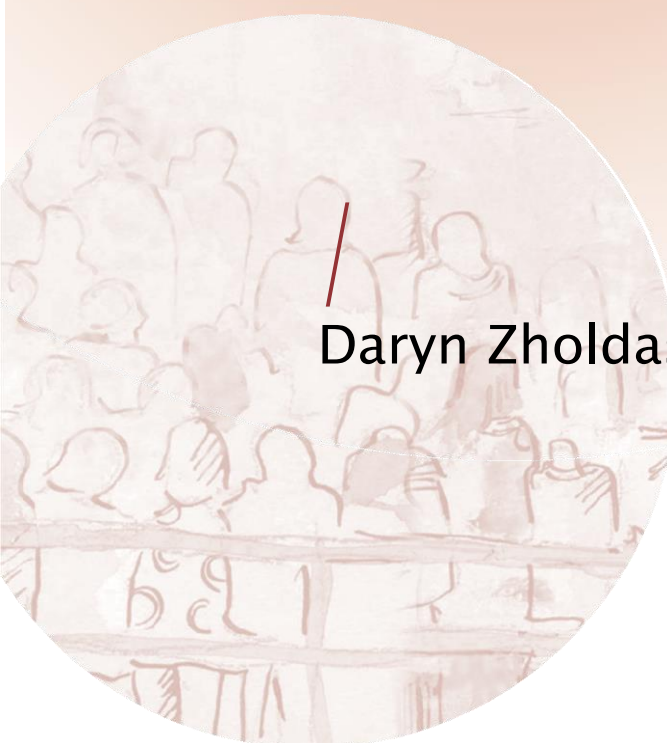




Central European
Labour Studies
Institute

**How new policy issues create
opportunities for social partner
participation:**

**A comparative study of
artificial intelligence and
algorithmic management
in Slovakia and Italy**

A circular illustration in a light red, sketchy style depicting a crowd of people. The figures are simplified, with some showing heads and shoulders, others more integrated into the group. The overall tone is abstract and humanistic.

Daryn Zholdasbay

How new policy issues create opportunities for social partner participation:

A comparative study of artificial intelligence and algorithmic management in Slovakia and Italy

CEL SI Research Report No. 72
July 2026

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Central European Labour Studies Institute (CEL SI)

This research report was originally written as a diploma thesis and was defended at the Institute of Public Policy, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava in 2026.



ABSTRACT (ENG)

ZHOLDASBAY, Daryn. *How new policy issues create opportunities for social partner participation: A comparative study of artificial intelligence and algorithmic management in Slovakia and Italy.* [Diploma Thesis]. Comenius University in Bratislava. Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences. Institute of Public Policy. Thesis Supervisor: Ing. Marta Kahancová, PhD. Bratislava, 2026. 95 p.

This thesis examines how social partners utilize modern algorithmic management systems as a new policy issue to increase their participation in policymaking within different industrial relations systems. The thesis focuses on Slovakia and Italy, two EU Member States subject to the same regulatory framework through the AI Act, but belonging to different industrial relations regimes. Building on Scharpf's actor-centered institutionalism and the conceptualization of industrial relations systems, the thesis analyzes how institutional settings, actor strategies, actor constellations, modes of interaction, and participation channels shape social partner participation. The research is based on a comparative qualitative case study using semi-structured interviews with trade union and employer organization representatives at national and sectoral levels. The findings show that the AI Act created regulatory space for social partner participation, as it sets minimum standards that can be further developed by Member States and through collective agreements. However, this space was utilized differently in the two cases. In Italy, social partners used AI/AM systems more actively through participation channels, consultations, and collective bargaining. In Slovakia, participation remained more limited, mostly consultative, and often constrained by unilateral employer action, although a new participation channel was created. The thesis argues that new policy issues do not automatically increase participation in policymaking. They can create opportunities, but participation depends on the industrial relations system, the strength of social partners, the role of the state, and the salience of the issue for social partners and their members. The thesis contributes to debates on AI governance, industrial relations, and participatory policymaking by showing how AI/AM systems can become a resource for social partners to strengthen their role in policymaking.

Keywords: participatory policymaking, algorithmic management, artificial intelligence, social partners, industrial relations systems, social partner participation in policymaking

ABSTRAKT (SVK)

ZHOLDASBAY, Daryn. *Ako nové politické témy vytvárajú príležitosti pre participáciu sociálnych partnerov: Komparatívna štúdia umelej inteligencie a algoritmického riadenia na Slovensku a v Taliansku.* [Diplomová práca]. Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave. Fakulta sociálnych a ekonomických vied. Ústav verejnej politiky. Školiteľka: Ing. Marta Kahancová, PhD. Bratislava, 2026. 95 str.

Táto diplomová práca skúma, ako sociálni partneri využívajú moderné systémy algoritmického riadenia ako novú politickú tému na zvýšenie svojej participácie na tvorbe politík v rôznych systémoch priemyselných vzťahov. Práca sa zameriava na Slovensko a Taliansko, dva členské štáty Európskej únie, ktoré podliehajú rovnakému regulačnému rámcu prostredníctvom AI Act, ale patria do odlišných režimov priemyselných vzťahov. Na základe Scharpfovho rámca aktérsky orientovaného inštitucionalizmu a konceptualizácie systémov priemyselných vzťahov práca analyzuje, ako inštitucionálne prostredie, stratégie aktérov, konštelácie aktérov, spôsoby interakcie a participačné kanály formujú participáciu sociálnych partnerov. Výskum je založený na komparatívnej kvalitatívnej prípadovej štúdii, ktorá využíva pološtruktúrované rozhovory so zástupcami odborových zväzov a zamestnávateľských organizácií na národnej a sektorovej úrovni. Zistenia ukazujú, že AI Act vytvoril regulačný priestor pre participáciu sociálnych partnerov, keďže stanovuje minimálne štandardy, ktoré môžu byť ďalej rozvíjané členskými štátmi a prostredníctvom kolektívnych zmlúv. Tento priestor však bol využitý odlišne. V Taliansku sociálni partneri využívali tému AI/AM systémov aktívnejšie prostredníctvom participačných kanálov, konzultácií a kolektívneho vyjednávania. Na Slovensku zostala participácia obmedzenejšia, prevažne konzultatívna a často limitovaná jednostranným konaním zamestnávateľov, hoci vznikol nový participačný kanál. Práca tvrdí, že nové politické témy automaticky nezvyšujú participáciu na tvorbe politík. Môžu vytvárať príležitosti, ale participácia závisí od systému priemyselných vzťahov, sily sociálnych partnerov, úlohy štátu a významu témy pre sociálnych partnerov a ich členov. Práca prispieva k diskusiám o riadení umelej inteligencie, priemyselných vzťahoch a participatívnej tvorbe verejných politík tým, že ukazuje, ako sa AI/AM systémy môžu stať zdrojom pre sociálnych partnerov na posilnenie ich úlohy v tvorbe politík.

Kľúčové slová: participatívna tvorba politík, algoritmické riadenie, umelá inteligencia, sociálni partneri, systémy priemyselných vzťahov, participácia sociálnych partnerov na tvorbe politík

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Meaning
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AM	Algorithmic Management
AI/AM	Modern Algorithmic Management Systems
EU	European Union
EEA	European Economic Area
AI Act	Artificial Intelligence Act
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
CNEL	National Council for Economics and Labour
OPERA	Observatory on Industrial Relations Policies for Participatory Artificial Intelligence
ICTWSS	Institutional Characteristics of Trade Unions, Wage Setting, State Intervention and Social Pacts
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
TU	Trade Union
EMP	Employer / Employer Organisation
ITR	Italian Respondent
SKR	Slovak Respondent

Introduction

This thesis examines how modern algorithmic management systems, as a new policy issue create opportunities for social partners to increase their participation in policymaking within different industrial relations systems. The thesis focuses on Slovakia and Italy as two comparative cases.

Modern algorithmic management systems are increasingly used in workplaces to organize, monitor, evaluate, and support managerial decision-making (European Commission, 2025). These systems are becoming more relevant as their use expands across European firms. For example, Milanez et al. (2025) report that four out of five managers in European firms use these tools. This development can have significant effects on work, including employment conditions, data protection and privacy, fairness, and collective employee rights (European Commission, 2025).

The growing use of algorithmic management systems has also attracted the attention of policymakers. At the EU level, this resulted in the adoption of the AI Act, which creates a common regulatory framework for these systems. The regulation has also become a contested policy field, as different actors promote different interests. Employers and technology firms often raise concerns about regulatory burdens and innovation, while trade unions and worker representatives emphasize the need for stronger worker protection, transparency, and collective rights.

Therefore, existing research has extensively examined the technological, economic, legal, and ethical implications of modern algorithmic management systems. A growing body of literature also discusses EU-level regulatory initiatives, especially the AI Act, and evaluates whether this framework provides sufficient protection or regulatory burden for firms. However, comparatively fewer studies examine how AI/AM systems create opportunities for social partners to increase their participation in policymaking within different national industrial relations systems.

The central puzzle of this thesis is that, despite the existence of shared EU regulation, social partner participation in policymaking on AI/AM systems varies across EU countries. The same policy issue and the same EU regulatory framework may therefore lead to different participation in policymaking depending on national institutional settings, actor strategies, and available participation channels.

Following this, the main research question is:

How do social partners utilize AI/AM systems as a new policy issue to increase their participation in policymaking within different industrial relations systems?

To answer this question, the thesis adopts a comparative qualitative case study of Slovakia and Italy. Both countries are subject to the same EU regulatory framework through the AI Act, but they belong to different industrial relations regimes: Italy to the state-centered and corporate cluster and Slovakia to the state-centered and liberal cluster. This makes it possible to examine how the same policy issue is utilized differently by social partners in different institutional contexts.

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 1 develops the theoretical and literature background of the thesis. It begins with how policymakers address policy issues, how different actors can participate in policymaking, and why AI/AM systems have become a relevant policy issue. Chapter 2 develops the conceptual and analytical framework of the thesis. It builds on Scharpf's (1997) actor-centered institutionalist framework to analyze actor interactions within institutional settings and conceptualizes industrial relations system. Based on this, it develops an analytical framework for the analysis. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the study. It explains the research design, case selection, and data collection through semi-structured interviews, data analysis, coding process, ethical considerations, and limitations of the research. Chapter 4 presents the empirical results of the study. The thesis then concludes with a discussion and conclusion, which interpret the findings in relation to the literature and present recommendations.

The key finding of the thesis is that social partners can utilize AI/AM systems as a new policy issue to increase their participation in policymaking, but this process differs across industrial relations systems. The EU AI Act created regulatory space because it sets minimum standards that can be further developed by Member States and through collective agreements. In Italy, social partners used this space more actively through institutional bodies, consultations, and collective bargaining, while in Slovakia participation remained more limited, mostly consultative, and often constrained by unilateral employer action, although a new participation channel was created. The thesis therefore shows that new policy issues do not automatically increase participation. They can be utilized as an opportunity, but the participation in policymaking depends on the industrial relations system, the strength of social partners, the role of state, and the salience of the issue for the social partners and their members.

1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter develops the theoretical background of the thesis. It begins by discussing how policy issues enter the policymaking process and how different actors can participate in policymaking. It then sets artificial intelligence and algorithmic management systems within the wider context of digital transformation. Finally, the chapter defines AI and algorithmic management systems, explains why they have become objects of regulation, and discusses how the EU AI Act and implementation by the Member States could create opportunities for social partners.

1.1 New policy issues, governance and actor participation

When public policymakers address certain issues, they decide whether to take actions or not (Dye, 1972). This shows that the policymakers can take actions to resolve some issues or purposefully ignore it (ibid.). Both of these positions show the stance of policymakers towards a given issue. The decision to intervene and the creation of the policy can be explained through policy cycle. Following, the policy cycle can be understood as consisting of five main stages: agenda-setting, policy formulation, decision-making, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. In the first, agenda-setting phase, policymakers decide whether they will address the issue. In the policy formulation phase, if policymakers decide to address the issue, different policy options are formulated. Then, in the decision-making phase, policymakers choose how, or through which policies, they will solve the problem. After choosing a course of action, the policy implementation phase begins, and the policy is implemented. This stage also defines how the policy will be carried out. Policy evaluation is the last stage where the policy is monitored and evaluated to assess whether it has achieved its purpose. After evaluation, the cycle returns to agenda-setting, where it is again decided whether the issue was successfully addressed or whether it needs to be addressed again (Howlett & Giest, 2012). Each stage of the policy cycle shows how policymakers make decisions and create policies.

However, in different settings, this the creation of policies can be done differently. These differences can be examined through models of governance. For example, in earlier political models of governance, such as “classical public administration”, the state was considered the main actor, operating through hierarchy, command, and control (Salamon,

2002). In this context, hierarchy refers to the role of different government agencies or bodies in implementing policies through a structured chain of authority. Command and control means that policymakers create a policy, issue instructions that are expected to be followed, and monitor whether the policy is obeyed. In this model, the state or government is therefore considered the main actor throughout the policy cycle, while the participation of other actors in policymaking could be limited.

However, there are several arguments why this model may not function effectively: the inability of policymakers to control and enforce regulations everywhere (Windholz, 2022), the exchange of votes or resources in lobbying certain interests (Wu & Knoke, 2012), and the expertise (Windholz, 2022) and inside information of different actors, which the state does not always possess (Salamon, 2002).

Before explaining this further, it is important to note that policymakers can use a variety of instruments to address different issues, or, as Salamon (2002) calls them, policy tools. These tools differ mainly in their degree of coercion. Some of them can be less coercive, for example public information campaigns, which do not force anybody to do anything. Others, such as regulation, are highly coercive (Salamon, 2002). As Windholz (2022) highlights, highly coercive tools must have clear standards to be followed, mechanisms for detecting non-compliance, and penalties for violations of these standards. Policymakers are unable to reach everywhere, and making regulations together with other actors can be more effective, as the state does not have to spend a large number of resources on monitoring compliance (Windholz, 2022).

Secondly, the exchange of votes or resources for lobbying certain interest can occur between elected policymakers and stakeholders, especially in developed democracies (Wu & Knoke, 2012). In this view, policymakers have the power to propose, discuss, and approve policies. This power is important for certain stakeholders, as they may try to advance their interests through policymakers. In exchange, these actors may provide support in the form of resources or votes, mainly if they represent large groups of people.

Lastly, Salamon (2002) argues that actors are interdependent and that none of them can fully exercise their will independently. This interdependence varies, meaning that some actors are more dependent than others. However, for the successful implementation of policies, participation in policymaking from all relevant actors can be useful, as involved actors may possess inside information that policymakers cannot easily acquire (Salamon, 2002). Additionally, actors may have relevant expertise on the topic (Windholz, 2022).

Given these reasons, newer models of governance have emerged, for example “new governance”, which acknowledges the influence of other actors on policymaking and builds on networking rather than hierarchy, negotiation and persuasion rather than command and control (Salamon, 2002). This networking aspect plays an important role, as different actors can participate in policymaking at different stages of the policy cycle. For example, in the agenda-setting process, actors can influence policymakers and push the agenda they need, or, in the policy formulation stage, relevant or expert actors can be involved in formulating policy options (Howlett & Giest, 2012).

The EU, in its policymaking, also considers networking with actors important, involving them in policymaking through various forms of consultation (European Commission, n.d.) The EU considers this vital, as it can create more trustworthy and higher-quality policies (European Commission, 2025a).

To conclude, this subchapter has shown that participatory policymaking and governance models that include non-state actors can be beneficial for policymakers. Such actors may bring resources, expertise, legitimacy, and electoral support to the policymaking process. Their involvement may also make regulation easier to implement, as actors who participated in the process may be more likely to comply with the rules, while the state may need to spend fewer resources on monitoring and control. However, because countries differ in their institutional arrangements, historical development, and rules of interaction, the extent and type of actor participation may vary across national contexts (Scharpf, 1997; Visser, 2009). This makes it important to examine how actors use new policy issues to create opportunities for participation in policymaking. The next subchapter therefore focuses on artificial intelligence and algorithmic management systems as a recent policy problem through which these dynamics can be analyzed.

1.2 Digital transformation and emerging policy challenges

Technological advancement has often contributed to new stages of social and economic development. In recent decades, one of the most important forms of this advancement has been digital. Digital technologies have created new possibilities for the economy and society, but they have also raised new questions about how the adoption of these technologies affects different aspects of life, including jobs, skills, and privacy. This broader process is usually described as digital transformation (OECD, 2019c).

Digital transformation has therefore become important for states and international organizations. Organizations such as the OECD and the European Union have developed frameworks and policy initiatives to support the adoption of digital technologies and guide their regulation. Examples include the OECD Going Digital Integrated Policy Framework (OECD, 2019c) and the EU Digital Decade initiative. The latter sets out the EU's targets for digital transformation until 2030 and shows that digitalization is one of the key policy priorities of the European Union (Eurostat, 2025a).

Among the main technologies associated with digital transformation are the Internet of Things, increased computing power, cloud computing, 5G networks, artificial intelligence (hereinafter AI), big data analytics, and blockchain technologies (OECD, 2019b). Among these technologies, AI has become one of the most visible, as its use can increasingly be seen in everyday life. For example, around one third of EU citizens used generative AI tools¹ in 2025 (Eurostat, 2025c). AI is also used by enterprises in the EU in different ways, including analyzing large amounts of data, recognizing patterns, generating different outputs, supporting decision-making, and automating different processes (Eurostat, 2025b). This makes AI relevant not only for the economy and society in general, but also for workplaces.

For this reason, AI is at the center of this thesis, specifically its effects on working conditions through the use of modern algorithmic management systems that rely on AI. (European Commission, 2025b). The European Union is the first major regulatory bloc to regulate AI technologies through the Artificial intelligence Act (hereinafter AI Act), which needs to be implemented across all Member States and European Economic Area countries (European Data Protection Supervisor, 2025). Although the regulation was created specifically to address AI technologies, it also influences usage of modern algorithmic management systems in the workplace.

To conclude, this subchapter has shown that digital transformation has become an important process for economies, societies, and workplaces. Among the technologies connected to this transformation, AI has become especially relevant because it is increasingly used by citizens, enterprises, and workplaces. Its use creates new opportunities, but also raises questions about how these technologies should be regulated in relation to working conditions. These developments help explain why AI has become a policy problem that requires regulatory attention. The EU AI Act represents one of the main responses to this problem, as

¹ Generative artificial intelligence refers to tools that can generate different outputs, such as text, images, videos, audio, or code, with ChatGPT being one of the well-known examples.

it establishes rules for AI technologies across the EU. The following subchapter therefore explains what these systems are.

1.3 Defining artificial intelligence and algorithmic management systems

The first step is to define what is being regulated, the definition of AI systems provided by the European Commission describes it as follows: *“AI system is a machine-based system that is designed to operate with varying levels of autonomy and that may exhibit adaptiveness after deployment, and that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments”*. While the definition of an AI system may appear complex, the (European Commission, 2025c) has provided detailed guidelines that clarify its components. For the purposes of this thesis, the most important element to take is the reference to “varying levels of autonomy”. This means that not all automated systems qualify as AI, but only systems that have certain degree of independence and are able to produce outputs without direct human involvement. For example, AI systems using machine learning technology can find patterns and relationships within data that may not be immediately apparent to human analysts (Rolf, 2024).

Secondly, for the purposes of this study, it is necessary to define algorithmic management systems. To understand this concept, it is first useful to clarify what is meant by algorithms. At its core, an algorithm is a mathematical rule or procedure that generates predefined outputs. For example, a calculator follows an algorithm: when a person enters $2 + 2$, the system follows predefined rules and produces the result 4. Algorithmic management builds on these algorithms. As defined by the ILO, it refers to *“algorithmic systems that use tracked data and other information to organize, assign, monitor, supervise and evaluate work”* (ILO, 2024). A slightly different, but more detailed definition is provided by Eurofound (2024): *“Algorithmic management can be defined as ‘the use of computer-programmed procedures for the coordination of labour input in an organisation’. It involves the collection, storage and processing of large amounts of workers’ data and other organisational data with the purpose of achieving efficient and fast decision-making.”* These two definitions are closely aligned and highlight two aspects that should be developed further: (1) the use of data in algorithmic systems, and (2) the organisation and coordination of work and labour or the management.

(1) Firstly, data and information play a key role in algorithmic management systems, as they form the basis on which both algorithms and systems operate. Basic algorithmic systems have long been used in practice, in the form of pre-defined algorithms which helped managers, as illustrated in Stohr and Zhao (2001). However, with the development of big data analytics and machine learning, some modern algorithmic management systems can go beyond fixed predefined rules. These systems may identify patterns in data, update their models, and generate recommendations or decisions based on these patterns (Rolf, 2024). This ability directly builds on the principles of AI discussed earlier, where autonomy enable systems to operate beyond fixed algorithms. For example, different digital platforms could determine a price of a ride, where the system uses real time data about the drivers' and customers' location and other different parameters to determine a price (Baiocco & Fernández-Macías, 2022). This shows how big data analytics enables modern algorithmic management systems to make decisions with limited direct human involvement.

For the purposes of this study, it is useful to distinguish between two types of algorithmic management systems:

- basic algorithmic management (hereinafter AM) systems with predefined algorithms and rules,
- modern algorithmic management systems with using AI (hereinafter AI/AM), that can adapt their algorithms.

(2) Secondly, the AI/AM systems assist with the organization and coordination of labor and management processes. As illustrated in the ride-hailing example above, such systems can determine pricing based on real-time data. This is only one of many ways in which AI/AM systems can be deployed. The European Commission (2025b) identifies eight different areas where these systems could be used: recruitment; work and task scheduling; nudging or directing employees (e.g., algorithms advising how to do the work); worker monitoring and surveillance; worker evaluation; talent management and training; rewarding workers; and worker dismissal. Similarly, Milanez et al. (2025) categorizes AI/AM systems usage into three broad areas: instruction, monitoring, and evaluation. Instruction includes allocating work schedules and tasks, assigning clients, and providing task guidance. Monitoring encompasses tracking work time, speed, and location, while evaluation covers rewarding or sanctioning performance and setting individual targets. This wide range of AI/AM systems usage in the workplace shows the potential of these technologies. After defining what are AI/AM systems, the thesis will investigate why the policymakers could regulate these systems.

1.4 Reasons for the AI/AM systems regulations

Before acting, policymakers may evaluate the reasons behind any intervention. Following Baldwin et al. (2011), one way of explaining the reasons for intervention is through market failures. These include negative externalities produced by firms, transaction costs caused by a lack of coordination, and unequal bargaining power between different actors. However, Baldwin et al. (2011) also argue that not all reasons for regulation can be explained by market failures. Some justifications are instead related to “rights-based and social rationales for regulation”. For example, the protection of human rights or the need for social protection can also justify intervention.

Following this logic, there are potentially three reasons why policymakers may intervene in AI/AM systems: the transformation of workplaces, the harmful effects of these systems, and the rate of their adoption.

(1) The first is the transformation of the workplaces, which leads to the redefinition of tasks and roles, the blurring of organizational boundaries and the centralization of knowledge and control (Baiocco et al., 2022). They argue that AI/AM systems lead to a redefinition of tasks and roles, which could lead to the reduction of middle managers and the atomization of work, as systems could enable better and direct control for the higher management, which in turn could lead to a replacement of the lower and middle-level managers. However, the degree of automation matters, as it reflects the extent to which AI/AM is implemented in the workplace (Figure 1). In this context, they have classified the use of AI/AM systems into several levels:

1. **No AM system** – only human managers make decisions.
2. **Management assistance** – technology assists the manager in various tasks, but the final decision always rests with the human manager.
3. **Partial and conditional automation** – algorithms make some managerial decisions, while human managers retain key functions and intervene when necessary.
4. **Full automation** – algorithms are capable of making all decisions without the need for human intervention (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Classification of levels of automation in algorithmic management

(Original proposal by Alex Wood, 2021)					(Alternative proposal)	
Level of automation	Narrative definition	Direction Evaluation Discipline	Review (in case of system failure)	Human can overrule system	Alternative levels of automation	Comments
1. No automation	Full-time performance by human manager of all aspects of direction, evaluation and discipline	Human manager	Human manager	n/a	1. No automation	Same as in Wood 2021
2. Mgmt. assistance	Assistance in either direction, evaluation or discipline with the expectation that human managers perform other management tasks and use own judgement to review, ignore and overrule system	Human manager and algorithm	Human manager	Yes	2. Mgmt. assistance	Same as in Wood 2021. Algorithms assist human managers in their decisions
3. Partial automation	Mode specific execution of either direction, evaluation or discipline with the expectation that human managers perform remaining functions	Human manager or algorithm	Human manager	Yes	3. Partial and conditional automation	Algorithms make some managerial decisions, with human managers retaining key functions and intervening when necessary
Algorithmic management						
4. Conditional automation	Mode specific execution of direction, evaluation and discipline with the expectation that human managers will respond appropriately to a request to intervene	Algorithm	Human manager	Yes		
5. High automation	Full-time performance by an algorithmic system of direction, evaluation and discipline without the need for human managers to intervene	Algorithm	Algorithm	Yes		
6. Full automation	Full-time performance by an algorithmic system of direction, evaluation and discipline without the possibility for human managers to intervene	Algorithm	Algorithm	No	4. Full automation	Same as in Wood 2021, but purely theoretical, no real application until the arrival of general artificial intelligence

Source: Baiocco et al. (2022).

In this context full automation remains a largely theoretical category, as even the most advanced AI/AM systems require human involvement (Baiocco et al., 2022). Therefore, based on this classification, most current systems can be understood as forms of partial or conditional automation rather than full automation. This suggests that, for now, the full replacement of low- and mid-level managers remains limited in practice.

Further, the previously mentioned atomization leads to the blurring of organizational boundaries (Baiocco et al., 2022). By atomization, the authors refer to the process by which complex tasks are broken down into smaller tasks that are monitored and managed by the system, leading to a transformation of traditional vertical hierarchies into flatter, more horizontal structures. This structural shift is closely linked to a potential reduction in the number of managers, as the direct supervision by managers becomes less necessary (Baiocco et al., 2022).

Lastly, AI/AM systems contribute to the centralization of knowledge and control. Large amounts of data are stored and processed in centralized systems, allowing management to plan production and appoint assignments to workers in real time. At the same time, this centralization of data can also create privacy and security risks, as highlighted by Cox and Oosterwijk (2024). As discussed earlier, data and information are essential for the functioning of AI/AM systems. These benefits and risks represent a second reason why AI/AM systems may require regulation.

(2) The advantages and disadvantages these systems bring are significant. On the one hand, AI/AM systems can have positive economic effects. For example, Kassa and Worku (2025) report a positive impact on employee productivity and organisational performance through the automation of repetitive tasks, decision support, and more efficient workflows. Furthermore, an OECD report found that 60% of mid-level managers reported improvements in decision-making due to increased information availability, faster processes, and greater autonomy (Milanez et al., 2025). The benefits, specifically the economic ones, are therefore visible, which is why different countries are competing to develop the most advanced systems (Cabanas & Heinz, 2026).

On the other hand, these technologies may also have negative consequences for workers. A growing body of research suggests that AI/AM systems can lead to work intensification, privacy concerns over data usage and collection, deterioration of the social work environment, job insecurity, loss of autonomy, discrimination, and deskilling (Cox & Oosterwijk, 2024; De Stefano & Taes, 2023; European Commission, 2025b; Jensen et al., 2024). For example, work intensification and loss of autonomy can be observed in the study by Håkansta et al. (2024), where drivers in Norway reported that the AI/AM system was not designed to account for workers' perspectives on breaks, including basic needs such as taking a toilet break.

(3) The third reason for the regulation is the scope of the use of these systems. The recent study on 6000 mid-level managers provided by Milanez et al. (2025) indicates that four

out of five mid-level firm managers in Europe use these technologies. This number will probably grow even further, considering the previously mentioned economic benefits.

The thesis has so far outlined three reasons policymakers should intervene in this area: the transformation of workplaces, potential harms from these systems and the wide adoption of these technologies. Using the earlier defined reasons for intervention by Baldwin et al. (2012), right-based and social rationales could be needed for the protection of workers, as harmful effects could occur during the using these technologies. From the market failure perspective, coordination is needed, as the wide adoption of these systems and absence of public policies can create uncertainty and transaction costs for firms. In the case of the AI Act, the regulation of AI/AM-related technologies reflects several rationales. The Act based on recital 1 aims to ensure a high level of protection of health, safety, the environment, and fundamental rights, and to protect against the harmful effects of AI systems, which reflects rights-based and social rationales for regulation. At the same time, it establishes common standards for AI systems in order to promote innovation, which can be linked to a market-failure rationale. The next subchapter will look into how AI/AM systems are being regulated on EU level.

1.5 How AI/AM systems are regulated

While analysis so far has addressed why policymakers may need to intervene in AI/AM systems, this section will focus on how the regulation on AI/AM systems in EU was created, which actors participated in this process, and how the regulation is still being influenced during implementation.

As mentioned earlier, the EU enables actor participation in policymaking through different forms of consultation. This was also the case when the EU addressed AI technologies through the AI Act. The AI Act represents one of the first comprehensive regulatory frameworks on artificial intelligence. In the case of the AI Act, public consultation took place through the European Commission's White Paper on Artificial Intelligence (European Commission, 2020b). The consultation collected views from citizens and actors on future AI policy and regulatory steps. The consultation received more than 1,200 contributions from different actors, including companies and business organizations, individuals, academic and research institutions, public authorities, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, and trade unions. In addition, more than 450 position papers

were submitted by NGOs, business associations, large companies, academia, citizens, SMEs, public authorities, trade unions, and other actors (European Commission, 2020a).

The results of the consultation show that a large number of stakeholders agreed that new legislation on AI was necessary. The consultation also showed support for a risk-based approach, where AI systems are classified according to the level of risk they create and where different obligations apply depending on this risk. As could be observed on the final legislation in the form of AI Act it has adopted these risk-based approaches. In this sense, actor participation helped shape the direction of the AI Act.

However, the AI Act was not only shaped during the consultation stage. Actors continued to influence the regulation during the legislative process and later during implementation. Business actors and technology firms have been especially active in lobbying EU institutions. Reports indicate that global technology firms spend around EUR 100 million on lobbying in Brussels in an effort to minimize regulatory constraints (Bank et al., 2021). Other lobbying attempts include US Vice-President JD Vance, warning against “excessive regulation” of AI at the Paris AI Action Summit (De Ruiter, 2025). According to Csernatonì (2025), this narrative can be understood as a strategy promoted by US actors rather than an objective assessment of European regulation, as large digital companies have also tried to influence guidelines on how AI systems should respect fundamental rights.

Following the debates and pressures surrounding AI regulation, the European Commission cancelled the AI Liability Directive on the same day that JD Vance gave his speech about “excessive regulation” (Datta & Hartmann, 2025). The directive would have established provisions on non-contractual civil liability for damages caused by AI systems. It also aimed to ensure that those harmed by AI systems would enjoy protections comparable to those harmed by other technologies in the EU, addressing accountability if damage occurred. The decision was criticized by the workers' representatives in the form of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC, 2025), while also undermining the work of the European Parliament, the EU’s directly elected legislative body, which had actively debated and supported the directive (Csernatonì, 2025). This potential shift towards deregulation could carry important implications. It could undermine the “Brussels effect,” whereby EU standards are transferred to other countries due to the size of the EU market (Csernatonì, 2025).

Despite the public consultations the AI Act was criticized by different actors. For example, European Trade Union Confederation did not find the AI Act to be enough protective for the workers. In turn, they have proposed to strengthen the regulation by

drawing some elements of the Platform Work Directive, which more explicitly addresses algorithmic management in platform sector employment contexts (ETUC, 2025).

Figure 2: Comparison of the AI Act and Platform Work Directive

	AI Act	PWD
Legal effect	Binding and directly applicable across all EU member states as a regulation	Binding in its objectives but requires transposition into national law, granting significant discretion to member states
Scope of application	Applies to all workers, across all sectors	Every person performing platform work, regardless of their legal classification * *certain rights reserved only for persons with the property of employee
Right of information	Right of prior notification, requiring employers to inform both workers and their representatives before deploying a high-risk AI system in the workplace	Extensive right of information for individual workers and their representatives including access to categories of data collected, information on number of platform workers, general terms and conditions, average working hours, duration and income
Right of explanation and revision	Explanation right for individuals only; no right to review/contest decisions	Explanation and contestation rights for both workers and their representatives
Role of unions/workers' representatives	Only in terms of receiving prior notification	Extensive role by granting them access to (a) key information regarding data protection impact assessments, (b) the use and modification of automated monitoring and decision-making systems and (c) by enabling them to request reviews of automated decisions affecting workers
Potential for further, more favourable legislation for workers	The Act does not preclude the Union or Member States from introducing laws or regulations more favourable to workers	The PWD allows for more favourable regulation and encourages member states to actively promote collective bargaining

Source: Minotakis (2025).

As shown in Figure 2, the Platform Work Directive is better designed to protect workers across multiple categories, including the right to information, the right to explanations and revisions, the role of unions or worker representatives, and the potential for further favourable legislation. It is evident that workers and their representatives enjoy more extensive rights under the Platform Work Directive, both in terms of contesting decisions and accessing information about AI/AM systems, compared with the current provisions of the AI Act. Also, several authors and actors have argued that the AI Act remains insufficient for addressing workplace-specific concerns and contains potential loopholes (Domínguez de Olazábal, 2025; ETUC, 2025; Minotakis, 2025; Yusifli, 2025).

On the other hand, some employers and technology firms have criticized it as overly strict, arguing that it may slow down Europe's development, deter investors, and discourage start-ups from establishing and growing their businesses in the EU (Bank et al., 2021; Herman, 2024). In addition, the implementation of these rules has posed practical challenges for companies. Full compliance requires meeting 45 technical standards, yet as of October

2025 only 15 were available (Gottarelli, 2025), making compliance impossible until the remaining standards are published. Moreover, many European countries have not yet implemented the Act, leaving operators without operational regulatory sandboxes or competent authorities to consult for guidance (ibid.).

In response to these challenges, around 50 European companies called on the European Commission to “stop the clock” for at least two years on the AI Act’s most demanding requirements, arguing that the legislation was complex and uncertain due to the absence of guidance and finalized standards (Gkritsi, 2025). As a result, enforcement of the Act has been postponed by up to 16 months, until the Commission confirms that the necessary standards and tools are in place (Council of the European Union, 2026). It was also a favourable decision for SMEs, as they may lack the resources to fully engage in the standardization process and could struggle with the financial and administrative burden of technical documentation, and other regulatory obligations (Balcioğlu et al., 2025).

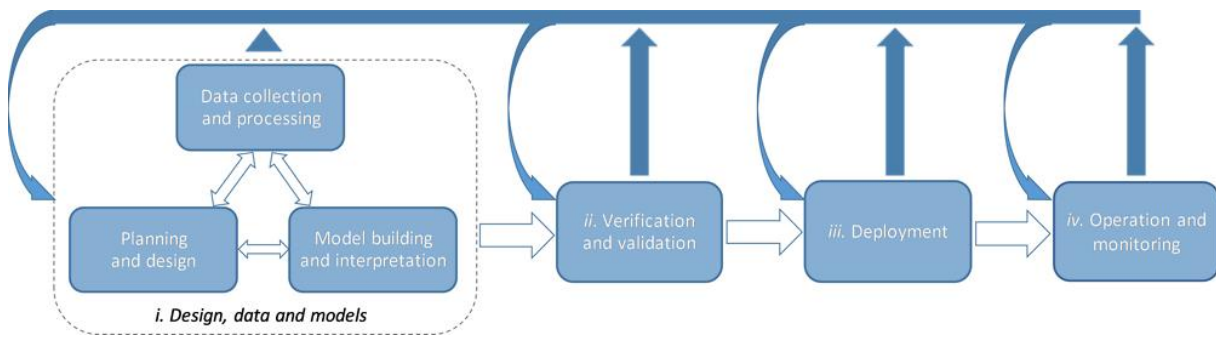
However, with this decision, the Council also announced that all AI systems will need to go through verification even if providers consider them not to be high-risk systems. Earlier, there was an exemption for providers who considered their systems not high-risk (Council of the European Union, 2026). In this sense, the decision also satisfied some of the interests of workers' representatives and authors such as Yusifli (2025), who had previously warned about this flaw.

To conclude, this section has shown that EU intervention in AI happened through regulation, but this regulation was also open to input from different actors. Actors participated in the creation of the AI Act through public consultations and position papers, while employers, technology firms, trade unions, and external actors continue to influence the regulation during implementation. The following section examines what the AI Act regulates and what it leaves for Member States to regulate.

1.6 The EU regulatory framework, Member States and social partners participation

To understand the regulation of AI/AM systems, it is necessary to clarify which phases of the system can be regulated and by whom. These regulatory dimensions can be analysed through the AI lifecycle framework proposed by the OECD (2019a). This framework distinguishes four main phases: (1) design, data and models, (2) verification and validation, (3) deployment, and (4) operation and monitoring (Figure 3).

Figure 3: AI system lifecycle



Source: OECD, 2019

The first two phases of the lifecycle, design, data and models, and verification and validation, are primarily regulated at the EU level through the AI Act. These phases take place before the system is deployed in practice. They include defining system objectives, collecting and processing data, developing models, testing system performance, and verifying that the system functions as intended (OECD, 2019a). In the AI Act, these stages are mainly connected to providers, meaning actors that develop AI systems or place them on the market (European Data Protection Supervisor, 2025).

Under the AI Act, providers of high-risk AI systems must comply with several requirements before placing the system on the market or putting it into service (European Data Protection Supervisor, 2025). These include conformity assessment and requirements for trustworthy AI, such as risk management, data quality, documentation and traceability, transparency, human oversight, accuracy, cybersecurity, and robustness. Providers are also required to implement a quality management system and, for high-risk systems, register the system in a public EU database. Following the latest omnibus update, this registration requirement has been extended to all AI systems (Council of the European Union, 2026). Providers also remain responsible throughout the lifecycle, including reporting serious incidents and taking corrective actions where necessary (European Data Protection Supervisor, 2025).

The later phases of the lifecycle are deployment and operation and monitoring. According to the OECD (2019a), deployment refers to introducing the system into a real-world environment, including organizational integration and compliance with relevant requirements. Operation and monitoring refer to the practical use of the system, continuous assessment of its outputs and impacts, identification of risks, and possible adjustments. These

stages are mainly connected to deployers, meaning organizations or individuals that use AI systems in practice (European Data Protection Supervisor, 2025). In the workplace, deployers are usually employers introducing AI/AM systems (ibid.).

Under the AI Act, deployers must follow the instructions for use provided by system providers, implement necessary technical and organizational measures, monitor system performance, ensure human oversight, and take corrective action if risks or incidents occur (ibid.). When using high-risk AI systems, they must also ensure that input data is relevant and sufficiently representative and, in certain cases, carry out a fundamental rights impact assessment before the system is first used (ibid.). They must also report serious incidents and cooperate with market surveillance authorities established by Member States. Member States, in turn, must implement the AI Act and establish governance systems to supervise and monitor compliance with the regulation (ibid.).

This is where the role of Member States becomes important. The AI Act provides minimum standards, but it does not exclude stronger protection at national level or through collective agreements. Article 2(11) states: “*This Regulation does not preclude the Union or Member States from maintaining or introducing laws, regulations or administrative provisions which are more favourable to workers in terms of protecting their rights in respect of the use of AI systems by employers, or from encouraging or allowing the application of collective agreements which are more favourable to workers.*” (European Data Protection Supervisor, 2025)”. This means that Member States can introduce more favorable rules for workers, while social partners can also regulate the use of AI/AM systems through collective agreements.

Social partners are relevant in this context because AI/AM systems directly affect areas that traditionally belong to industrial relations, such as working conditions. According to (Eurofound, n.d.), social partners are central actors in the governance of employment relationships within industrial relations systems. In most EU Member States, they participate in policymaking shaping working conditions and employment-related policies through collective bargaining or tripartite social dialogue (Eurofound, n.d.).

Their relevance can also be observed by earlier examples at the EU level. National trade unions and employer organizations are not only active within their domestic systems, but are also organized through European-level umbrella organizations. Trade unions are represented through organizations such as the European Trade Union Confederation, while employers are represented through organizations such as BusinessEurope, SMEunited, and SGI Europe. Through these organizations, national social partners can indirectly participate in

EU policymaking by contributing to consultations, position papers, lobbying activities, and broader debates on regulation. As discussed earlier, this was also visible during the development of the AI Act, where trade unions and employer organizations promoted different preferences regarding the balance between worker protection and regulatory burden.

At the national level, however, the possibilities for social partner participation depend on industrial relations systems. Industrial relations can be defined as *“the individual and collective relations between workers and employers at work and arising from the work situation, as well as the relations between representatives of workers and employers at the industry and national levels, and their interaction with the state”* (Macdonald & Vandenabeele, 1996). These systems differ across EU countries and provide different participation channels through which social partners can participate in policymaking. This makes it relevant to compare how social partners, facing the same policy issue (AI/AM systems) and the same EU regulation (the AI Act), can use this issue to increase their participation in policymaking.

As shown above, the first two phases of the AI lifecycle are mostly regulated at the EU level through the AI Act. By contrast, national actors and social partners become especially relevant from the deployment stage onwards, where AI/AM systems enter workplaces and begin to affect working conditions. This may include collective agreements on employee or trade union involvement in the introduction of new technologies, as well as training for employees and/or management on new AI/AM tools, as identified by Kahancová et al. (2026, forthcoming) (see Table 1).

During the operation and monitoring phase, social partners and national actors may oversee how these systems function in practice, how they are evaluated, and how AI-driven decision-making affects workers. This includes different examples of collective agreements of compliance with privacy and data protection legislation, oversight of AI/AM systems used in work organisation, recruitment, and performance evaluation, access to categories of collected data and other system properties, and the right to appeal automated decisions (Kahancová et al., (2026, forthcoming); Minotakis, 2025) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Regulation of AI/AM systems across the AI lifecycle

Lifecycle phase	Regulatory level	Actors	Examples of the regulations
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Design, data and models	EU	EU policymakers	AI Act: conformity assessment, risk management, data quality, transparency, human oversight, registration in EU database
Verification and validation	EU	EU policymakers	AI Act: testing & validation, performance checks, bias mitigation, model interpretability, robustness evaluation
Deployment	National, sectoral, company	National authorities, social partners, individual employers, works councils	Employee/trade union involvement in introduction of new AI tools. Training for employees/managers on new AI tools.
Operation & monitoring	National, sectoral, company	National authorities, social partners, individual employers, works councils	Monitoring of AI/AM system performance. Oversight of AI use in work organization, recruitment, and performance evaluation. Compliance with privacy and data-protection rules. Access to data categories collected. Right to appeal automated decisions.

Source: Adapted from AI system lifecycle OECD (2019), and author's own elaboration.

To conclude, Chapter 1 has shown how different models of governance understand the role of actors in policymaking. While classical public administration emphasizes hierarchy, command, and control, newer governance approaches highlight networking, consultation, and the involvement of other actors in policymaking. This is important for the thesis because it shows why actor participation can matter when new policy issues emerge.

The chapter then identified AI/AM systems as the policy issue studied in this thesis. It explained what AI and algorithmic management systems are and why policymakers may develop regulatory responses to them. Three main reasons were identified: the transformation

of workplaces, potential harms for workers, and the wide adoption of these technologies. The EU has chosen to intervene through the AI Act. Given the EU's consultative nature, the Act was shaped through consultations and input from different actors. At the same time, the AI Act sets minimum standards for worker protection, which can be further developed by Member States. This creates opportunities for social partners to participate in policymaking on the governance of AI/AM systems.

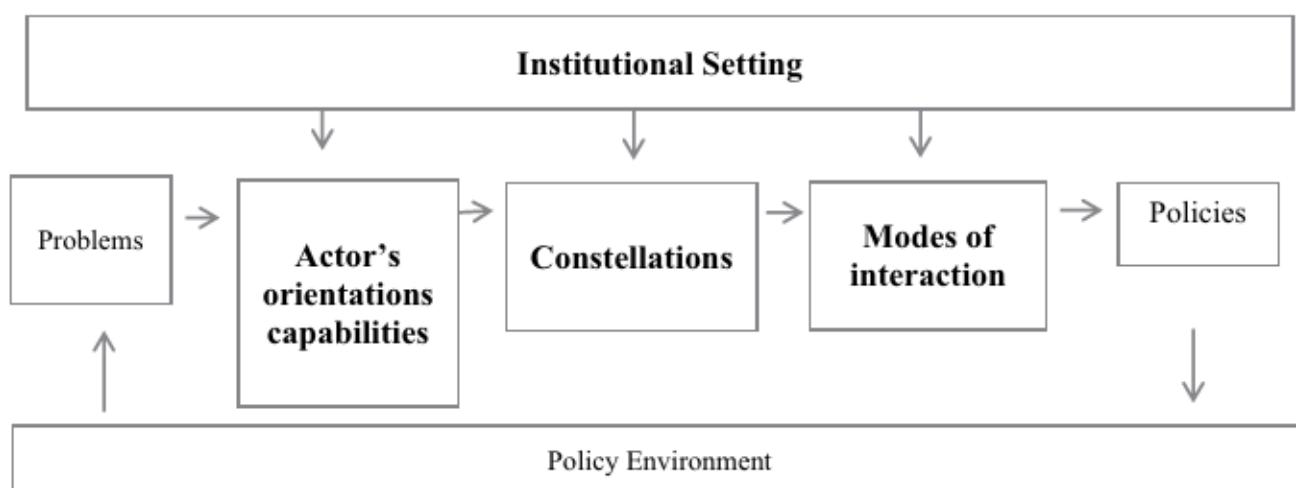
The next chapter therefore conceptualizes what participation in policymaking means, how industrial relations systems can be compared, and how social partners may use the issue of AI/AM systems to strengthen their position.

2 CONCEPTUAL & ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

As established in Chapter 1, policymaking is not shaped only by policymakers, but also by other actors who may participate in policymaking. In this chapter, the conceptual framework of the thesis is developed. The thesis builds on Scharpf's (1997) actor-centered institutionalist framework, which is useful for analyzing how actors interact within given institutional settings (see Figure 4). In this framework, there are different interconnected elements that can explain the role of social partners: institutional setting, problem structure, actor orientations and capabilities, constellations, modes of interaction, and policy outcomes within a given policy environment (see Figure 4).

To compare institutional settings which are industrial relations systems, the thesis draws mainly on Visser's (2009) framework of industrial relations regimes, as well as on indicators related to collective bargaining and participation channels. Together, these concepts help explain why the same policy issue, AI/AM systems, may create different opportunities for social partner participation in different countries.

Figure 4: The domain of interaction-oriented policy research



Source: Scharpf (1997)

This framework (Figure 4) will be the foundation for the analysis conducted in this study. Its further components will be explained and conceptualized in the following subchapters.

2.1 Industrial relations systems

The most important role in Scharpf's framework is played by the institutional setting, which affects actors' interactions within that setting. Following Scharpf (1997), institutions in this study are understood as systems of rules that structure the course of actions available to a set of actors. These rules are not only formal, but also include social norms agreed between actors, which hold them accountable. As earlier mentioned, social partners interact in the industrial relations systems.

For comparison purposes, industrial relations systems can be approached from multiple analytical perspectives, which help capture the complex relationships between actors and provide indicators for comparison. Thus, the thesis uses several perspectives. First, industrial relations regimes are used to understand bargaining styles, the distribution of power among actors, and their patterns of interaction. Second, the OECD/AIAS database on Institutional Characteristics of Trade Unions, Wage Setting, State Intervention and Social Pacts (ICTWSS) provide comparable indicators on bargaining, which are closely related to industrial relations regimes. Third, the analysis considers the channels of participation available to social partners, which are crucial for participation in policymaking on AI/AM systems.

First, to analyze industrial relations regimes, this study uses the comparative framework developed by Visser (2009). These classifications are summarized in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Industrial relations regimes or arrangements

	North	Centre-west	South	West	Centre-east
Production regime	Coordinated market economy		Statist market economy	Liberal market economy	Statist or liberal?
Welfare regime	Universalistic	Segmented (status-oriented, corporatist)		Residual	Segmented or residual?
Employment regime	Inclusive	Dualistic		Liberal	
Industrial relations regime	Organised corporatism	Social partnership	Polarised/state-centred	Liberal pluralism	Fragmented/state-centred
Power balance	Labour-oriented	Balanced	Alternating	Employer-oriented	
Principal level of bargaining	Sector		Variable/unstable	Company	
Bargaining style	Integrating		Conflict oriented		Acquiescent
Role of SP in public policy	Institutionalised		Irregular/politicised	Rare/event-driven	Irregular/politicised
Role of the state in IR	Limited (mediator)	'Shadow of hierarchy'	Frequent intervention	Non-intervention	Organiser of transition
Employee representation	Union based/high coverage	dual system/high coverage	Variable (*)	Union based/small coverage	Union based/small coverage
Countries	Denmark Finland Norway Sweden	Belgium Germany (Ireland) Luxembourg Netherlands Austria Slovenia (Finland)	Greece Spain France Italy (Hungary) Portugal	Ireland Malta Cyprus UK	Bulgaria Czech Republic Estonia Latvia Lithuania Hungary Poland Romania Slovakia

Source: Visser (2009)

According to this framework (Figure 5), countries can be divided into industrial relations regimes based on different characteristics: North, Centre-West, South, West, and Centre-East. Each group characterizes important aspects of the industrial relations system in that country. His approach integrates several theoretical traditions, including the Varieties of Capitalism perspective, analyses of power relations between employer organizations and trade unions, employment regime perspectives, and patterns of collective bargaining and coordination. (Hall & Soskice, 2001)

Regarding production regimes, Visser draws on Hall and Soskice's (2001) Varieties of Capitalism approach, which distinguishes between Liberal Market Economies (LMEs) and Coordinated Market Economies (CMEs). LMEs rely primarily on market competition and a highly mobile workforce characterized by general skills. In contrast, CMEs are based on long-term employment relations and the development of industry-specific skills (Hall & Soskice, 2001). Visser (2009) adds that institutions in CMEs promote cooperation between social partners and the state, while LMEs leave coordination to the market, giving more power to employers. However, he also includes the notion of the state-centered regime, where the state is the main actor.

In his second classification, Visser (2009) builds on this concept of state-centered regimes and focuses more directly on power relations between employer organizations and trade unions. It shows the levels and styles of collective bargaining, the scope for social partner intervention in public policy, and the degree of state involvement in union–employer relations.

Visser (2009) further applies Gallie's (2007) framework, which distinguishes between three employment regimes: inclusive, dualist, and market-based. In inclusive regimes, policies are designed to extend both employment and common employment rights as widely as possible. Such regimes are also characterized by strongly institutionalized labor participation in decision-making, both directly and through influence over governing political parties. In a market-based employment regime, workers' representatives are viewed as barriers to economic self-regulation. As a result, workers' representatives are weak and have almost no role in policy participation. In contrast, dualist regimes are characterized by a more consultative involvement of workers in policymaking, but still weaker than in the inclusive regime.

By using this framework, some comparisons can be made. For example, the Nordic group of countries would be expected to have higher social partner participation in policymaking, with stronger trade unions than employer organizations. In comparison, the Western (Anglo-Saxon) cluster of countries will probably have more limited social partner participation and weaker trade unions, as the state leaves regulation more to the market, so to the employers.

To define what is stronger, weaker, a second contribution by Visser (2013) Institutional Characteristics of Trade Unions, Wage Setting, State Intervention and Social Pacts database (hereinafter ICTWSS), could be useful as it provides numerical indicators for analyzing industrial relations systems across countries. The database includes three dimensions: bargaining coverage, the structure of collective bargaining, and bargaining coordination. These are relevant for assessing where and how collective bargaining takes place and the relative strength of social partners, complementing the earlier framework.

First, according to Visser (2013) bargaining coverage refers to the proportion of employees whose working conditions are regulated by collective agreements concluded by trade unions or worker representatives. Compared to union density, which measures the share of workers who are union members, bargaining coverage is a more accurate indicator of the degree of worker organization, as it shows how well trade unions and worker representatives could protect the rights of the workers, showing their organizational strength (Visser, 2013).

The structure of collective bargaining refers to the levels at which bargaining takes place, usually at the national, sectoral, or company level (Visser, 2013). More centralized systems tend to promote more unified working conditions and reduce inequalities across sectors, whereas decentralized systems allow for greater flexibility but may also lead to more variation in outcomes across firms and sectors (Visser, 2013). This is closely related to bargaining coordination, which describes the extent to which bargaining outcomes are aligned across levels (Visser, 2013). In more coordinated systems, actors at the national or sectoral level can set patterns or guidelines that are followed by bargaining organizations at lower levels. Following this logic, such systems may allow for a more synchronized response to new challenges, such as the introduction of AI/AM systems. In contrast, in weakly coordinated systems, bargaining outcomes are determined more independently across firms or sectors, which may limit the possibility of developing shared standards or common strategies. As a result, responses to AI/AM systems are more likely to be fragmented and uneven across the economy.

For the purposes of this thesis, stronger industrial relations systems are therefore understood as systems with higher bargaining coverage, higher union density, more centralized bargaining structures, and stronger bargaining coordination. By contrast, systems with lower bargaining coverage, lower union density, more decentralized bargaining, and weaker coordination are expected to provide weaker conditions for social partner participation.

Third, industrial relations systems also include institutionalized channels of interaction, such as tripartite and bipartite bodies, as well as other institutional bodies, which provide arenas for social partner participation in policymaking. These bodies show how social partners are involved in policymaking. For example, in Finland, which belongs to the Nordic cluster, the thesis would expect based on Visser's (2009) framework that social partners would be active in policymaking. According to the information provided by Eurofound, (2024a), there are various tripartite and bipartite bodies for consultation, and some of them are established ad hoc for specific issues. Some of these working groups enable social partner to participate in policymaking by creating policies (Eurofound, 2024a).

To conclude, industrial relations systems in this thesis are operationalized through three interrelated dimensions: industrial relations regimes, indicators on bargaining, and participation bodies. Taken together, these dimensions allow for a comparative assessment of how industrial relations systems can structure social partner participation. While the first two dimensions capture broader characteristics of the industrial relations systems showing the role of state and social partners as well as their strength, the third dimension shows observable arenas within the system where actors' participation in policymaking can take place.

2.2 Actors, Strategies and Interactions

In addition to institutional settings (Figure 4), policy responses are also shaped by the orientations of actors and the nature of the policy problem (Scharpf, 1997). Actor orientation refers to the preferences, perceptions, and strategic behaviour of actors, which may vary depending on how they interpret a given policy issue. The nature of the policy problem refers to the fact that the interactions between actors will differ, as not all policy issues are equally salient to them, which could affect their level of engagement.

Starting with the orientations which influence not only how actors define problems, but also how they assess possible strategies and interact with other actors. In this context,

Scharpf distinguishes between actors' capabilities, meaning their potential strategies, and their evaluations of outcomes, or "payoffs," which shape their choices and behaviour (Scharpf, 1997). Potential strategies may include lobbying² policymakers, as observed during the development of the AI Act, as well as public campaigns or position papers promoting the risks or benefits of AI/AM systems. Actors evaluate these strategies in terms of expected payoffs, for example, whether lobbying efforts are likely to yield influence without significantly damaging their reputation or relationships with other actors. These strategies and payoffs will be subject of empirical investigation in Chapter 4.

Building on these orientations and capabilities, actor constellations emerge, which determine the likelihood of conflict or cooperation between actors depending on the extent to which their interests are compatible or opposed (Scharpf, 1997). The degree of alignment or conflict in actors' interests influences negotiations and the policies that will be adopted. Scharpf (1997) further adds that these constellations can play out in different modes of interaction, including "unilateral action," "negotiated agreement," "majority vote," and "hierarchical direction." In the context of this thesis, majority vote is not possible, as states and social partners do not vote. On the other hand, negotiated agreement is expected to be a central mode of interaction, especially in industrial relations systems with strong social partners based on the indicators on bargaining defined earlier and developed participation channels, where coordination between actors is required.

At the same time, other modes of interaction cannot be excluded. Unilateral action or hierarchical decision-making may occur in cases where social partner participation is weak or absent. This is especially relevant for the implementation of AI/AM systems at the company level, where employers may introduce such systems without consultation, or where the state may adopt policy unilaterally without input from social partners. For the purposes of this thesis, both modes will be treated as one category and referred to as unilateral action, as both represent an absence of coordination and one-sided decision-making.

Such unilateral action is expected mainly in industrial relations systems where social partners are weak. This may include state-centered systems, where the state plays a dominant role and social partners are weak, as well as liberal market economy systems, where regulation is often left more to the market and social partners are weak especially, trade unions.

² Important to note, lobbying is understood as an actor strategy rather than a participation in policymaking.

On the nature of the problem, what is highly relevant for one actor may be of limited importance for another, depending on their interests, resources, and strategic priorities. As a result, both the level and the form of participation depend on the perceived relevance of the issue (Scharpf, 1997). In the context of AI/AM systems, this implies that trade unions, employer organizations, and state actors may prioritize these technologies differently. For instance, sectors that are less exposed to these technologies may have lower levels of engagement, which in turn can lead to weaker participation in policymaking processes. Such variation contributes to differences in how actively actors participate in policymaking across industrial relation systems.

Participation is therefore shaped by both structural and actor-centered factors, which interact in complex ways. While institutional arrangements define the formal channels of participation, they do not guarantee that these channels will be actively used. Actor constellations and interaction dynamics play a crucial role in determining how these channels are utilized in practice. Moreover, the interplay between actors' orientations, capabilities, and perceived issue salience influences whether participation translates into actual influence or the possible creation or expansion of participation channels. In this sense, policy outcomes are not only structured by institutions but also co-produced through strategic interaction among actors.

2.3 Operationalisation of Participation

Participation in policymaking can be conceptualized in two ways: as the extent of participation, expressed in numerical values (0–3), ranging from no participation to decision-making authority (see Table 2), and as the type of participation, which can be captured through participation channels identified in the literature.

To understand the extent of participation, it is relevant to describe how social partners can participate in policymaking. Following Visser (2009), social partners can participate in policymaking through several mechanisms.

First, veto power refers to situations in which trade unions and employer organizations possess sufficient influence to shape or block policy outcomes. This may occur through channels of participation, such as tripartite agreements between the state, employers, and employees, or through strong negotiation leverage. In this thesis, tripartite agreements are treated as decision-making authority, corresponding to value (3) in Table 2, because social partners directly participate in reaching a binding agreement.

Second, bipartite agreements constitute a mechanism through which trade unions and employer organizations negotiate directly with each other without the involvement of the state (Visser, 2009). These agreements may occur at both national and sectoral levels. Visser (2009) distinguishes between three types: autonomous agreements, sponsored agreements, and dependent agreements. Among these, autonomous agreements are treated as value (3) in Table 2, as they do not involve third actors such as the state or courts, and social partners act as decision-makers. Sponsored and dependent agreements are classified as value (2), as they involve active participation in policymaking of social partners but remain conditional upon state support or legal frameworks.

This value (2) also includes joint guidelines and forms of participation in policy implementation. These are weaker than autonomous agreements, but still stronger than value (1), where participation is only minimal or consultative, such as social dialogue or consultations. In these cases, social partners may express their views but do not exert direct influence over decision-making outcomes. This form of participation is most commonly observed at the national level.

Finally, value (0) represents the absence of participation, where policies on AI/AM systems are introduced unilaterally by the state or employers without any involvement or consultation with social partners. Each value is also linked to a mode of interaction: value (0) reflects unilateral action, while the other values are based on negotiation, with value (3) representing the strongest negotiation position.

Table 2: Operationalization of social partner participation in policymaking

Ordinal Value	Description	Mechanisms
0	Absence of participation	Unilateral employer or state decisions (unilateral action)
1	Minimal or consultative participation	Social dialogue; public consultations (negotiations)
2	Involvement in policy implementation	Bipartite agreements (dependent or sponsored); Joint guidelines; implementation committees; training councils; labour market boards (negotiations)

3	Decision-making authority	Tripartite agreement; autonomous collective agreements; (negotiations)
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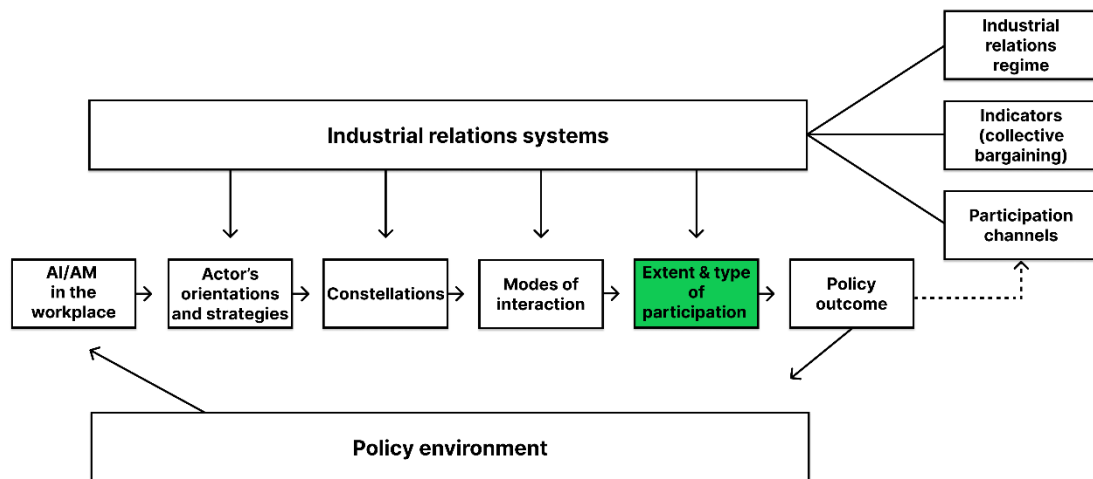
Source: Author's own elaboration based on Visser (2009).

The type of participation in policymaking can be observed by comparing whether tripartite, bipartite, or other participation channels existed before AI/AM issues were expanded or changed, or whether new channels of participation were created for participating in policymaking on AI/AM issues.

Building on Scharpf's (1997) framework and industrial relations systems conceptualization, the thesis expects that the extent and type of social partner participation will differ across country clusters. In the Nordic group of countries, the extent of participation in policymaking is expected to range from value (1) to value (3), as social partners are stronger and will have more types of participation channels. By contrast, in the Western (Anglo-Saxon) cluster, the extent of participation is expected to range mainly from value (0) to value (1), as social partners are generally weaker and participation channels probably are less developed.

After the operationalization of social partner participation, the conceptual framework based on Scharpf (1997) is presented in Figure 6. In this framework, participation in policymaking refers the extent and type of social partner participation in policymaking as defined in Table 2. The institutional setting is defined as the industrial relations system, which is composed of three elements: (1) the industrial relations regime, (2) indicators of collective bargaining, and (3) participation channels.

Figure 6: Conceptual framework: Industrial relations systems and social partner participation in policymaking on AI/AM systems.



Source: Author's elaboration based on Scharpf (1997).

This institutional setting shapes actors' orientations and potential strategies, as well as the constellations between actors and the modes of interaction. These interactions, in turn, result in different extent and type of social partner participation, which influence policy outcomes. In this thesis, policy outcomes are understood broadly as any form of regulation or governance related to AI/AM systems, including both state-led policies and collective agreements between social partners. However, policy outcomes may also include the absence of regulation, where AI/AM systems are introduced unilaterally by employers without consultation or involvement of trade unions.

At the same time, the perception of the policy issue plays an important role and remains partly independent from the institutional setting, as it shapes the level of participation of policymaking. The policy issue of AI/AM systems, discussed in Chapter 1, emerges from the EU AI Act and its national implementation as part of the broader policy environment.

Finally, the framework acknowledges a possible relationship between policy outcomes and participation channels. This suggests that policy outcomes are shaped by actor constellations and modes of interaction. These factors influence the extent and type of participation and can lead to the creation, reshaping, or expansion of participation channels. In this way, new policy issues may also gradually influence industrial relations systems themselves.

To summarize the Chapter 2 connects Scharpf's (1997) actor-centered institutionalist framework with Visser's (2009) framework of industrial relations regimes. This combination

allows the thesis to study social partner participation in different national contexts. Scharpf's framework helps explain how institutions shape actor orientations, strategies, constellations, modes of interaction, extent and type of participation, and policy outcomes, while Visser's framework allows for the comparison of industrial relations systems across countries. Together, these frameworks provide the basis for analyzing how the same policy issue, AI/AM systems, can create different opportunities for social partner participation in policymaking in different countries.

3 METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the thesis and explains how the thesis examines whether the issue of AI/AM systems creates opportunities for social partners to participate in policymaking across different national contexts. To analyze this, the thesis uses a comparative case study of Slovak and Italian social partners. These two countries were selected because they are both subject to the same EU regulatory framework through the AI Act, while differing in their industrial relations systems. This difference is expected to shape the extent and form of social partner participation and will be explained in Section 3.2. This chapter also presents the research question and sub-questions, explains the research design and methods of data collection and analysis, and describes the limitations, ethical and data protection measures applied in the study.

3.1 Research aim and questions

As shown in Chapter 1, AI/AM systems have gained attention not only from workers and employers, but also from policymakers, who are becoming increasingly involved in regulating them. With this growing relevance, a substantial body of research has emerged on the topic in recent years. However, most existing literature has focused on the technological, economic, legal, and ethical implications of AI/AM systems, while other studies addressed the AI Act, discussing whether it provides sufficient protection for workers or regulatory burden for companies. Comparatively fewer studies examine how national industrial relations systems enable social partner participation in policymaking when dealing with the same problem (AI/AM systems), especially considering differences between industrial relations systems.

The central puzzle of this study is that, despite the existence of shared EU regulation, social partner participation in the governance of AI/AM systems varies across EU countries. This variation will be further demonstrated in Section 3.2.

On this basis, the main research question is:

How do social partners utilize AI/AM systems as a new policy issue to increase their participation in policymaking within different industrial relations systems?

To further guide the analysis, the thesis is structured around the following sub-questions:

- Do social partners and policymakers perceive these questions as important?

- What strategies do social partners adopt in AI/AM regulations, and how do they evaluate potential payoffs?
- How do actor constellations develop between trade unions, employer organizations, and the state, and to what extent are their interests compatible or conflictual?
- Which modes of interaction emerge in AI/AM governance, negotiated agreement, consultation, hierarchical decision-making, or unilateral action?
- To what extent do these interactions result in stronger or weaker social partner participation, measured through values 0 – 3?
- What types of participation channels are created, expanded, or transformed in response to AI/AM systems?
- What policy outcomes are produced through these interactions, including regulation, collective agreements, consultative processes, or unilateral implementation?

3.2 Case study – Slovakia and Italy

The selection of Slovakia and Italy is based on both their shared obligation to implement the AI Act and their differences in industrial relations systems. Both countries are therefore addressing the same policy issue, AI/AM systems, but within different institutional settings. Italy positioned between the state-centered and corporatist cluster, while Slovakia positioned between state-centered and liberal regimes. This makes the two cases useful for comparison, as the thesis expects social partners to utilize the same policy issue differently depending on the industrial relations system. Based on these differences, variation is expected in the extent and type of social partner participation in policymaking. But first, the thesis will discuss these differences in details.

To identify these institutional differences (see Table 3), the thesis first draws on Visser's (2009) comparative framework of industrial relations regimes. According to him, both Slovakia and Italy can be broadly characterized as statist systems, in which the state plays a central role in regulating employment relations. However, important differences exist between the two countries. Slovakia exhibits more liberal and market-oriented features, but the system remains statist, as the state continues to play a dominant role in employment regulation (Visser, 2009). While social partners in Italy are generally stronger than in Slovakia, they are not fully institutionalized in public law and often depend on state involvement. This makes their participation in policymaking dependent on political support

and state intervention, reflecting the historical development of Italian industrial relations as a hybrid between state-centered and corporatist models. (Visser, 2009).

However, while Visser (2009) provides a broad comparative framework, the specific characteristics of Central and Eastern European countries are often analysed at a more aggregated regional level. This makes it necessary to complement his approach with more country-specific literature to better capture the features of Slovakia. An important contribution in this regard is provided by Bohle and Greskovits (2012), who classify Slovakia within the model of Eastern European embedded neoliberalism. This model is characterized by strong state dominance in policymaking, weak and fragmented social partners, and state-led compromises that seek to reconcile market transformation with social cohesion within formally inclusive, yet often institutionally fragile, systems of democratic governance. Boonjubun et al. (2025) further develop this perspective by emphasizing the structural weakness of trade unions, whose influence frequently depends on alliances, as well as fragmented and foreign-led employer organizations that lack the capacity for cohesive collective action.

Second, interrelated to the first indicator are the indicators on bargaining. Starting with the density and coverage. In Slovakia, trade union density was approximately 11.8% in 2022, while bargaining coverage reached around 26% in 2017 (Kahancová & Uhlerová, 2023). Employer organization density was 62.6% in 2022. In Italy, employer density reached approximately 77% (2018), trade union density 30.2% (2024), and bargaining coverage around 100% (2019) (OECD, 2025). These figures indicate stronger organizational capacities of social partners in Italy compared to Slovakia.

Then, Slovakia is characterized by relatively low coordination and fragmented bargaining mechanisms. Italy, by contrast, displays moderate coordination, supported by procedural guidelines and sectoral coordination mechanisms that contribute to more structured bargaining processes (OECD, 2025). It also relates to the fact that the bargaining in Slovakia takes place primarily at sectoral and company levels, with company-level bargaining being dominant (Eurofound, 2024c). The ICTWSS data further confirm that bargaining alternates between sectoral and company levels (OECD, 2025), indicating a relatively decentralized structure. Italy is more sectoral but is complemented by firm-level negotiations (OECD, 2025), showing that it is more coordinated. Based on these indicators, Italy has higher union density and bargaining coverage, as well as a more centralized and coordinated bargaining system. This indicates that social partners are stronger in Italy than in Slovakia.

Third are institutional channels for social partner participation in both countries. In Slovakia, social dialogue is formally institutionalized through the Economic and Social Council, a tripartite advisory body involving government, trade unions, and employer organizations. However, its role remains consultative rather than binding, and participation at sectoral level is done by different tripartite, bipartite bodies, but their functioning is not as stable as Economic and Social Council (Eurofound, 2024c). As a result, trade unions increasingly rely on lobbying, public campaigns, and media mobilization to influence policymaking (Kahancová & Uhlerová, 2023). Slovak social partners could also submit comments on legislation related to AI/AM systems through the Slov-lex platform, which represents a form of consultation. Additionally, all the topics related to digitalization could be discussed in the Digital coalition (Digital Coalition, n.d.).

In Italy the main tripartite body is the National Council for Economics and Labour (hereinafter CNEL), which functions as an advisory body to the government, parliament, and regional authorities (Eurofound, 2024b). Similar to the Slovak tripartite council, it brings together representatives of the state, trade unions, and employer organizations. However, its competences are broader, as it can propose draft legislation and issue opinions, recommendations, and analytical reports on economic and social issues and provides expertise and assessments to EU legislation (Eurofound, 2024b). This represents a form of institutionalized participation that, while primarily consultative, offers social partners a more structured and continuous role in policymaking. Also, there are more different bipartite bodies operating across sectors and governance levels, further supporting social partner involvement (Eurofound, 2024b).

Table 3: Operationalization of industrial relations systems: comparative overview of Slovakia and Italy

Dimensions	Slovakia	Italy
Industrial relations regime	State-centered, weak and fragmented social partners. Combines state-centered governance with liberal, market-oriented features, often favoring employer interests and limiting	Statist system with elements of corporatism. Trade unions retain mobilization capacity, but coordination with the state is fragile and uneven; participation depends on political context.

	trade union autonomy.	
Indicators	Density: TU ~11.8%; EMP ~62.6% Coverage: ~26% Structure: company / sectoral Coordination: low	Density: TU ~30.2%; EMP ~77% Coverage: about 100% Structure: sectoral Coordination: moderate
Participation channels	Tripartite Economic and Social Council (consultative role). Bipartite and tripartite bodies across levels.	CNEL with broader advisory competences (incl. legislative input). Multiple bipartite and tripartite bodies across levels.
Social partners	Main trade union confederations and federations: KOZ SR, SOS, NKOS Main employer organizations and confederations: AZZZ SR, RUZ, ZMOS, APZD	Main trade union confederations and federations: CGIL, CISL, UIL, SPI-CGIL, Filcams-CGIL, FP-CGIL, ST-CISL, FNP-CISL, Fisascat-CISL, UILA, UIL Pensionati, UILFPL Main employer organizations and confederations: Confartigianato Imprese, Confcommercio, CNA, Confesercenti, Casartigiani, Confindustria, ABI, Confapi, Confcooperative, Legacoop, AGCI

Source: Author's compilation based on Visser (2009), OECD (2025), Eurofound (2024b), Eurofound (2024c) Kahancová & Uhlerová (2023).

These differences in industrial relations systems may partly explain why the pace of implementation differs across the two countries. Italy has already adopted dedicated national legislation aligned with EU Act on artificial intelligence, making it the first EU Member States to do so (Giuffrida, 2025). The country has established an organizational framework, specifying which authorities are responsible, the designated contact points, and the provision of regulatory sandboxes (Legge 23 settembre 2025, n. 132). While the legislation generally mirrors EU provisions without introducing additional obligations, it builds on earlier national frameworks, such as the 1997 Transparency Decree, which regulates the deployment of

automated decision-making or monitoring systems in the workplace, so AI/AM systems are under that law (Legge 23 settembre 2025, n. 132, Art. 11). Under this law, employers must inform employees about the use of such systems for hiring, task allocation, performance evaluation, or termination, including:

- the aspects of employment affected, the purposes of the system, and its logic and functioning;
- the types of data and parameters used, including performance metrics;
- control measures, correction processes, and responsible quality management officers;
- system accuracy, robustness, cybersecurity, and potential discriminatory impacts (Legge 23 settembre 2025, n. 132, Art. 11).

Employees, either directly or through company or local trade union representatives, have the right to access this information and request further clarifications (Legge 23 settembre 2025, n. 132). This framework should provide better transparency and create more opportunities for employee representation to discuss these topics.

Slovakia, by contrast, is still in the process of adapting the EU AI Act (Slov-lex, 2026). Its implementation focuses also on distributing enforcement competences among public authorities, defining legal concepts, and designating a surveillance authority and a single contact point for AI governance. The Slovak framework also mirrors the EU AI Act and does not yet introduce major changes regarding workplace use, but it remains open to modifications as the legislative discussion continues (Slov-lex, 2026).

Taken together, the evidence presented in Table 3 and the broader literature suggests that Slovakia and Italy are characterized by distinct, yet internally heterogeneous, industrial relations regimes. Slovakia is generally described as a system with weak and fragmented social partners and a dominant role of the state in shaping employment relations. Its industrial relations regime combines elements of state-centered governance with liberal and market-based features, often resulting in arrangements that favor employer interests and limit the autonomous influence of trade unions. Italy, by contrast, is typically characterized as a statist and partially corporatist system. While trade unions retain significant mobilization capacity, particularly among core segments of the workforce, institutionalized coordination between the state and social partners remains fragile and uneven. As a result, social partner participation in Italy is highly dependent on political context and state involvement, rather than being consistently embedded in stable corporatist institutions. The bargaining indicators show that

the Italian social partners are stronger than Slovakian. Additionally, the main tripartite body (CNEL) in Italy is involved more in policymaking than in Slovakia as its competence are broader. The implementation of the AI Act is more advanced in Italy than in Slovakia. In addition, Italian social partners operate within a legal framework that already includes transparency obligations requiring employers to inform workers and their representatives about the use of AI/AM systems. This makes social partner participation in policymaking in Italy more possible.

After establishing the differences between Slovakia and Italy in their industrial relations systems, the thesis formulates several analytical assumptions:

- Italian state is expected to play a more active role in the governance of AI/AM systems than the Slovak state, given the more state-centred character of the Italian industrial relations system.
- Social partners in Italy are expected to adopt more proactive strategies and demonstrate higher levels of participation in policymaking in extent and type, as the Italian industrial relations system is characterized by stronger social partners than in Slovakia.
- Actor constellations and modes of interaction are expected to differ between the two cases. In Italy, negotiation between social partners is expected to be more developed, as social partners have a stronger position within the industrial relations system. In Slovakia, given the weaker position of social partners, they are expected to prioritize traditional “bread-and-butter” issues, such as wages, working conditions, and job security, rather than newer issues such as AI/AM systems. As a result, unilateral employer action is expected to be more common in Slovakia, while negotiated interaction is expected to be more visible in Italy.
- Social partners in both countries are expected to use the issue of AI/AM systems as an opportunity to strengthen their position, but to different degrees. In Italy, social partners are expected to use this issue more actively by creating or expanding participation channels and by bringing the topic into collective bargaining. In Slovakia, social partners are expected to use this issue more limitedly, mainly through participation at value (0) or (1).

3.3 Research Design: Comparative Qualitative Case Study

The thesis adopts a comparative qualitative case study design. This design is suitable because the thesis aims to examine how the same policy issue, AI/AM systems, could be utilized differently by social partner participation across different industrial relations systems.

The comparison between Slovakia and Italy allows the thesis to analyze how institutional differences shape actor perceptions, strategies, interaction dynamics, and the resulting extent and type of participation.

The research is based on semi-structured interviews with representatives of social partners at national and sectoral levels. This method is appropriate because the study focuses on empirical experiences of actors, including how they perceive AI/AM systems, what strategies they adopt, how they evaluate potential payoffs, and how interactions between actors develop.

3.4 Interview Guide and Operationalisation

The interview guide was structured around the main concepts developed in the conceptual framework (see Appendix 1). Each interview started with an explanation of AI/AM systems, including the difference between basic algorithmic management and modern AI-based algorithmic management systems. Examples were provided to make sure that respondents had a shared understanding of the topic.

The first block of questions focused on respondent identification, including the organization, sector, position, and role of the respondent in collective bargaining or social dialogue, where relevant for the thesis.

The second block focused on awareness and salience of the topic. Respondents were asked whether they perceived AI/AM systems as important for their country, sector, or organization, and whether the topic was included in their organization's priorities or strategies.

The third block examined respondents' understanding and assessment of AI/AM systems. It asked whether respondents were aware of the presence of these technologies in workplaces, how they evaluated their potential benefits and risks, and whether they considered regulation necessary.

The fourth block focused on participation through collective bargaining and social dialogue. Respondents were asked whether AI/AM systems were discussed or negotiated, at which level this took place, and between which actors. This block was directly connected to the concepts of participation extent, participation channels, and policy outcomes.

The fifth block focused on initiatives and strategies. It asked about internal and external initiatives, such as training, campaigns, guidelines, cooperation with the state, or

existence of participation channels. These questions were designed to capture actor strategies, interaction dynamics, modes of interaction, and the possible creation or expansion of participation channels.

3.5 Interview Sample and Respondents

The empirical analysis is based on a total of eight semi-structured interviews, with four conducted in Slovakia and four in Italy (see Table 4). The sample was designed to be balanced across both national and sectoral levels, as well as across trade unions and employer organizations.

Table 4: Interview sample.

Country	National trade unions	National employer organizations	Sectoral trade unions	Sectoral employer organizations
Slovakia	1	2	1	0
Italy	2	0	1	1

Respondents were contacted via email. The number of interviewees is considered adequate given the representative role of social partners as membership-based organizations expressing collective interests. In addition, the number of relevant social partner organizations at national and sectoral levels is relatively limited in both countries. At both levels, the selected respondents were experts in the field of digitalization, including topics related to artificial intelligence and algorithmic management.

All respondents received the interview questions in advance, and the same interview guide was used across all interviews in order to maintain consistency across different interview formats. Prior to each interview, the concepts of artificial intelligence and algorithmic management were explained in order to establish a shared understanding of the topic among respondents (see subchapter 3.4).

All interviews in Slovakia were conducted either online or offline and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Half of these interviews were co-conducted together with the thesis supervisor. These interviews were also part of a broader thematic study conducted by Eurofound – *Interviews for the Thematic Review on Collective bargaining and social*

dialogue on artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithmic management (AM) in the workplace. However, the interview questions used in this thesis were designed specifically for the purposes of this research. In Italy, interviews were conducted either in written form or through recorded audio responses. This format was used due to the absence of shared working language between the researcher and participants.

3.6 Data Analysis

All interviews were subsequently transcribed into text form, anonymized, and analyzed using the software Dedoose, where a coding tree was developed (see Table 5). The analytical dimensions were derived from the analytical framework presented in Figure 6 and research sub-questions in Chapter 3.2. The main codes were developed deductively from the analytical framework and research sub-questions, while some subcodes were identified inductively during the analysis of the interview data. The coding process therefore combined deductive and inductive elements.

Table 5: Coding structure used in the analysis.

Analytical dimension	Main code	Subcodes
AI/AM in the workplace (issue)	Perception of AI/AM	Highly important; Growing importance; Not important
Actor`s orientations and capabilities	Strategies of the actors	Confrontational; Non-confrontational Mixed
Actor`s orientations and capabilities	Assessment of payoffs	Building awareness; influencing legislation; strengthening bargaining capacity; mobilizing pressure
Constellations	Constellations between the social partners	Cooperative; Conflictual Mixed
Modes of interaction	Modes of interaction between	Negotiated;

	the social partners	Unilateral
Extent and type of participation in policymaking	Extent of participation in policymaking	Value 0; Value 1; Value 2; Value 3
Extent and type of participation in policymaking	Type of participation in policymaking	Existing channels used; Existing channels expanded; New channels created
Policy outcomes	Policy outcomes	Binding agreements; Unilateral implementation

3.7 Data Protection Ethical Issues and Limitations

All interviews were conducted via secure internet connections, and the collected data were anonymized to reduce the possibility of identifying respondents. Before the interviews, participants received an informed consent (see Appendix 2) form explaining the purpose of the thesis, the type of data collected, its use, storage, access, and publication. The form also informed respondents about their rights under GDPR, including the right to access, correct, delete, restrict, or withdraw consent for the use of their data. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Audio or video recording was conducted only with the explicit consent of participants. The data were stored securely and accessed only by the researcher and the thesis supervisor. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Comenius University (see Appendix 3).

A limitation of the study concerns the format of interviews conducted in Italy, as well as language-related constraints. However, despite these limitations, the collected data provided sufficient depth and detail for the purposes of the analysis, as several respondents offered comprehensive answers.

Another limitation relates to the composition of the sample, particularly the absence of a national-level employer representative in Italy and a sectoral-level employer representative in Slovakia. Despite efforts to ensure a balanced sample, it was not possible to conduct interviews with these representatives, as contacted respondents did not reply. While this may affect the balance of perspectives, the study focuses mainly on interactions between social

actors, meaning that relevant information could still be partially obtained from trade union respondents and other employer-side respondents.

A further limitation concerns the timing of the Slovak interviews, majority of which were conducted at an early stage of the research. Nevertheless, the interview questions discussed in subchapter 3.4 were designed in a manner to cover all relevant aspects of the study.

Finally, potential biases may arise from the qualitative nature of the data, including differences in how respondents perceive and interpret AI/AM systems and the relationships between the actors. This factor was taken into account during the analysis and also tackled by the balanced sample.

4 RESULTS

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the thesis. In the Slovak case, one additional participation channel is also included in the analysis. This channel emerged only in April, after the interviews had already been conducted, and is therefore added to complement the interview-based findings. The list of respondents and their citation codes can be found in Appendix 4 and 5. In the analysis, respondents are mostly referred to as trade union respondents or employer organization respondents. In some cases, broader terms such as “employers” and “trade unions” are used, as the respondents represent the views of these organizations.

The analysis is conducted using a thematic approach, structured around the analytical framework and coding tree, and addresses the research sub-questions. Specifically, the analysis focuses on the following themes:

- 1) the perceived importance of AI/AM systems,
- 2) actor strategies and their assessment of payoffs,
- 3) interaction dynamics between actors (constellation and mode of interaction),
- 4) extent and types of participation and policy outcomes.

The analysis develops through a comparison of the two cases. But, first, it identifies patterns common across both countries to show shared tendencies in how social partners perceive and address AI/AM systems. Then, it examines cross-country differences, focusing on how variations in industrial relations systems shape actor behavior, interaction dynamics, and the resulting forms of participation.

4.1 Importance of AI/AM systems

The findings (see Table 6) indicate that AI/AM systems are increasingly recognized as a relevant topic by social partners in both Slovakia and Italy. In both countries, almost all respondents confirmed that these systems are already present in the organizations or sectors represented by their members. This shows that AI/AM is not perceived only as a future issue, but as a topic that is already entering the world of work. At the same time, the importance and the level of activity around the topic differ significantly across the two cases.

Based on the interviews, three categories can be identified: (1) highly important, (2) growing importance, and (3) not important or low relevance. The comparison shows that Italy is closer to the first category, as AI/AM systems are consistently perceived as highly

important by respondents. Slovakia, by contrast, is closer to the second category, as the topic is recognized as growing in importance, but it has not yet become a central issue for members, dialogues or collective bargaining.

Table 6: Perceived importance of AI/AM systems in Slovakia and Italy

Dimension	Slovakia	Italy
Presence of AI/AM systems	Recognized by most respondents	Recognized by all respondents
Importance of AI/AM	Growing importance	Highly important
Interest among members	Low	Higher than in Slovakia (informal and formal discussions)
Social partners' perceptions of state activity	Limited, mostly AI Act implementation	More visible through hearings and different participation bodies, but still perceived as insufficiently coordinated and too general
Overall assessment	Growing importance, but not yet entered bargaining as it is not priority for members	High importance and more active discussion

A common pattern across both countries is that social partners are aware of the presence of AI/AM systems and recognize their possible effects on workers. Respondents in both cases mentioned potential changes in work organization, decision-making, skills, and employment. In both countries, the topic is also connected to concerns about job replacement and the need for fair transformation.

However, the importance of the issue differs. In the Italian case, AI/AM systems are consistently perceived as a highly important topic among social partners. All respondents mentioned that these systems are already implemented in the companies or sectors they represent. One trade union respondent at the national level reported that the topic is very important, especially considering digital transformation and workplace changes (ITR4). Another trade union respondent stated that the topic has become increasingly important because certain companies in the IT sector are planning to reduce the number of employees

and have stopped hiring young people due to the introduction of AI/AM systems (ITR3). The employer representative also considered these technologies of public interest and noted that one region had already adopted a law regarding employee training on these technologies (ITR2). Also, the employer representative added that the managers and workers, low-level trade unions and employer organizations are discussing these topics formally and informally. In several cases, the topic is already part of sectoral bargaining and social dialogue (see 4.3 section). This shows that in Italy, AI/AM systems are already present and have started to produce visible effects for workers and social partners.

The role of the state in Italy is perceived as important, but also not fully sufficient. On the one hand, one respondent described participation in government hearings on the implementation of AI Act and membership in bodies organized by the government for social partners on this topic (ITR4). On the other hand, respondents argued that the government should play a stronger role and support dialogue between social partners (ITR2; ITR3; ITR4.). Employer respondent mentioned that a steering committee managed by the government, where each social partner could provide expertise, would be useful (ITR2). Trade union respondents similarly argued that the government should not leave the issue only to market regulation but should play a more active role in negotiations and create rules that protect jobs (ITR3; ITR4). For now, state has developed only very general guidelines, without committing opening enough space for social partner participation in policymaking or bringing the parties into dialogue (ITR3). It is relevant, as there is some fragmentation of bargaining in these systems, meaning no common standard (ITR3). Also, trade union respondent emphasized the need to clarify which authorities are responsible for workplace monitoring and enforcement (ITR4). Trade unions in Italy therefore emphasized the need for comprehensive agreements that would establish rules, rights, and transparency standards.

This is especially relevant because some companies are still in a testing phase and lack clear knowledge of how to implement these systems properly (ITR3; ITR4). At the same time, Italian companies are slow in adopting these systems, and some do not adopt them because they lack adequate organizational skills (ITR3). Therefore, despite the existence of observatories and institutional bodies, social partners still expect a more active role from the state in this issue. This suggests that both social partners perceive the state as an important actor and expect it to be even more active.

In Slovakia, respondents were more divided in their perception of the topic. Almost all respondents mentioned the presence of AI/AM systems in workplaces, meaning that these systems are already present in the companies or sectors they represent (SKR1; SKR2; SKR3).

However, all respondents also stated that there is no strong interest from the members of their organizations in discussing this topic. This means that trade unions and employer organizations may consider the topic important, but if their members focus on other issues, they cannot fully dedicate themselves to it.

Both employer organizations and trade unions in Slovakia mentioned that bargaining on this topic is absent and that other issues, especially wages, are currently more important. This was linked also to the broader context of fiscal consolidation in Slovakia. One employer organization representative at the national level noted that not all employer organizations consider AI/AM systems to be an important issue. This is because, in some sectors, such as the food sector or state-owned enterprises in network industries, these technologies are either absent or not yet relevant (SKR4). At the same time, another employer at the sectoral level described these systems as revolutionary, as they may replace some jobs but also create new ones (SKR2). One trade union respondent similarly acknowledged the risk of human replacement and argued that the transformation should be fair and that people should retain employment (SKR3).

The Slovak respondents did not mention any active state actions or discussions beyond the AI Act implementation process, where social partners can submit comments. Additionally, on the role of state and trade unions, another employer respondent added that they should be more proactive in addressing questions related to forecasting how the labor market will develop, as this would be beneficial for all actors (SKR2). As a result, the issue is often not brought into collective bargaining or structured social dialogue. Respondents explicitly stated that discussions or bargaining attempts were absent or very limited. However, almost all respondents expected that AI/AM systems will eventually enter discussions, as the topic is growing in importance (SKR1; SKR2; SKR4).

To conclude, the most common finding across both cases is that AI/AM systems are already recognized as relevant workplace issues. However, the main difference lies in the degree of salience. In Italy, the issue is more important, more actively discussed, and already connected to bargaining, social dialogue, and participation channels. In Slovakia, the topic is recognized and expected to grow in importance, but it has not yet entered collective bargaining in a meaningful way, as other topics remain more urgent for both workers and social partners. The role of the state is also perceived differently in the two cases. In Italy, state involvement is more visible than in Slovakia, as in Slovakia respondents did not mention any activity from the state, except implementation of AI Act. However, respondents did not describe this role as sufficient. Several of them argued that the state should play a stronger

coordinating role, especially because many companies implement AI/AM systems without discussion with workers' representatives or trade unions, while transparency remains limited in practice. Respondents also pointed to uncertainty over which authorities should monitor the workplace use of these systems, the fragmentation of initiatives, and the lack of coordinated dialogue. Therefore, the Italian case shows a paradox: the state is more active than in Slovakia, but social partners still expect it to do more by bringing the parties together and supporting participatory governance.

4.2 Actor Strategies and Payoffs

The Italian and Slovak actors use a variety of strategies to strengthen their participation in policymaking on this issue. In both countries, social partners use mostly non-confrontational strategies, such as awareness-raising, trainings for trade unionists/for employees how to work with the tools, and lobbying. However, the scope and level of development of these strategies differ significantly. In Slovakia, strategies are more limited and mostly focused on building awareness and preparing the ground for future bargaining. In Italy, strategies are more diversified and already connected to bargaining, institutional participation, research, and mobilization (see Table 7).

Table 7: Perceived importance of AI/AM systems in Slovakia and Italy

Dimension	Slovakia	Italy
Main strategies	Awareness-raising, workshops, lobbying, comments on legislation	Awareness-raising, publications, trainings, bargaining strategies, creation of working groups on this topic, research, lobbying, institutional participation, strikes
Main actors using strategies	Mainly trade unions; employer organizations mostly limited to training how to work with these systems and lobbying and	Trade unions (awareness-raising, publications, training, bargaining strategies, mobilization, creation of working groups on this topic)

	comments on legislation	and employer organizations (research, institutional participation, working groups on this topic)
Strategy type	Non-confrontational	Mostly non-confrontational, with some confrontational planned strike
Expected payoff	Building worker interest and bringing AI/AM topic to bargaining and influencing national/European level regulation	Strengthening bargaining capacity, showing union power and influencing national level regulation
Overall assessment	Mostly awareness-raising and lobbying	More diverse and advanced strategies, including awareness-raising, preparation for bargaining, creation of strategies, lobbying

Based on the previous subchapter, readers could assume that Slovak social partners are mostly passive. While it is true that their participation in policymaking is lower compared to Italy, they are still active in using strategies. For example, trade unions in Slovakia reported communication campaigns, workshops, and educational initiatives aimed at increasing workers' understanding of AI/AM systems (SKR1; SKR3). These efforts are intended to build interest among workers, as some of them are not aware of the existence of these systems (SKR1).

One trade union respondent at the sectoral level described a concrete example from a workshop on AI/AM systems. During the workshop, one company-level trade union representative realized that similar systems were already being used in their workplace. Although this representative had previously shown no interest in discussing AI/AM because they believed such systems were not present in their workplace, they later approached the respondent to learn more about the topic (SKR1). This suggests that awareness-raising

strategies can increase interest, as workers and lower-level representatives may become more able to identify the presence of these systems.

Another strategy identified in the Slovak case is lobbying at both the European and national levels. At the EU level, one trade union respondent emphasized that EU-level regulations largely shape national frameworks, making the European level an important arena for participation in policymaking (SKR3). At the national level, both trade unions and employer organizations participate in legislative processes through comments and amendments (*pripomienky*). One employer specifically mentioned cooperation with another actor in preparing these inputs, and such activity could be observed on the Slov-lex platform (SKR4), although primarily from the employers' side, as no written trade union inputs were found. These examples show that both actors are active in trying to influence the policymakers.

Employers in Slovakia did not report any developed strategic approaches comparable to those observed in Italy (SKR2; SKR4). Their activities were mainly limited to training employees on how to use AI/AM tools, rather than engaging in broader policy or bargaining strategies (SKR2; SKR4). They explained this by arguing that there was no strong demand for such strategies from their members. On the other hand, one trade union mentioned having a strategy dedicated to bargaining on this topic under their digitalization strategy and stated that they plan to update it, as previous attempts to discuss this topic and directly request information about these systems were unsuccessful (SKR1).

Regarding payoffs (see Table 8), the strategies chosen by Slovak social partners are mostly non-confrontational. Awareness-raising strategies are used in the expectation that, as more workers become informed about the topic, trade unions will eventually be able to bring AI/AM systems to the bargaining table. Lobbying attempts are also aimed at influencing policymakers at both the EU and national levels. Through comments and amendments, social partners try to influence legislation. These strategies can therefore be considered non-confrontational, as they are unlikely to significantly damage relationships between social partners. Bargaining strategies in Slovakia are emerging, but strategies are also considered non-confrontational, as they do not harm relationships between social partners.

Table 8: Strategy and payoff table

Strategy	Slovakia: expected payoff	Italy: expected payoff	Confrontation level

Awareness-raising/training	Build worker interest and detect AI/AM systems	Prepare workers and representatives for bargaining, detection of AI/AM systems	Low
Lobbying/comments on legislation	Influence EU and national regulation	Influence national level regulation	Low
Research/publications	Not identified	Build expertise and bargaining capacity	Low
Bargaining strategies	Emerging	Strengthen negotiation capacity	Low
Strike	Not identified	Show union power and pressure employers/state	High

In contrast, the strategies adopted by social partners in Italy are more developed and diversified, reflecting the more advanced position of the topic within the industrial relations system. Trade union respondents reported a wide range of activities, including publications, books and handbooks for collective bargaining on the topic, training programs for union leaders, seminars, conferences, and the establishment of internal coordination structures (ITR1; ITR3; ITR4). As one respondent mentioned, trade unions and workers' representatives understand the importance of this issue, and many are trying to develop bargaining strategies but do not know how to do so. Their organization therefore supports them in developing these strategies and in using diagnostic tools to identify and assess the use of AI/AM systems in workplaces (ITR3).

The Italian employer respondent also described initiatives such as forums, workshops, memoranda, and collaboration with government institutions and ministries as part of their strategy (ITR2). Additionally, the employer respondent mentioned that a large amount of research on this topic is being conducted in Italy, not only by the government and social partners, but also by universities, and that they actively participate in some of this research. Trade union respondent also confirmed that there is a large amount of research on AI/AM systems, although most of it focuses on ethics rather than on concrete workplace impacts (ITR3).

Both trade unions and employer organizations participate in working groups and bodies addressing AI-related issues within their organizations (ITR1; ITR2). One respondent

also reported participation in government hearings and other bodies created by the government indicating that these actors are active in lobbying and shaping policy (ITR4). As one respondent mentioned, many trade union having discussion meetings on this topic, not only at the national level but also on sectoral level (ITR3).

The strategies mentioned above are mostly non-confrontational (see Table 8), as they are based on educating members, discussing the topic, lobbying, producing research, and participating in meetings with the government. However, Italy also shows a confrontational strategy in the form of a planned strike by the three major unions, CGIL, CISL, and UIL, in response to job losses associated with AI/AM systems (ITR3). The strike represents a confrontational strategy because it directly challenges employers. At the same time, it also shows union unity and mobilization power, as it aims to mobilize workers and attract attention from other actors, such as the media and government.

To conclude, both Slovak and Italian social partners use strategies to influence the governance of AI/AM systems, but the level of development differs. In Slovakia, strategies are mostly preparatory and focused on awareness-raising, lobbying, and creating future interest in bargaining. In Italy, strategies are more sophisticated and advanced, combining training, bargaining preparation, research, lobbying, institutional participation, and, in some cases, confrontation. This supports the earlier assumption that social partners are more active in Italy than in Slovakia, given the differences in their industrial relations systems.

4.3 Interaction Dynamics (Constellations and Modes of Interaction).

The interaction dynamics differ significantly between Slovakia and Italy. In both countries, conflicts around AI/AM systems are present, especially where employers implement these systems without consultation. However, the degree of negotiation differs. In Slovakia, the dominant pattern is conflictual constellations between employers and workers and unilateral employer action. In Italy, the situation is more mixed, as unilateral implementation also exists, but it is accompanied by examples of negotiation, collective agreements, and formal or informal exchanges between social partners.

Table 9: Interaction dynamics in Slovakia and Italy

Dimension	Slovakia	Italy
Actor constellation between	Mostly conflictual	Mixed (Cooperative and

social partners		conflictual)
Dominant mode of interaction between social partners	Unilateral employer action	Mixed (negotiation and unilateral employer action)
Employer organizations position	Some employers see it as a competitive advantage and internal management tools which should not be discussed. Also, regulations seem complex.	Some employers are open to negotiation; others implement unilaterally and refuse to negotiate
Trade unions position	Limited ability to push the issue into bargaining	More active in demanding transparency and agreements
Main area of conflict	Whether AI/AM implementation should be negotiated	Transparency, disclosure, bargaining in this topic
Evidence of negotiation	Very limited; one case of agreement to revisit the topic	Sectoral and company-level agreements exist
Overall pattern	Weak dialogue and employer-led implementation	Coexistence of bargaining and conflict

In Slovakia, the constellations are mostly conflictual, as trade unions and employers have different views on how AI/AM systems should be implemented. Several respondents indicated that employers implement these systems unilaterally, without consultation or negotiation with trade unions (SKR1; SKR2). For example, one trade union respondent mentioned that employers often openly present these systems on social media, but when it comes to bargaining, they refuse to discuss them (SKR1). Other respondents also confirmed the absence of bargaining on this topic, despite acknowledging the existence of these systems in workplaces (SKR1; SKR2; SKR3). Only one relative success was mentioned by a trade union respondent, who stated that an employer agreed to discuss this topic in the future (SKR1).

The absence of bargaining or dialogue could be explained by the fact that some employers consider these technologies to be internal management tools and therefore not subject to negotiation (SKR4). This is illustrated by statements suggesting that decisions

about implementing such systems should remain within the employer's authority, as the employer bears the risks and costs if the system fails (SKR4). Employers also view these systems as part of their competitive advantage (SKR2; SKR4), which may lead to reluctance to disclose information or negotiate over them.

The role and level of activity of trade unions also play an important role. As observed earlier, mainly higher-level trade unions consider this issue important, while lower-level unions or workers often do not show the same level of interest. This may be because these systems are absent in some workplaces, or because lower-level representatives are unable to detect their presence. One employer also mentioned that trade unions had not made attempts to address these issues, as they often focus on short-term goals, such as wages (SKR2).

At the same time, trade unions acknowledge that these systems can have positive effects and economic benefits but argue that they should be implemented fairly (SKR1; SKR3). Fair implementation, according to respondents, means that humans should always remain in control of decision-making, data protection rules should be stronger, and job losses resulting from transformation should be minimized or accompanied by the creation of new positions for displaced workers (SKR1; SKR3).

Employer organization respondents also agreed that AI/AM systems should not make decisions independently, emphasizing that humans should remain in control of decision-making processes. (SKR2; SKR4). However, one employer respondent mentioned that employers already bear substantial costs, as job requalification and retraining are mostly financed by them (SKR2). Employers also emphasize that regulation is already complex, as they are responsible for implementing it (SKR2; SKR4). One employer respondent argued that individual firms should be allowed to create their own normative rules rather than being burdened by overly complex regulation (SKR4). For example, the same respondent argued that transparency issues could be addressed more through informal normative rules than through strict government regulation.

To conclude, in Slovakia the constellation between trade unions and employer organizations is mainly conflictual, and the dominant mode of interaction is unilateral decision-making of employer. All actors acknowledged the existence of AI/AM systems, but negotiations are largely absent. This means that employers often implement these systems without discussion with trade unions. The reasons lie mainly in the limited ability of trade unions to push this topic forward, as interest among workers has not yet been sufficiently developed, and in the employers' view that the implementation of such systems remains a managerial decision.

In Italy, by contrast, interaction dynamics are more complex and include both cooperation and conflict. Cooperation is mostly expressed through negotiation, and there are examples of collective agreements as well as formal and informal exchanges between social partners. For example, one trade union respondent mentioned that in some recently renewed sectoral agreements, provisions aimed at transparency and information disclosure had been introduced (ITR4). These provisions are in line with the European AI Act, the regulation on the processing of personal data, and existing Transparency Decree 1997 on information that must be communicated to workers and trade union organizations (ITR4).

Respondent also reported the existence of company-level agreements, mainly in large companies and technologically advanced sectors (ITR4). These agreements mostly concern information disclosure, transparency, data processing, limits on remote monitoring, and health and safety of the workers. Another trade union representative estimated that a few dozen agreements on this topic already exist in Italy, with several of them at the national level (ITR3). At the national level, some sectoral agreements have already begun to address AI, with the chemical and pharmaceutical sectors being the most advanced (ITR3). At the company level, some agreements provide for information exchange and dialogue on the topic (ITR3).

According to the same respondent, bargaining on this topic mainly focuses on algorithmic transparency, privacy issues related to data collection, use, and generation, the protection of workers from discrimination, and the development of the skills needed to work with AI/AM systems (ITR3). The employer organization respondent added that specific topics most often discussed are the data use, the transparency of the systems (ITR2). But the employer organization respondent did not provide specific examples of agreements but stated that these issues are increasingly being discussed and negotiated, both formally and informally.

At the same time, conflictual constellations between trade unions and employer organizations, as well as, unilateral implementation by employers are also reported. One trade union respondent pointed to the reluctance of employers in the service sector to discuss AI/AM systems (ITR1). Another added that, despite some successful agreements, there are still no real spaces for collective bargaining in many companies, and disclosure on how the systems function remains largely insufficient, as many of them implement these systems without discussion with workers representatives or trade unions (ITR3; ITR4). Therefore, despite existing legal frameworks, such as the 1997 Transparency Decree, transparency

remains insufficient in practice, and workers often lack information about how these systems function or whether they are being used at all.

To summarize, the constellations between social partners in Italy are both conflictual and cooperative. The conflictual dimension is reflected in employer-led unilateral implementation and insufficient transparency. The cooperative dimension takes place through negotiation, where social partners discuss how these systems should be implemented and, in some cases, reach collective agreements. Compared to Slovakia, Italy therefore shows a more mixed pattern, where conflict remains present but is accompanied by stronger negotiation processes. Slovakia, by contrast, shows a mainly conflictual constellation between social partners, with employers tending to implement these technologies unilaterally.

4.4 Forms and Extent of Participation and Policy outcomes

The findings show that in both Slovakia and Italy, AI/AM systems have created some space for social partner participation, but the extent and type of this participation differ strongly between the two countries (see Table 10). In both countries, there are cases where employers introduce AI/AM systems unilaterally, without consultation with trade unions.

Another common feature is that social partners in both countries participate at least minimally in national-level policy processes. This includes consultation mechanisms, comments on legislation, hearings, or participation in advisory bodies. However, these forms of participation differ in strength. In Slovakia, participation in policymaking remain mostly consultative and limited in extent and type, while in Italy they are more developed.

Table 10: Extent and type of participation in policymaking in Slovakia and Italy

Dimension	Slovakia	Italy
Overall extent of participation in policymaking	Mostly value 0-1 with emerging value 2	Values 0-3
Value (0): absence of participation	Employer-led implementation without consultation with trade unions	Employer-led implementation exists in some cases
Value (1): consultative participation	Slov-lex comments; Economic and Social	Parliamentary hearings; informal/formal

	Council; Digital Coalition	consultations; OPERA; Social Partners' Consultative Body
Value (2): involvement in policy implementation	Government Council for Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence	CNEL
Value (3): decision-making authority	Not identified in the interviews	Collective agreements at national-sectoral and company levels
Type of participation in policymaking	Usage of existing channels; one new channel created	Expansion of existing channels and creation of new channel
Policy outcomes	Mostly unilateral implementation by employers	Collective agreements; some unilateral implementation

As the interviews showed, the extent and types of participation in policymaking remain limited in Slovakia. In terms of extent, participation is mostly between value (0) and value (1), although one newly created body can be classified as value (2). The dominant pattern is the absence of participation (value 0), as in several cases trade union reported that even when they attempted to open discussions on AI/AM systems, employers refused to negotiate (SKR1). Since most respondents confirmed the existence of these systems in workplaces, it can be assumed that the policy outcome in many cases is unilateral employer decision-making on the implementation of AI/AM systems, without consultation with trade unions.

A new participation channel was also recently established through the Government Council of the Slovak Republic for Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence (*Rada vlády SR pre digitálnu transformáciu a umelú inteligenciu*), created as an advisory, coordinating, and initiative body (MIRRI, 2026). Although it does not provide social partners with decision-making authority, its formal mandate goes beyond consultation. The Council coordinates digital policy processes, formulates priorities and goals, assesses legislative proposals, adopts recommendations for the government, and monitors the implementation of digital policy activities. Since the body was established only on 8 April, it is still too early to evaluate how it functions in practice, especially as the last interview with a Slovak respondent

was conducted in February. However, based on its formal role, it can be classified as value (2), as it provides social partners with participation in policy implementation.

The Digital Coalition was also mentioned by respondents as a possible arena where social partners can express their views. However, no respondent provided concrete examples of how it functions in practice (SKR1, SKR4). One employer respondent even stated that they did not know what role the body played in this area (SKR4). Therefore, it can only be cautiously classified as value (1).

In terms of the type of participation in policymaking, Slovakia shows mostly the use already existing channels, such as Slov-lex, the Economic and Social Council, and the Digital Coalition. But also, The Government Council for Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence represents a newly created participation channel in policymaking.

In contrast, Italy shows participation in policymaking across values 0-3. As discussed earlier, there is evidence that some employers introduce AI/AM systems unilaterally, without discussion with trade unions, which corresponds to value (0). At the same time, respondents reported multiple formal and informal consultations, hearings in Parliament, and meetings between social partners, which correspond to value (1).

At the institutional level and type of participation, CNEL was expanded and new body was established OPERA (*Osservatorio politiche e relazioni industriali per l'intelligenza artificiale partecipativa*) (CNEL, 2026). OPERA collects and monitors company-level cases of participatory AI involving workers and provides a forum for dialogue with industrial relations actors. It can therefore be classified as value (1), as it functions mainly as a monitoring and consultative arena related to AI, worker participation, and industrial relations. Separately, at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, social partners participate in the Social Partners' Consultative Body (*Consulta delle parti sociali*), which is part of the Observatory on the Adoption of AI Systems in the World of Work (Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, 2026). This body includes employer organizations and trade unions and has a consultative and propositional function. It contributes to the work of the Observatory by ensuring dialogue with social partners and providing input on the effects of AI on work, collective bargaining, employment, and training. Therefore, it can be classified as value (1), as it provides a consultative participation channel rather than decision-making authority. One respondent reported their presence in these institutional bodies (ITR4).

Also, the existing body of CNEL expanded by creation the OPERA. As CNEL is an institution with broader competences to issue opinions, recommendations, analytical reports, and proposals on economic and social issues, this channel can be cautiously classified as

value (2). This is because social partners are not only consulted but participate in policymaking in a more structured institutional process linked to policy development.

Finally, Italy demonstrates value (3) through collective agreements at national-sectoral and company levels. These agreements show direct decision-making authority by social partners and represent the strongest form of participation in policymaking observed in this study. The policy outcomes of these interactions are visible in concrete collective agreements regulating AI/AM systems.

To conclude, both countries show that AI/AM systems can create participation opportunities, but these opportunities are activated differently. In Slovakia, participation in policymaking remains mostly limited and consultative, with unilateral employer implementation as the dominant policy outcome, although one newly created body may provide participation in policy implementation. In Italy, participation is broader and higher in extent and type, ranging from consultation to collective agreements and having more channels of participation in policymaking.

4.5 Comparative Summary of Findings

Table 11 summarizes the overall findings from the comparison between the two countries. To discuss these findings, the thesis uses the sub-questions developed in Chapter 3.2, as these sub-questions also formed the basis of the coding tree.

Table 11: Comparative summary of findings

Themes	Slovakia	Italy
Importance of AI/AM	Growing	High
Main strategies	Trade unions (awareness-raising, Employer organizations (lobbying, comments on legislation)	Trade unions (awareness-raising, publications, training, bargaining strategies, mobilization, creation of working groups on this topic) Employer organizations (research, institutional

		participation, working groups on this topic)
Strategy type / payoff	Mostly non-confrontational	Mixed (non-confrontational and confrontational)
Actor constellation between social partners	Mostly conflictual	Mixed (conflictual/cooperative)
Dominant interaction mode between social partners	Unilateral employer action	Negotiation and unilateral employer action
Participation in policymaking (extent)	0-2 (mostly 0-1)	0-3
Existing channels expanded (type)	No	Yes
New channel created (type)	Yes (1)	Yes (1)
Policy outcomes	Mostly unilateral employer implementation	Collective agreements; some unilateral employer implementation

The first sub-question asked whether social partners and policymakers perceive AI/AM systems as important. The findings show that the issue is perceived as important in both countries, but the level of importance differs. In Italy, social partners perceive the issue as highly important, as AI/AM systems are already part of bargaining, social dialogue, and institutional discussions. In Slovakia, the importance of the issue is growing, but interest among members of employer organizations and members of trade unions is still developing.

The second sub-question focused on strategies and payoffs. Slovak social partners mainly use awareness-raising and lobbying strategies. Trade unions use awareness-raising to bring the topic into focus and to help workers identify these systems in workplaces. Both trade unions and employer organizations also use lobbying, mainly through comments and amendments, to push their interests in policymaking. These strategies are mostly non-confrontational. In Italy, strategies are more diverse and developed. Social partners use training, research, bargaining strategies, lobbying, participation through participation channels, and in some cases mobilization. Most strategies are non-confrontational, but the planned strike by major trade unions represents a confrontational strategy aimed at putting pressure on employers and the state.

The third and fourth sub-questions concerned actor constellations and modes of interaction. In Slovakia, the constellations between social partners are mostly conflictual, as employers and trade unions differ in their views on whether AI/AM systems should be subject to bargaining or consultation. The dominant mode of interaction is unilateral employer action, as employers often implement these systems without discussion with trade unions. In Italy, the constellations are mixed, both conflictual and cooperative. Unilateral employer implementation is also present, but negotiation is more visible through social dialogue, formal and informal exchanges, and collective agreements.

The fifth sub-question asked to what extent these interactions result in stronger or weaker social partner participation in policymaking. In Slovakia, participation ranges from value 0 to value 2, but most cases are closer to value 0 or value 1. This means that participation is mostly absent or consultative, with one emerging case of involvement in policy implementation through new body. In Italy, participation ranges from value 0 to value 3. This means that Italy includes not only unilateral action and consultation, but also participation in policymaking and decision-making authority through collective agreements.

The sixth sub-question focused on participation channels. In Slovakia, existing channels were used, such as Slov-lex, the Economic and Social Council, and the Digital Coalition. A new channel was also created through the Government Council for Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence. In Italy, new or expanded channels were identified, including CNEL OPERA and the Social Partners' Consultative Body within the Ministry Observatory. This shows more diverse and more channels of participation in the Italian case.

The final sub-question asked what policy outcomes were produced. In Slovakia, the main outcome is mostly unilateral employer implementation of AI/AM systems. In Italy, the outcomes are more diverse and include collective agreements, and also some cases of unilateral employer implementation.

Table 12: Assessment of analytical assumptions

Assumption	Finding	Assessment
Italian state is expected to play a more active role in the governance of AI/AM systems than the Slovak state,	The finding is partly confirmed. In Italy, more public and institutional arenas related to AI/AM governance were	Partly confirmed

given the more state-centred character of the Italian industrial relations system.	identified, including the Ministry Observatory and the Social Partners' Consultative Body, as well as CNEL-based initiatives such as OPERA. However, CNEL should not be treated as a direct government body, but as a constitutional consultative institution. Also, Italy adapted the AI Act as one of the first countries, showing the activity of the state in these manner. But, respondents in Italy still expected the state to play an even stronger role, while Slovakian state also created a new advisory and coordination body.	
Social partners in Italy are expected to adopt more proactive strategies and demonstrate higher levels of participation in policymaking in extent and type, as the Italian industrial relations system is characterized by stronger social partners than in Slovakia.	Italian social partners adopted more diverse and developed strategies than Slovak social partners. The extent and type of participation were also higher in Italy.	Confirmed
Actor constellations and modes of interaction are expected to differ between the two cases. In Italy, negotiation between social	The constellations and modes of interaction differ between the two cases. Negotiation is more visible in Italy through social dialogue and collective	Mostly confirmed

partners is expected to be more developed, as social partners have a stronger position within the industrial relations system. In Slovakia, given the weaker position of social partners, they are expected to prioritize traditional “bread-and-butter” issues, such as wages, working conditions, and job security, rather than newer issues such as AI/AM systems. As a result, unilateral employer action is expected to be more common in Slovakia, while negotiated interaction is expected to be more visible in Italy.	agreements, while Slovakia is characterized mainly by unilateral employer action. However, unilateral employer actions were observed in both countries	
Social partners in both countries are expected to use the issue of AI/AM systems as an opportunity to strengthen their position, but to different degrees. In Italy, social partners are expected to use this issue more actively by creating or expanding participation channels and by bringing the topic into collective bargaining. In Slovakia, social partners are expected	In both countries, new participation channels were created. In Italy existing channels was expanded.	Mostly confirmed

to use this issue more limitedly, mainly through participation at value (0) or (1).		
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To conclude, the findings mostly confirm the main analytical expectations of the thesis (see Table 12). AI/AM systems created opportunities for social partner participation in both countries, but these opportunities were utilized better in Italy. Italian social partners used the issue to create and expand participation channels, and the topic also entered collective bargaining, resulting in collective agreements. In this way, AI/AM systems created new opportunities for social partners to strengthen their participation in policymaking.

In Slovakia, a new participation channel was also created, but participation remains more limited, mostly consultative, and often constrained by unilateral employer action. No collective agreements on AI/AM systems were identified, and bargaining on the topic was almost absent. This suggests that the same policy issue can create different participation outcomes depending on the industrial relations system and the position of social partners within it.

At the same time, the findings also add some nuance to the assumptions. The Slovak state was not fully passive, as it created a new advisory and coordination body. However, Italy still adapted the Act faster and also expanded and created bodies and channels for participation in policymaking. Similarly, actor constellations and modes of interaction differed between the two cases, but unilateral employer action was observed not only in Slovakia, but also in Italy.

These findings provide the basis for the following discussion chapter, where they will be interpreted in relation to the literature.

Discussion

The methodology chapter formulated the following research question: **How do social partners utilize AI/AM systems as a new policy issue to increase their participation in policymaking within different industrial relations systems?** The findings also show that AI/AM systems created participation opportunities because the EU AI Act sets minimum standards that can be further developed by Member States and through collective agreements. This regulatory space allowed social partners to participate in policymaking with the topic at different levels. However, the same regulatory framework did not produce the same extent and type of participation in policymaking in both countries. In Italy, social partners were able to use the issue to participate through channels of participation, consultations, and collective bargaining and collective agreements. In Slovakia, participation opportunities also appeared, especially through the new Government Council for Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence, but the overall level of participation in policymaking remained weaker as no bargaining or agreements were identified.

This difference can be partly explained by the industrial relations systems of the two countries. Building on Visser's (2009) framework and bargaining indicators from ICTWSS, and participation channels, Italy can be considered stronger in terms of union density, bargaining coverage, centralization, coordination, and stronger participation channels and stronger social partners, especially trade unions. Slovakia, by contrast, has weaker bargaining structures, lower coverage, and more limited social partner influence as no collective agreements were observed. These differences shaped the ability of social partners to use AI/AM systems as an opportunity for participation. In Italy, the stronger position of social partners was reflected in more diverse strategies, more visible negotiation, the existence of collective agreements, and the creation or expansion of participation channels. In Slovakia, social partners were active, but their strategies were more preparatory, focused mainly on awareness-raising and lobbying.

At the same time, the findings also show that industrial relations systems do not explain everything. Slovakia still created a new body where social partners are represented and where the formal mandate goes beyond consultation. This was classified as value (2), even though such an outcome might not be fully expected given the weaker position of social partners in the Slovak industrial relations system. This can be partly explained by Visser's (2009) classification of Slovakia as positioned between liberal and state-centred regimes. This means that, although social partners are relatively weak, the state may still play an important role in creating institutional channels for participation in certain policy areas. The question is

how Slovak social partner will utilize this channel to increase their participation in policymaking.

The importance of AI/AM systems was not assumed in advance but examined empirically. This is important because, following Scharpf's framework, the salience of the policy problem influences whether actors engage with it and how they participate. The interviews showed that AI/AM systems were relevant for respondents when these technologies were already present in their sector, organization, or among their members. Where these systems were absent, or where actors were not able to identify them, the topic was less salient. This was especially visible in Slovakia, where higher-level social partners often considered the issue important, but interest among members and lower-level representatives was still weak. In Italy, by contrast, the topic was more perceived as important because AI/AM systems were already linked to bargaining, job transformation, transparency, and public debates.

The findings therefore support Scharpf's argument that institutions structure actor interactions, but they do not mechanically determine outcomes. Industrial relations systems define the rules and available channels, but actor orientations, strategies, constellations, and modes of interaction shape the outcomes and how these channels are actually used. In Slovakia, low issue salience among members and employer reluctance contributed to conflictual constellations and unilateral employer action. In Italy, stronger salience, more developed strategies, and more participation in extent and type allowed social partners to move more often towards negotiation and collective agreements. However, even in Italy, unilateral employer implementation remained present, which shows that stronger institutions do not eliminate conflict.

One important contribution of this thesis is that it shows how new policy issues may not only be addressed through existing participation channels, but may also reshape or expand them. In this thesis, participation channels are treated as part of industrial relations systems. Therefore, when AI/AM systems lead to the creation of new channels or the expansion of existing channels, they may gradually influence the industrial relations system itself. This does not mean that industrial relations systems change immediately or completely. Rather, new policy issues can add new participation channels, strengthen relationships between actors, and create new possibilities for social partners to legitimize and strengthen their role in policymaking.

This finding is especially important for the Italian case, where the state and social partners created or expanded several participation channels. In Slovakia, this process was

weaker, but the creation of the new Government Council also shows that AI/AM systems can open participation channel for social partners. The question for future research is whether these new channels will remain formal only, or whether they will become active and meaningful channels for participation. This is important because the existence of a body does not automatically mean effective participation. As one Slovak respondent suggested in relation to the Digital Coalition, some bodies may exist formally but remain unclear or weak in practice. Future research could examine whether, in the medium and long term, new policy issues such as AI/AM systems strengthen the position of social partners, and whether newly created participation channels become stable and transferable arenas of policymaking.

Nevertheless, Italian social partners still expect more from the state. Several respondents perceived the role of the state as too passive or too general, especially because they expected the state to bring social partners together and coordinate a shared process in the ongoing transformation. This is important because some respondents also pointed to broader tendencies of deregulation, decentralization, and weaker coordination in Italian industrial relations. In this sense, although Italy still has a stronger bargaining tradition than Slovakia, some developments may reduce coordination and make participation more fragmented.

One related problem is the issue of so-called “pirate agreements” (*contratti pirata*). These are collective agreements usually signed by less representative or little-known employer organizations and trade unions, often with weaker standards than agreements signed by the main representative social partners. Research on Italy shows that these agreements can be associated with lower wages and weaker labor standards, and they are often linked to problems of representativeness and fragmentation in the collective bargaining system. The latest Italian law adopted by the government does not address this problem but instead risks worsening it (Faioli, 2026). This is relevant for the thesis because it shows that even in a stronger industrial relations system, social partner participation can be weakened if representation is fragmented or if less representative actors are used to bypass stronger collective bargaining structures.

The thesis also has implications for public policy. Participatory policymaking may improve policymaking by bringing expertise and inside information into the policy process, as argued in the theoretical part. Since social partners represent workers and employers, their participation may help create rules that are more balanced, more transparent, and easier to implement. This is especially relevant in the governance of AI/AM systems, where technical regulation alone may not be sufficient to address workplace specific effects. Social partner

participation in policymaking could therefore contribute to better regulation, stronger compliance, and greater legitimacy.

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be formulated:

- First, in both countries, the state could play a more active role in communicating, coordinating, and supporting the implementation of the AI Act. Respondents in both countries mentioned the complexity of the Act, which suggests that social partners and companies may need clearer guidance. The state could also support companies in adapting these technologies in a human-centered way, especially where companies are still in the testing phase or lack knowledge and organizational skills to implement AI/AM systems properly.

- Second, both Italian and Slovak social partners should continue promoting awareness and knowledge about AI/AM systems among workers, employers, and their own members, especially in Slovakia, where awareness is still low. This is important because these technologies are likely to become more common in workplaces, given their economic potential. Workshops, trainings on how to work with these systems, and awareness-raising initiatives can help workers and representatives understand how AI/AM systems function, learn how to work with them, and adapt them more effectively in the workplace. In Slovakia, such activities could also help raise interest among members and bring the topic into social dialogue. A better understanding of these technologies can also support more workplace-oriented implementation. For example, it can help ensure that AI/AM systems take workers' needs into account and avoid negative cases such as the one described by Håkansta et al. (2024), where drivers in Norway reported that the system did not account for workers' toilet breaks.

- Third, in Italy, the state should ensure that existing transparency rules are effectively enforced. Trade union respondents emphasized that, despite existing legal frameworks, transparency remains insufficient in practice and workers often do not know whether AI/AM systems are being used or how they function. This suggests that stronger monitoring and clearer enforcement responsibilities are needed. Without effective enforcement, formal transparency rights may remain weak in practice.

Conclusion

This thesis examined how AI/AM systems can be utilized to increase social partner participation in policymaking within different industrial relations systems. The findings show that AI/AM systems created opportunities for social partner participation in both Slovakia and Italy, but the extent and type of participation differed between the two cases.

In Italy, social partners were able to use these opportunities more actively and more quickly. The issue of AI/AM systems entered social bargaining, formal and informal discussions and became relevant in Italy. New and expanded participation channels were identified, and collective agreements at national-sectoral and company levels showed the strongest form of participation in policymaking. This means that in Italy, AI/AM systems created not only consultative opportunities, but also opportunities for social partners to participate in policymaking through bargaining and channels of participation.

In Slovakia, these opportunities remained more limited. Participation was mostly consultative and often constrained by unilateral employer action. Employers frequently implemented AI/AM systems without consultation with trade unions or worker representatives. However, Slovakia also showed some development, especially through the creation of the Government Council for Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence. This indicates that even in a weaker industrial relations system, a new policy issue such as AI/AM systems can still create some new space for social partner participation in policymaking. This can be partly explained by Visser's (2009) classification of Slovakia as positioned between liberal and state-centered regimes, meaning that the state is an important actor in the given industrial relations system.

The assumptions based on industrial relations systems were therefore mostly confirmed. Italy, with stronger social partners, higher bargaining coverage, more coordinated bargaining, and more stronger existing participation channels, showed higher participation in policymaking. Slovakia, with weaker social partners and more limited participation channels, showed more limited extent and types of participation. However, the creation of a new participation channel in Slovakia suggests that new policy issues can also open new participation channels, even in systems where social partner participation is generally weaker.

As these participation channels define industrial relations systems it can gradually influence the industrial relations system itself. In this sense, AI/AM systems did not only become a topic within existing institutions, but were also utilized to develop new channels where social partners can participate in policymaking.

More broadly, the thesis showed that AI/AM systems are not only technological tools, but also policy issues that can change the workplace. For this reason, the EU used input from

many different actors when creating the AI Act. In this sense, the AI Act can be understood as a participatory regulation, both in how it was created and in how it is still being shaped during the implementation stage, including by social partners.

However, the role of the state and the model of governance remain important, as they can shape how policymaking takes place and whether other actors are included in the process. The thesis argued that participatory policymaking and governance models that include other actors can be beneficial for policymakers, as they can bring resources, expertise, legitimacy, and electoral support. They may also make regulation easier to implement, as actors who were involved in the process may be more likely to comply with the rules, while the state may spend fewer resources on monitoring and control.

To conclude, the thesis showed how a participatory approach can work in the case of AI Act implementation in the EU and in different national industrial relations systems. The comparison between Slovakia and Italy showed that industrial relations systems affect how social partner participation differs across countries. Future research could examine whether these new participation channels actually strengthen social partners' position in the medium and long term, or whether they remain temporary channels created only for the specific issue of AI/AM systems.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview questions for respondents

Interview on the Use of Artificial Intelligence and Algorithmic Management in Human Resource Management in Slovakia and Italy

Before we start the interview: I would like to briefly explain what I mean by artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithmic management (AM) in the context of this interview.

Algorithms are rules that produce predefined outcomes, for example: “if A happens, then do B.” A company can use basic algorithmic management systems for simple tasks, such as tracking attendance – the system can alert a manager if an employee does not show up at work. A human still defines the rules and decides on the outcomes.

Example: Doodle – people vote on when they are available for a meeting, and the algorithm selects the day and time with the most votes.

Artificial intelligence (AI) – a system that learns from data and can create its own rules (algorithms) and decisions.

Modern algorithmic management systems often use AI – e.g., machine learning (ML) and large amounts of data – to detect patterns and correlations that humans might not even imagine. This allows them to optimize, for example: shift planning, task allocation, or employee performance evaluation. They are used to support decision-making processes.

Example: The system notices that an employee (attendance, absences) often misses work on the day when their favorite sports team plays (as indicated in a questionnaire), and it can take this into account when planning shifts or predicting absences.

Question for the respondent: Do you understand the difference between basic algorithmic management (AM), artificial intelligence (AI), and AM using AI? Can we start the interview?

Questions:

I. Identification

- 1) Which organization do you represent?
- 2) In which sector do you operate?
- 3) What is your position or role within the organization?
- 4) How are you personally involved in collective bargaining and social dialogue?

II. Awareness of the Topic

- 5) Do you perceive this topic (AI and AM) as important for the labor market in Slovakia/Italy?
- 6) Are you aware of any actions/activities in this area – for example, by the government, the EU (e.g., the EU AI Act), or other institutions?
- 7) Which leading state representatives or social partners are currently addressing or working on this topic (e.g., ministries, trade unions, employers)?
- 8) Does your organization include this topic in its program, strategy, or priorities?

III. Understanding AI and Algorithmic Management

9) Do you think AI systems, algorithmic management (AM), or AM using AI are already present in Slovak/Italian workplaces in the field of human resource management? Can you provide a specific example?

In which sectors or types of companies are these systems most commonly used? Are these systems mainly associated with:

- **Pure algorithmic management (AM)** – executing predefined rules, e.g., monitoring, task allocation, evaluation;
- **AM using AI** – traditional algorithmic management that uses AI to learn from data and recommend decisions;
- **AI decision-making** – the system independently analyzes data and makes decisions or predictions without predefined rules?

10) In which areas of human resource management do you think AI or algorithmic management systems are currently used or could be best utilized in Slovak/Italian workplaces, and why? (e.g., monitoring, task completion, breaks, working hours, employee speed or location).

11) Recent OECD research has shown that one reason for implementing these systems is managers' belief that they increase productivity and work efficiency. What is your view on this? Do you see other benefits or positive experiences from practice?

12) In your opinion, what are the main risks or challenges associated with using AI or algorithmic management? Various studies point to issues such as lack of transparency and trustworthiness in decision-making processes. How do you perceive these risks? Have you encountered them in your practice, or do you anticipate other challenges?

13) Of the areas you mentioned, which do you think require regulation and which do not? Why? What form of regulation do you consider most appropriate?

14) In your opinion, are there specific challenges that make regulating these systems difficult? For example, technical limitations or other factors that you believe complicate or reduce the effectiveness of regulation.

IV. Collective Bargaining and Social Dialogue

15) Is the topic of AI or algorithmic management discussed within social dialogue and collective bargaining?

- Please provide examples (if possible, both paper or digital versions).
- At what level does the dialogue take place (company, sectoral, national)?
- Between which actors? Are these bipartite or tripartite negotiations?
- Which specific topics are subject to negotiation? (e.g., data use, monitoring, right to disconnect, algorithm transparency)
- Approximately how many collective agreements or initiatives between social partners have addressed AI/AM topics in the past year?

16) Are you aware of other social partner initiatives? For example, in other companies, unions, sectors, etc.

- Follow-up question: specific examples, guidelines, agreements, initiatives, joint statements, campaigns, training sessions.

V. Initiatives

17) Apart from collective bargaining and social dialogue, what other initiatives does your organization use to raise awareness of AI and algorithmic management? For example, internal initiatives (e.g., training for employees, internal guidelines, manuals, workshops, ethical codes, memoranda, informal discussions) or external initiatives (e.g., collaboration with the government or parliament – laws, programs, recommendations; or within social dialogue).

- Can you provide specific examples or materials?

18) How is interest in AI and algorithmic management initiatives developing in your organization or sector?

- Do you perceive growing interest in these topics?
- Who is driving this interest (members, employees, management, government, unions)?
- Do you think more attention should be given to this topic?
- Is this topic discussed in any forums or meetings?
- How often have you discussed it over the past year?
- Have any special committees or working groups been created for this purpose?

19) If AI/AM is not being discussed or negotiated, why do you think this is the case? One example could be lack of interest or prioritization of other topics.

20) How would you describe the cooperation between the state, employers, and unions on AI and algorithmic management issues?

- Follow-up question: What role do you think each partner should play?

VI. Rules and Measures for Implementing and Using Software

21) Does your organization have any measures in place for using AI or AM? For example, regular audits or an ethics committee.

22) If your organization currently does not use AI/AM software, would you consider implementing it?

- If not, why? (high costs, employee resistance, distrust, other)
- If yes, which software and for what purpose?

23) Is there anything else you would like to add – something I did not ask but you consider important?

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, please contact:

Daryn Zholdasbay + my email

Appendix 2: Consent form

Title of the Thesis:

Governing AI and Algorithmic Management in the Workplace: How Different Polities Enable Stakeholder Participation

Researcher:

Daryn Zholdasbay

Purpose of the Thesis:

The rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithmic management (AM) in European workplaces raises challenges for labour rules and workplace governance. This study looks at how Slovakia and Italy manage these challenges, focusing on the role of trade unions and employer associations. It examines how these organisations participate in policies, decision-making and governance at national, sectoral, and company levels.

Data to be Collected:

- Audio and video recordings of interviews for internal research purposes only.
- Information on collective agreements, social dialogue, and other initiatives.
- All data will be processed anonymously.

Use of Data:

- For the researcher's (Daryn Zholdasbay) master's thesis.

Data Protection Measures:

- Data will be processed anonymously.
- Data will be stored securely by the researcher (Daryn Zholdasbay).

Who Will Have Access:

- Daryn Zholdasbay and Marta Kahancová (thesis supervisor)

Publication of Results:

- Results will be published anonymously, with no possibility of identifying participants.

Data Retention:

- Data will be stored for 5 years.

Participant Rights under GDPR:

- **Access to Data** – request access to your data.
- **Correction** – request correction of inaccurate data.
- **Deletion** – request deletion of data ("right to be forgotten").
- **Restriction of Processing** – request limitation of data use.
- **Data Portability** – receive your data in a structured, commonly used format.
- **Objection to Processing** – object to processing based on legitimate interests or public interest.
- **Withdrawal of Consent** – withdraw consent for data processing at any time.

Voluntary Participation:

- Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

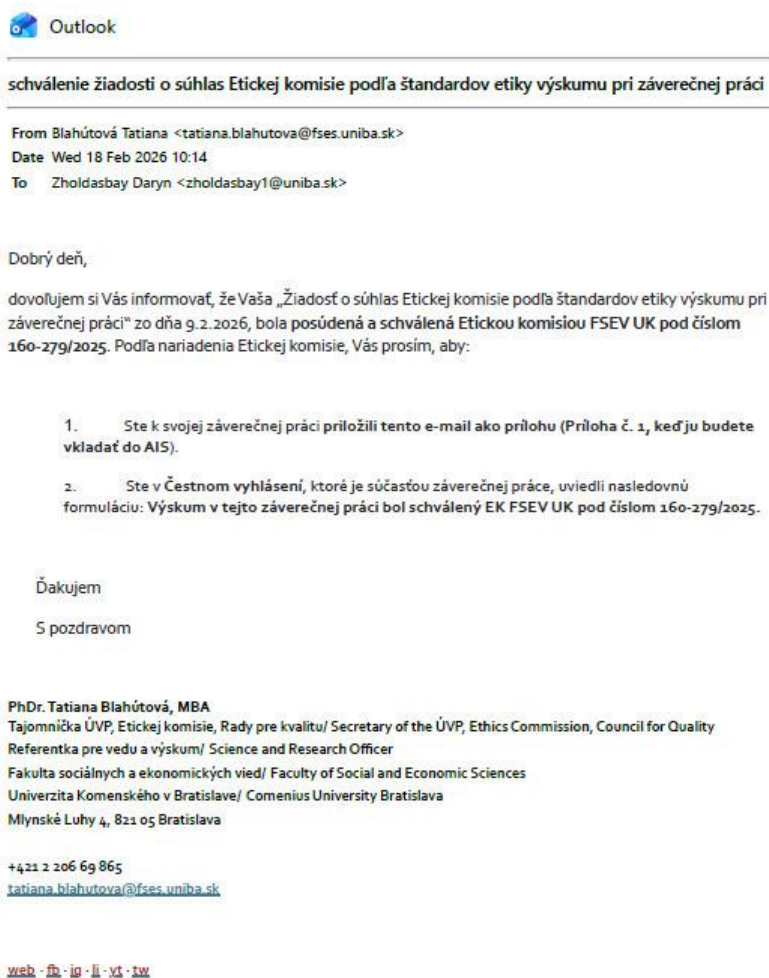
Video/Audio Consent:

I agree / disagree to the recording of the audio/video of this interview.

Confirmation of Participation:

- I have read and understood the information provided.
- I voluntarily agree to participate in this interview.

Appendix 3: Research Approval from the Ethic Committee



schválenie žiadosti o súhlas Etickej komisie podľa štandardov etiky výskumu pri závere

From Blahútová Tatiana <tatiana.blahutova@fses.uniba.sk>
Date Thu 13 Nov 2025 14:36
To Zholdasbay Daryn <zholdasbay1@uniba.sk>

Dobrý deň,

dovoľujem si Vás informovať, že Vaša „Žiadosť o súhlas Etickej komisie podľa štandardov etiky výskumu pri záverečnej práci“ zo dňa 3.11.2025, bola posúdená a schválená Etickou komisiou FSEV UK pod číslom 160-225/2025. Podľa nariadenia Etickej komisie, Vás prosím, aby:

1. Ste k svojej záverečnej práci priložili tento e-mail ako prílohu (Príloha č. 1, keď ju budete vkladať do AIS).
2. Ste v Čestnom vyhlásení, ktoré je súčasťou záverečnej práce, uviedli nasledovnú formuláciu: Výskum v tejto záverečnej práci bol schválený EK FSEV UK pod číslom 160-225/2025.

Ďakujem

S pozdravom

PhDr. Tatiana Blahútová, MBA
Tajomníčka ÚVP, Etickej komisie, Rady pre kvalitu/ Secretary of the ÚVP, Ethics Commission, Council for Quality
Referentka pre vedu a výskum/ Science and Research Officer
Fakulta sociálnych a ekonomických vied/ Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences
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Appendix 4: Interviews in Slovakia

Respondent code	Respondent identification	Interview date	Format	Interviewer(s)
SKR1	Trade union, sector-level, industrial sector	27.11.2025	Online	Author
SKR2	Employer organization, national level	14.11.2025	Online	Author and thesis supervisor
SKR3	Trade union, national level	15.12.2025	In person	Author
SKR4	Employer organization, national level	13.2.2026	In person	Author and thesis supervisor

Appendix 5: Interviews in Italy

Respondent code	Respondent identification	Interview date	Format
ITR1	Trade union, sector-level, services sector	26.03.2026	Email
ITR2	Employer organization, sector-level regional level, private sector	28.03.2026	Audio
ITR3	Trade union, sector-level, industrial sector, affiliated expert body	30.03.2026	Email
ITR4	Trade union, national level	17.04.2026	Email

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