?

2. Welfare and job quality

- Are there any form of implementation of welfare policies at firm level (for example, nursery)? In your opinion, are they useful?
- Are there any room for you as delegate/shop steward who has contact with trade unions to push for their implementation?

3. Covid

- What was the impact of the pandemic in this company?
- Did the company implement some specific policies during the pandemic? Were they in line with the national laws?
- As long as you know, did the company receive specific guidelines from the home country during the pandemic period?
- What was the role of the trade unions?
- What were the most problematic difficulties?
- Did the pandemic push the workers to approach to the trade union?
- What was your role as a delegate/shop steward during the pandemic?

4. Future perspectives

- Which are the changes you would like to see implemented on the topics discussed so far?
- What should be done in order to push for some more structured and coordinated supranational trade unions strategies?

- ***List of questions for FoodForYou managers***

1. Level of autonomy of the branches

- *Relation with headquarter*

- How is the relationship with the headquarters managed?
- How much autonomy do national branches have in the decision making processes?

- *Freedom in human resource management*

- How much the HQ decisions affect human resource management?
- Which are the forms through which human resource management adapts to national specificities, looking in particular at issues such as management of wages, timetable, shifts, types of contracts and so forth?

2. Proactive role of the managers

- How much autonomy do you have as a store manager/human resource manager?

3. Relations with institutions

- *Relation with national institutions*

- How does *FoodForYou* carries its relation with the main national institutions related to the labour market (for example the Labour Ministry?)

- *Relation with country of origin's institutions*

- In which way the country of origin's institutions manages their relation with Italian/Danish institutions?

- *Relations with trade unions' representatives' workers*

- Which are the relations with trade unions here in Italy/Denmark? Are there differences, as long as you know, in comparison with home country's trade unions?

- *Presence of unions in the branches*

- Which is/are, if present, the union/s operating in this establishment? How are relations with them?
- Are there any workers' representatives inside this establishment? If yes, how his/her role influence his/her work and how it is perceived from a managerial perspective?
- Which are, if present, the main issues pointed from trade unions?

4. Welfare and job quality

- Are there any welfare services the company offers to its workers?
- How much autonomy do you have, as national branches manager, in proposing/implementing such policies?