

MÄRT MASSO

Employment relations in Estonia:
employee control, participation
and work accommodation in
co-determining working conditions



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LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

- Study I.** Masso, M. (2013). Determinants of employee work schedule and method control. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 34(3), 451–69. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X12451348>.
- Study II.** Masso, M. (2015). The determinants of employee participation in occupational health and safety management. *International Journal of Occupational Safety and Ergonomics*, 21(1), 62–70. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10803548.2015.1017959>.
- Study III.** Masso, M., Foster, D., Osila, L., Bábel, B., Czarzasty, J., Kiss, A., Koziarek, M., & Owczarek, D. (2019). The influence of collective employment relations on work accommodation: Case studies in Estonia, Hungary and Poland. *Transfer*, 25(4), 451–64. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1024258919828597>.
- Study IV.** Foster, D., Masso, M., & Osila, L. (2021). Work accommodations and sustainable working: The role of social partners and industrial relations in the employment of disabled and older people in Estonia, Hungary and Poland. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 27(2), 149–65. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959680120971896>.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

- Study I.** The author was responsible for all aspects of this article (including the analysis and writing of the theoretical, methodological and discussion parts).
- Study II.** The author was responsible for all aspects of this article (including the analysis and writing of the theoretical, methodological and discussion parts).
- Study III.** The author was responsible for all aspects of writing this article. The author was also the lead researcher in the research project the article is based on. The second and third authors of the article contributed by writing minor parts and by editing the manuscript. The other listed authors were active in preparing and executing case studies in their countries and analysing and evaluating the collected information. The importance of all the authors in designing and executing the research project the article is based on is greatly appreciated.
- Study IV.** As the second author of this article, the author contributed by writing the minor theoretical and analytical parts, including the discussion and conclusions and by editing the manuscript. The first author outlined the theoretical approach and conceptualised the whole analysis. The third author contributed by designing the study and reviewing the writing. The author of the thesis was also the lead researcher in the research project the article is based on.

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KEY TERMS

Employment relations – Refers to individual and collective governance of work and employment, key dimensions of which are industrial democracy, industrial competitiveness, social justice, and job and employment quality (Welz et al., 2016). It defines the social relationship between employer and employee in the context of the workplace and institutions beyond organisational settings, primarily collective and government regulation of employment and working conditions.

Participation in occupational health and safety management – Refers to employee involvement in and influence on health and safety management. It describes the extent to which employees have access to information sharing, joint consultation, and joint decision-making processes for the purpose of creating a healthy work environment and working conditions (Wilkinson et al., 2010, p. 10).

Power – Within the system of employment relations, power refers to the characteristics of the parties involved in co-determining working conditions. In addition to one's ability to get someone to do something they would not otherwise do (Dahl, 1957), the conceptualisation of power should take into account the techniques parties use to diminish others' ability and awareness to assert ownership of their own interests (Lukes, 1974), as well as the structures that empower parties in organisational settings (Clegg, 1989).

Work accommodation – Refers to practices and efforts to modify any aspect of a work environment or working conditions to enable individuals with functional limitations or disabilities to perform their work (Kwan and Schultz, 2016, p. 272).

Work schedule control – Refers to employee discretion in managing their work timing and, indirectly, their overall working time. The degree of control workers have over their timing (and total hours of work) describes their decision latitude and discretion, which is influenced by employment relations (Berg et al., 2004, p. 331).

Working conditions – Refers to the working environment and aspects of an employee's terms and conditions of employment. This covers such matters as the organisation of work and work activities, working time, training, skills, employability, health, safety, well-being, and work-life balance. Working conditions are co-determined within employment relationships (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2021).

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Focus of the thesis

The cover text of my thesis will discuss employment relations, specifically the co-determination of working conditions and employee discretion in the Estonian employment relations system. Employment relations can be defined as the individual and collective governance of work and employment, the key dimensions of which are industrial democracy, industrial competitiveness, social justice, and job and employment quality (Welz et al., 2016). Employment relations concern the regulation or governance of relations between workers, employers, organisations, and supra-organisational institutions like employment law and social dialogue.

In my research, I explore three different approaches to the co-determination of working conditions in Estonia. Firstly, the two earlier articles upon which this cover text is based focus on explaining the variability in employee discretion over work schedules in the Estonian employment relations system. As employment relationships inherently involve collective action, employee discretion is influenced by other agents and organisational practices. Correspondingly, the second article studies employee participation in occupational health and safety management in Estonia as a collective organisational practice. Finally, since institutions and actors beyond the organisation play a role in co-determining working conditions, the third and fourth articles focus on collective employment relations regarding work accommodation as a social practice aimed at establishing and enabling suitable working conditions for disabled individuals in Estonia.

1.2. System of employment relations in Estonia

The three approaches to co-determining working conditions explore the central puzzle of industrial relations: Who possesses power, and in whose interest is that power used in industrial relations? From the employees' perspective, on the one hand, the key presumption is that employee control in employment relationships leads to increased job quality and improved working conditions. On the other hand, work and employment are collective endeavours, and individual control is influenced by and must take into account the individual and collective control of other persons, collectives, and institutions. The emergence of social relations within, between, and beyond the organisation highlights the importance of the employment relations system as a whole.

In the grand historical narrative of employment relations (Edgell, 2005; Graham, 2006), the transition from pre-modern societies to modern (capitalist) work processes saw workers moved from households to work organisations. During this transformation, workers witnessed the removal of both worker control over the work process and the product from the worker, enabling capitalists and their managers to supervise and control workers. Further development of modern forms

of industrial production saw workers organising into trade unions and political parties in an attempt to improve their working conditions and resist the deterioration of their power within employment (Edgell, 2005; Graham, 2006). Particularly since the late 20th and early 21st centuries, authors have debated the possibility of a new emergence of workplace democracy and consensual authority that reintroduces worker control into the work process and employment relations. However, this debate has revolved around the question of whether power is indeed being transferred from company to worker or if a new veiled transfer of power from worker to company is taking place (Edgell, 2005; Graham, 2006).

The study of the Estonian employment relations system reveals the complex and diverse reality of industrial relations systems in Europe as well as the variety of industrial relations institutions and outcomes in working conditions. Various typologies, developed in tandem, characterise the Estonian system in different ways. Recently, the European Commission located Estonia within the group of countries characterised by fragmented and state-centred industrial relations regimes (European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2016). In this group, working conditions are primarily co-determined at the company level, employee representation is based on both limited trade union and employee representatives in the workplace, bargaining style is acquiescent, and social partners' participation in employment policy-making is irregular. Similarly, Welz et al. (2016) classified Estonia as a Central-Eastern industrial relations system in which (i) the transition to a market economy is reflected in fragmented employment institutions; (ii) a comparatively weak legal framework for industrial relations contributes to under-resourced institutions and more voluntary initiatives than mandatory actions; (iii) employers' representatives accept corporate social responsibility on a voluntary basis, and employee representatives are concerned with their limited capacity to influence social dialogue and co-determine working conditions; and (iv) governments focus on the development of workforce skills and the inclusion of minorities in their efforts to promote industrial competitiveness and social justice. Sanz de Miguel and his colleagues (2020), in arguably the most empirical analysis of the varieties of industrial relations systems in Europe, concluded that Estonia's (along with Poland's and the United Kingdom's) stable system (which showed minimal variation during 2008–2012/2013–2017) belongs to the market-oriented category. Countries in this category achieve the lowest scores on industrial democracy ratings, which evaluate the governance of the employment relationship based on social dialogue, collective bargaining, and workers' participation at the company level. Nevertheless, despite relatively weak social partners, low levels of decentralised and coordinated collective bargaining, and the minor role the government plays in co-determining working conditions, Estonia (and the United Kingdom) scored above the EU average in social dialogue performance at the company level.

The employment relations system and its impact on the co-determination of working conditions is a dynamic historical process, particularly noteworthy in Estonia, which has undergone considerable socio-economic transformation in recent decades (see also Roots, 2013; Kallaste, 2010). Throughout this transfor-

mation, the practices and processes that social partners have used to shape their directions have been assessed as promising (Kall, 2020).

With respect to the historical process leading to the contemporary period, less is known about the actual process of convergence or divergence of industrial relations systems in Europe. Similarly, the question of whether, compared to other European countries, industrial relations systems in Estonia have become more or less homogenous remains unanswered. Past studies stress the persistence of national variance and the risk of downward convergence in regulation and working conditions due to the enlargement of the European Union and negative economic cycles (Vos, 2006; Marginson and Sisson, 2002; R. Hyman, 2012). Vaughan-Whitehead (2019) showed that, as a rule, collective bargaining coverage and union density in Europe decreased between 2000 and 2016, with Estonia an extreme case¹ where union membership declined by more than 55%.

However, the focus of these studies has been on institutions and collective mechanisms of co-determining working conditions, which, as discussed above, are not key characteristics of the Estonian employment relations system. Empirically, little is known about the actual power balance in employment relationships. Yet, one study indicates that in the dimension of employee discretion (defined as the right to decide the order of tasks, the speed of work, and the methods used, known as decision latitude), European countries have seen weak downward convergence between 1995 and 2015 (in the form of collective deterioration in the average of the variable of interest in the Member States and a reduction of disparities over the period analysed). Notably, Estonia is among the countries where the decision latitude of workers improved relative to other countries² (Warhurst et al., 2019).

Shifting attention from past transformations and convergence (or lack thereof) to future developments, foresight or forecasting studies have not provided a complete picture of the future of industrial relations. Instead, they have concentrated on its collective aspects. Most notably, Hyman (2015) outlined three scenarios for the future of industrial relations in Europe: the first projects the erosion of national industrial relations systems and conditions of employment; the second envisions “elite reform” as succeeding in reengineering industrial relations and workers’ protection according to an ideal social policy agenda; the third centres on a counter-movement from below, challenging trade unions to mobilise discontented groups far beyond their traditional constituency. The research narrative (R. Hyman, 2018) suggests that in Central and Eastern Europe, including Estonia, where systems of organised employment relations have not been as extensively developed, the scope for unilateral dominance by (particularly foreign-owned) employers has expanded further than in other areas. Due to the European Union’s capacity to strengthen

¹ Other countries include Czech Republic, Latvia, Slovakia, Romania.

² The list of countries where the decision latitude improved: Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain. The list of countries where cognitive discretion improved: Czechia, Lithuania, Malta

the “social dimension” of employment regulation, this narrative encourages the erosion of nationally based employment protections, provoking a growing divergence in outcomes related to working conditions and job quality. In summary, the institutional analysis of the employment relations system outlines a prospective future in which employee discretion and control over working conditions are unlikely to increase.

1.3. Co-determination of working conditions

From the historical overview of the development of the employment relations system presented above, the main conclusion of the cover text of my thesis is that throughout history, Estonia, like other European countries, has witnessed fluctuations in the power balance between workers and work organisations. When compared to the employment relations systems of other European countries, the Estonian system falls within the category of countries in which collective institutions of representation and public regulation of working conditions are limited. However, the evidence also indicates that employee participation at the company level in Estonia is above the European average, and employees’ rights to decide their working conditions have increased and are catching up with other European countries.

The research described in this cover text focuses on the current state of the Estonian employment relations system. It is based on three articles that focus on the spectrum of employees’ occupational, organisational, and collective institutional authority in co-determining working conditions in Estonia. The central theme of the thesis is visualised in Figure 1. This thesis contributes to the literature on employment relations by examining employee work schedule control, employee participation in occupational health and safety management, and the architecture of employees’ choices in relation to enabling working conditions, i.e. work accommodation for disabled workers. The four studies forming the basis of this thesis seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What factors influence employee control and discretion in Estonian employment relationships?
2. What factors influence employee participation in occupational health and safety management in Estonia?
3. What measures can social partners and the government take to empower co-determination of working conditions to accommodate work in Estonia?

Beyond the research questions of the four studies, the cover text discusses the lessons concerning employment relations in Estonia that can be taken from these studies. The main research questions addressed in the cover text are:

1. What is the personal and societal value of industrial democracy and employee discretion on working conditions in Estonian society and economy?

2. How does Estonia compare to other employment relations systems in terms of employee work schedule control, employee participation in occupational health and safety management, and co-determining work accommodations?
3. How is power embedded in the different practices of co-determining working conditions within the employment relations system, particularly in the Estonian context?

The principal contribution of this dissertation is the systematic study of employee discretion in employment relationships in Estonia, encompassing various aspects of working conditions and factors that determine employee discretion. While the institutions of employment relationships have been studied in many Central and Eastern European countries, including Estonia, fewer studies have been conducted on employees' actual or perceived control over working conditions and its implications for our understanding of the Estonian employment relations system. The three realms of employment relations – working time, occupational health and safety, and accommodation of working conditions – can be considered key dimensions of the quality of employment relations, analysis of which can shed light on workplace democracy. Also extending the scope of previous studies is the use of multilevel data and models for studying the relationship between employers and their employees and participatory research that involves parties in employment relationships in the research process.

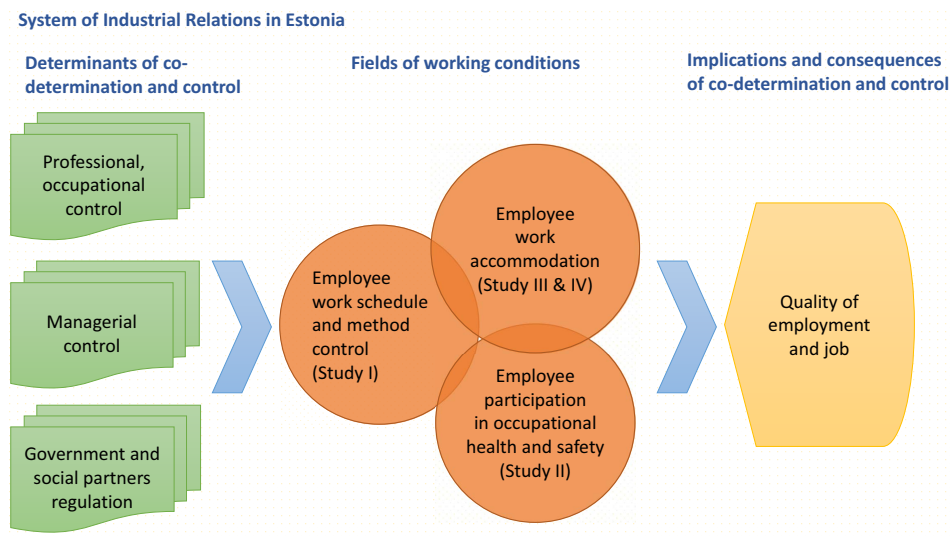


FIGURE 1. SCHEMATICS ON FOCUSES OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN THE THESIS

Source: Author's visualisation

1.4. Structure of the cover text

The main body of the cover text is organised into five chapters:

1. Research setting: In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the theoretical frameworks crucial for conceptualising the studies in the thesis, address theoretical and empirical gaps not fully explored in the articles, and introduce my research questions

2. Methodology: In this chapter, I present the mixed methods approach employed in the studies. This approach includes quantitative multilevel analysis and participatory comparative case studies. I also discuss various methodological considerations that must be taken into account when employing these methods.

3. Findings: In this chapter, I describe the theoretical context for my studies and review the significance and results of each study conducted.

4. Discussion: In this chapter, I explain and evaluate the study results, providing insights into how they contribute to our understanding of industrial relations within the Estonian context. I also consider the future prospects of industrial relations in Estonia.

5. Conclusions: In the final chapter, I summarise the key takeaways from the studies and discuss the potential avenues for future research in the field.

2. SETTING THE PROBLEM: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

Employment relations constitute a distinct form of social relations. One of the central characteristics of employment relations and a key theme recurring in the study of work and occupations is the control exercised by employees in co-determining working conditions³. The concept of co-determination in terms of employment and working conditions and the bargaining power of workers, employers, and organisations in employment relations has been both explanatory and response concept pivotal in efforts to understand the dynamics of labour and employment (Clegg et al., 2006).

Studies examining control in the context of work reflect the development of the social sciences in general and the socio-economic study of work and occupations in particular. As Ritzer (1989) and Simpson (1989) explain, early work in this field primarily focused on micro-level analysis that presumed workers to be creative actors in control of their immediate work environment. In the middle period of the field, the focus was on control as a macro-level phenomenon and the impact of macro-level factors on passive actors. These two periods represent two distinct research traditions: (i) the autonomy of work approach and (ii) labour process theory. More recent work in the field has brought these two traditions together to examine the link between micro and macro factors and how it has influenced the study of work, organisations, and employment relations (Ritzer, 1989; Simpson, 1989).

In the next section, I expound upon these approaches to control and co-determination within employment relations by outlining the different (albeit related) perspectives on control of work employed in the social and behavioural sciences: autonomy of work, labour process theory, and more recent theories of power and agency-structure relationships in employment relations.

2.2. Autonomy of work and decision latitude

One of the earliest contributions to the autonomy of work research perspective was the “job characteristic model” developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976). The model focused on how to design enriched work experiences, identifying autonomy as a key factor influencing both emotional and behavioural reactions to work. A similar model, the “job demands-job decision latitude model”, was formulated by Karasek (1979). Karasek’s model focuses on the conflict between demand and control, specifically decision latitude, which manifests as a lack of decision

³ Instead of control, similar concepts like bargaining power, authority, autonomy, participation, discretion have been used to refer to this phenomenon.

authority over one's work and a low level of skill use that can lead to monotonous tasks and physical and mental strain.

This perspective draws extensively from the psychology of work and adheres to methodological individualism. Autonomy and control are mostly attributed to personal characteristics like personality and skills, while autonomy itself is defined as the ability to make decisions about one's work (Karasek, 1979). Most empirical work within this tradition concentrates on issues related to workers' autonomy and control (see Breugh, 1989, 1998; Brady et al., 1990). Interpretations in this context are primarily derived from management and organisational theories, particularly from work design theories. Hornung et al. (2010, p. 188) summarise three work design concepts taken from both research and management theory and practice: (1) job redesign that is initiated and planned by managers top-down with the aim of achieving better worker performance and motivation and treats employees as passive recipients of interventions; (2) job crafting that emphasises employee discretion when it comes to designing tasks and interactions to reflect workers personal needs and treats employees as active actors; and (3) job crafting that considers workers to be both active actors and recipients and frames work design in the context of employee-management negotiation with the aim of designing work for mutual benefit and thus considers workers both active actors and passive recipients.

In summary, the autonomy of work perspective primarily focuses on individual control and the design of work, paying less attention to the broader concepts of control and power within social theory. In the sense that it focuses upon the control that the worker-as-agent derives from their personal characteristics, the autonomy of work perspective is a psychological approach. In the sense that it is concerned with the ways in which work design can enable organisations, workers, or the two together to achieve desired employment relations, it is a managerial approach.

2.3. Labour process theory

The theoretical foundations of labour process theory were laid by Braverman (1974) and later developed by Burawoy (1979), Edwards (1979), and Friedman (1977). Braverman (1974) argues that work in modern capitalist systems is structured according to principles of scientific management, where management fully controls the knowledge and design of the production process. Labour process theory posits that work in the capitalist system is organized in such a way as to de-skill workers and separate conception from execution, thus depriving workers of control of their work. For Braverman, control represented "the central concept of all management systems" (Braverman, 1974, p. 68), and much of the scholarship in this tradition has sought to explain how control over the labour process shifted from workers to management. Friedman (1977) expanded the discussion of control by drawing attention to the forms of control other than direct control that are present in capitalist systems and work organisations. One example of such forms of control is the policy of responsible autonomy, under which management

“attempts to harness the adaptability of labour power by giving workers leeway and encouraging them to adapt to changing situations in a manner beneficial to the firm” (Braverman, 1974, p. 78). Edwards’s (1979) analysis draws our attention to the genealogy of control strategies. He distinguishes between three kinds of control strategy: “simple control”, which is more common in small organisations; “technical control”, which relies on technological systems and machinery to control the labour process; and “bureaucratic control”, which relies on elaborate rules of conduct and is common in large organizations. Both Edward and Friedman argued that new forms of control are often introduced in response to worker resistance to the existing forms of control. Burawoy’s work (1979) diverges from earlier work in the traditions in so far as it places greater emphasis on the production of consent and coercion. Burawoy argued that management creates consent by allowing choice in a restrictive environment, suggesting that “it is participation in choosing that generates consent” (Burawoy, 1979, p. 27).

In summary, labour process theory offers a macro-level analysis of the way managers’ power is maintained in organizations and its general consequences for employment relations and social relations. It posits that managerial action in modern societies is motivated by the strategies organisations and employers employ to control labour via consent to capital-labour relations in both the economy and society more generally. At least in its classical forms, labour process theory derives its theoretical framework from structuralist theories, one consequence of which has been a tendency to neglect worker agency (Ackroyd, 2009).

2.4. Structuration theory in organisational and work research

In conceptualising control in the study of work, the autonomy of work perspective and labour process theory focus, respectively, on micro-level agency and macro-level structures. Structuration theory represents one attempt to reconcile these “over-” and “under-socialized” models by providing a more balanced framework that considers both agency and structure (see, for example, Alexander, 1987; Bourdieu, 1977; Joas, 1996; Sewell, 1992; for a comprehensive review of the literature, see Jones, 2015).

According to Giddens, social systems exhibit a duality of structures, meaning that “the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize” (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). Structuration theory maintains that human or organisational agency is performed within the pre-existing social structures that shape agency. At the same time, structures are continuously recreated and modified by the enactment of agency. Giddens defines the social structure as “rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems” (Giddens, 1984, p. 377). While adding that: “Structure exists only as memory traces, the organic basis of human knowledgeability, and as instantiated in action” (Giddens, 1984, p. 377). Correspondingly, rules, more specifically the rules of social life, are defined as “generalizable procedures applied

in the enactment/reproduction of social life” (Giddens, 1984, p. 21). Finally, according to Sewell, Giddens defines resources as “anything that can serve as a source of power in social interactions” (Sewell, 1992, p. 9).

Giddens (1979, 1981, 1984) states that power is embedded in the interactions between workers and organisations/managers, and it is this structure that is reproduced by both workers and organisations/management. He explains that “all social interaction involves the use of power, as a necessary implication of the logical connection between human action and transformative capacity. Power within social systems can be analysed as relations of autonomy and dependence between actors in which these actors draw upon and reproduce structural properties of domination” (Giddens, 1981, p. 456). Knights and Roberts suggest that Giddens “sought to replace individualistic concepts of action and power with relational concepts”, which, they claim, “provide a fruitful basis for the analysis of power in organizations” (Knights & Roberts, 1982, p. 49). For Giddens, then, power, on the one hand, restricts individual agency and, on the other hand, is the “transformative capacity” (1984, p. 15) that creates “the power to achieve outcomes” (1984, p. 257).

In his interpretation of Giddens’s theory of structuration, McPhee (2004, p. 16) claims that agents exercise power by drawing on structural rules and resources. In doing so, they also reproduce and exercise power in such a way as to reproduce these rules and resources. In line with this interpretation, Giddens (1984, p. 16) states that “power within social systems that enjoy some continuity over time and space presumes regularised relations of autonomy and dependence between actors or collectives in contexts of social interaction. But all forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors. This is what I call the dialectic of control in social systems” (Giddens 1979, p. 91).

2.5. Conceptualisation of power in different streams of thought

The brief review provided above highlights the centrality of the concept of power in the different streams of thought, even while the angles of analysis and emphases differ. However, the concept of power is somewhat underdeveloped in at least the main writings on the autonomy of work and labour process theory. More recent approaches move beyond the “under-socialized” or “over-socialized” models to create more balanced models of employment relations. For instance, arguing from the perspective of contingency theory, Simpson (1985) claims that the “organization of work” shapes workers’ control of work, but the extent of control depends on the power of workers to influence the organisation of work. Similarly, Choi et al.’s approach to the labour process suggests that “bureaucratic and technological effects on autonomy depend on worker power and status; specifically, the more power and status workers have, the less constraining the impact of bureaucracy and technology on their autonomy” (Choi et al., 2008,

p. 427). In light of these developments in the field, I review some further conceptualisations of power that could be combined with the theoretical perspectives on work discussed so far.

Much of the work employing the functional and behaviourist approach borrows from the classical definition of power from Robert Dahl (1957). Dahl defines power as follows: “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something B would otherwise not do”, adding that “power is a relation, and that it is a relation among people” (Dahl, 1957, p. 203). Arguably, it is this “common-sense” definition of power that aligns best with the autonomy of work and decision latitude research tradition.

Two other approaches, however, also examine the more opaque dimensions of power within employment relations, thus challenging the simple conceptualisation of the employee or employer role and magnitude in co-determining terms of employment and working conditions. For instance, the central premise of Lukes’s (1974, 2004) theory of power (among the most influential theories of power in the study of work (P. Edwards, 2006)) is that “power is at its most effective when least observable” (Lukes, 2004, p. 1). Lukes identifies three dimensions of power. The first represents one’s ability to secure one’s aims when opposing views are expressed by different individuals or groups. The second dimension is “non-decision making”, where decision-making is kept off the agenda through biased framing of issues addressed and addressable in the practices of power. The third dimension is the shaping of preferences in such a way that those excluded from the decision-making process are not even conscious of their interests. This process is manifested in the inability of participants to articulate themselves in a way that reflects their true interests.

Another influential theory of power in the study of work and organisations is Clegg’s (1989) circuit of power theory. The first circuit, the episodic circuit, operates at the micro-level and involves the exercise of power in day-to-day relations. At this level, agents use “means in order to control resources which have consequential outcomes for the scope of action of these agents” (Clegg, 1989, p. 215). The second circuit, the dispositional circuit, is constituted by macro-level rules of practices and social meanings that inform members’ relations and legitimise authority. These rules instantiate the kind of power which is “concerned with fixing and re-fixing relations of meaning and of membership” (Clegg, 1989, p. 224). Finally, the third circuit, the facilitative circuit, is comprised of macro-level technology. This circuit involves the “‘material conditions’ of techniques of production and discipline” and is concerned with “the empowerment and disempowerment of agencies’ capacities, as these become more or less strategic as transformations occur which are incumbent on changes in techniques of production and discipline” (Clegg, 1989, p. 224).

The complexity of power relations permeates all the studies and the cover text of the thesis, whether in the context of employee work schedule control, participation in occupational health and safety management, or accommodation of work. Moreover, a significant limitation of the empirical research (see also Pfeffer, 1981) is that any data that could be collected from the parties involved in employment

relationships tends to align with the functionalist perspective, where the dependent variable explains either employee power over the organisation or organisation power over employees.

TABLE 2. CONCEPT OF POWER IN RESEARCH OF CO-DETERMINATION OF WORKING CONDITIONS

Stream and thematic focus	Authors (e.g.)	Methodological approach	Concept of power
Work autonomy Employee discretion, autonomy of work, decision latitude.	Hackman and Oldham (1976), Karasek (1979)	Methodological individualism	Simple definition of power (Dahl); source of power is individual; employee control leads to good working conditions
Labour process theory Employee collective resistance to capitalist, bureaucratic control.	Burawoy (1979), Edwards (1979), Friedman (1977), Braverman (1974)	Methodological structuralism	More complex definition of power (see also the second and third dimensions of power in Clegg, Lukes); source of power of employees and organisations is embedded into structures and relationships. Employee power leads to upskilling and overcoming the distinction between conceptualisations and execution of work.
Structuration theories Employment and organisations need an approach that neither “over-socializes” nor “under-socializes” actors.	Giddens (1979, 1981, 1984), Sewell (1992)	Aims to conciliate agency and structure in theory and methodology.	Dialectic control in social systems such as employment. Agents exercise power and reproduce structures by drawing on structural rules and resources.

Source: Author’s synthesis of the literature (more extensive coverage can be found in, e.g., Ailon 2006; Clegg, Courpasson, and Phillips 2006)

While **Study I** focus on employees' direct control over their working conditions as might be viewed simplistically through the lens of power as attributed to personal resources (such as skill and positions in occupational hierarchies), the articles on determinants of control consider employee discretion within the institutional context. This context can either empower or disempower individual employees as actors within employment relationships, both within the workplace and the industrial relations system. In contrast, **Studies II, III, and IV** shift the focus to social structures, such as collective mechanisms that are expected to empower employees, specifically employee participation and collective employment relations. However, the theoretical approach must still account for power as being embedded in social relationships, including practices that shape the parties' abilities and capacities related to awareness and agenda-setting.

3. STUDY METHODS

The dissertation adopts a mixed methods approach to studying industrial relations and working conditions. It combines quantitative multilevel analysis to examine the impact of employees' and employers' characteristics on employee work schedule control and participation in health and safety management with qualitative participatory action research designed to investigate collective mechanisms for co-determining work accommodations. The selection and combination of these methods was guided by the following considerations:

1. Given the presence of multiple parties in employment relations and the interplay between these parties, recognising the nested nature of these relationships necessitates the use of multilevel data and methods.
2. The study of employment relations is not only a process of understanding co-determination of working conditions but also empowering the parties involved to conceptualise and bring about changes in the world of work.

The next sections will provide a detailed discussion of the methods employed in the studies.

3.1. Multilevel quantitative analysis

Employment relations within organisational and industrial relations systems are multilevel in nature. Employees are embedded in work organisations, while employees' and employers' industrial relations are embedded within the broader industrial relations system (Kalleberg 1994, 1989).

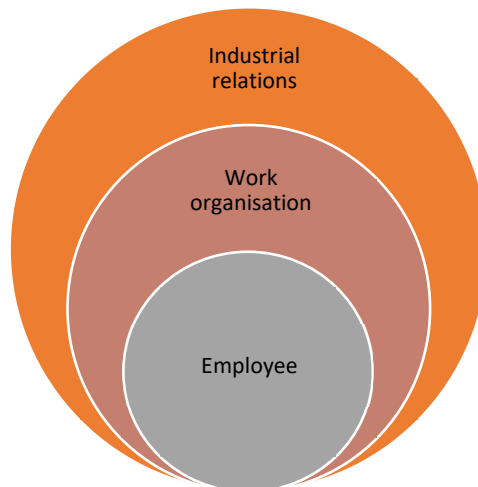


FIGURE 3. MULTILEVEL ANALYSIS OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Source: Author's visualisation based on Kalleberg (1994, 1989)

Multilevel theories in organisation research offer a means to consolidate the focus on employees or organisations. They do so by concurrently examining the organisational context surrounding employees and the employees themselves (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). This approach helps reconcile individual agency, including control in “under-socialized” models, and organisational structure in “over-socialized” models. It also enables the study of the dynamic interplay between organisations and occupations (Lounsbury & Kaghan, 2001).

The methods of data analysis chosen for this research allow for the simultaneous exploration of the effects of organisation-level and employee-level predictors (Studies I and II), as well as the effects of country-level and employee-level predictors (Study II) (Snijders & Bosker, 1999). This approach offers advantages over single-level analysis using standard multiple regression by partitioning the variance of the dependent variable organisation and employee-level effects. This, in turn, enables more precise estimation of coefficients and standard errors in organisation-level and employee-level variables (Snijders & Bosker, 1999, p. 14).

The conceptual models of employee-level and organisation-level determinants of employee work schedule and work methods (Study I) and determinants of employee participation in occupational health and safety management (Study II) are tested by analysing data from the Estonian Working Life Survey.

The cross-sectional survey on working conditions and employment relations was conducted by Statistics Estonia in 2009 (see also the methodological guide by Pettai and Puusepp, 2009). It employed linked two-staged samples of organisations and their employees to achieve a multilevel survey design. The target population of organisations is 17,320, represented by a sample of 811. The sample is stratified by economic activity and the number of employees in the organisation. The target population of employees amounts to 479,300 individuals, represented by a sample of 4,113 employees. Employees were randomly selected from within the previously sampled organisations, with employee sample sizes per organisation ranging from 3 to 14 and averaging 5.

The multilevel conceptual framework of industrial relations should also take into account that the effects of employee-level working time control determinants may be moderated by macro-level characteristics of the industrial relations system (Study II). In light of this, several individual datasets, especially at the country level, were used to compile the linked dataset. Most country-level measures were derived from the European Company Survey 2009 (ECS), a large-scale representative survey among establishments in all EU-27 countries and three acceding and candidate countries (Croatia, Macedonia, Turkey), conducted by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). The survey targeted establishments with ten or more employees across various sectors of economic activity, with sample sizes typically around 500 in smaller countries and 1,000 in larger ones. Additionally, the unemployment rate for 2009, a country-level measure, was sourced from the Eurostat Labour Force Survey online database.

Employee-level data was drawn from the European Working Conditions Survey from 2015 (EWCS), also administered by Eurofound (this is the most recent

available EWCS survey). The survey interviewed approximately 44,000 European workers in 31 countries, including all EU-25 member states plus Bulgaria, Croatia, Norway, Romania, Turkey, and Switzerland. Sample sizes per country averaged around 600 employees in smaller countries and 1,000 employees in larger ones.

The linked country-level and employee-level micro-dataset includes data on 35,606 employees aged 16–64 from 28 European countries. This sample excluded the self-employed or employees working in one-employee organisations.

Two key methodological caveats in the analysis deserve attention. First, the datasets used for empirical modelling are cross-sectional in nature. Coupled with the data analysis technique employed, this allows only for describing the variance in employee work control and participation. The theoretical specification of the model presumes both the direction and causal mechanisms of relationships. Therefore, the causal or deterministic interpretations given in the analysis are valid only so long as these theoretical assumptions hold.

Second, as discussed in the theoretical section, power and control are often embedded in organisational relationships. Thus, they should not be examined only from the individual perspective. The survey methodology assumes that individuals express the true nature of their power relationships in employment relations. However, this assumption also results in the individualisation of control in empirical work, potentially overlooking conceptualisations that view individual power as embedded in relationships and structures that cannot be simplistically reproduced in survey conversations.

3.2. Participatory action research and comparative case study research

While most research on employment relations and working conditions has focused on employees, employers, their representative organisations, and countries within employment relations systems, research on the actors and institutions involved in these relationships is becoming more prevalent in the literature. This approach retains a normative ambition in that it seeks to advance knowledge in ways that benefit the parties within employment relationships and that can ground interventions that might help develop industrial relations practices. In so doing, this approach recasts the researcher's role as that of an agent of change (Huzzard & Björkman, 2012).

The methodological approach employed in the two latter publications (Studies III and IV) is rooted in the tradition of participatory action research and qualitative cross-country comparative research (for detailed study design information, see Masso et al., 2017). Through cooperation with social partners from Estonia, Poland, and Hungary, the objective of the action research was to discuss and design employment relations practices that industrial relations stakeholders could use to encourage and enable the employment of older and disabled people through adaptations to work and working conditions.



FIGURE 4. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH MODEL

Source: Based on Chevalier and Buckles (2019)

Kemmis and McTaggart emphasise that participatory action research is concerned with studying actual and not abstract practises. In their words, its subjects are the “real, material, concrete, and particular practises of particular people in particular places” (Kemmis & McTaggart 2005, p. 564). McNiff (2016, p. 12) refers to action research as “practice-based research,” while Koshy (2005) maintains that new knowledge is created by examining issues in specific, practical contexts. The central aspects of action research are planning, taking action, evaluating the action, and planning further steps (Coghlan and Brannick, 2009; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). It is a socially interactive process described as “fluid, open, and responsive” (Kemmis and McTaggart 2005, p. 277), with outcomes that involve not only finding desired solutions to the original problems but also insights gained from both intended and unintended outcomes (Coghlan & Brannick, 2009).

The central aim of the action research was to bring together social partners in Estonia, Hungary, and Poland through a series of workshops. The action research had two primary objectives:

- First, to inform social partners about the potential use of work accommodations to support disabled and older people in the labour market. To this end, a comprehensive literature review synthesising the available evidence on this topic was presented and disseminated to social partners in advance of the first workshop.
- Second, to engage social partners in each of the three countries in active dialogue to co-produce strategies for better integrating disabled and older people into the labour market. The workshops facilitated general debates with the social partners, highlighting perceived barriers to the integration of these two groups into employment.

In the first stage of the research process, a comprehensive literature review on work accommodations and industrial relations was presented to social partners. This review aimed to establish what provisions and evidence currently exist in different countries and, in doing so, explore what might be possible. Each country's expert produced a background paper summarising country-specific information on work accommodations and industrial relations. This was crucial as it enabled participants to actively engage with each other in the action research and so become contributors to the production of new knowledge, not mere observers (Coghlan & Brannick, 2009; Huzzard & Björkman, 2012). In each country, a local facilitator with expertise in local work accommodations and industrial relations coordinated the action research seminars. The workshop participants were members of peak-level representative organisations of employees and employers, i.e., employees' and employers' confederations. In some countries and during specific seminars (e.g., in Estonia), representatives of disabled people, interest groups, or government policy designers and implementers also participated. Each country conducted between three to five workshops, with each workshop involving 12 to 22 representatives. After each workshop, summaries of the discussions were produced, and feedback was sought from participants to ensure that the information collected accurately reflected what had been discussed and agreed upon. Each new seminar began with reflections on the outcomes of the previous one.

Following the methodological tradition of qualitative cross-country comparative research (George & Bennett, 2005), the conclusions from the seminars were subsequently analysed for the purpose of creating country case studies. These case studies aimed to compare and contrast systems of industrial relations, welfare provisions, and state policies and practices that impact the employment of disabled and older people. The use of a wide range of information sources allowed for insights into the dynamic development of employment relations systems and work accommodation practices over the decades.

The key limitation of the study on work accommodation stems from two key features of action research: (i) It demands significant planning and self-reflection throughout the process (Coghlan & Brannick, 2009; Huzzard & Björkman, 2012), and (ii) it is typically subject to unpredictability and limited control over the results (Huzzard & Björkman, 2012). The project involved multiple partners and participants, making it challenging to ensure that all parties understood common aims and activities throughout the seminars. While this complexity did not diminish the richness of the knowledge produced for the comparative research, it did constrain the design and implementation of industrial relations practices by social partners. As a result, the impact of the action research project on employee control of working conditions and access to accommodated working conditions may not have been as extensive as initially hoped. Nevertheless, in each country, the awareness raised through the project can be seen as empowering in its own right. Additionally, concrete industrial relations practices were developed that, if implemented, could lead to the accommodation of work.

4. INSIGHTS FROM THE STUDIES INTO EMPLOYEE CONTROL

This thesis compiles findings from four studies that explore various aspects of employment relationships and working conditions, in particular, power relationships in co-determining working conditions. The first two studies (Studies I and II) focus on aspects of employee control within the workplace, while Study III centres on employee participation. Finally, Studies III and IV analyse the accommodation of work and working conditions. These three research streams are examined in further detail in the following sections.

4.1. Employee work schedule control (Study I)

4.1.1. Context of the studies

Control is a defining feature of social life within the workplace (also crucial and closely related are autonomy, discretion, self-management, and power). Research on work control often falls into two broad categories: micro-level analyses that view individuals as creative agents in control of their working conditions, often referred to as the autonomy of work research tradition, or analyses that conceive control in terms of macro-level phenomena that shape the architecture of opportunities and its impact on more or less passive actors, a perspective often associated with the labour process research tradition (Ritzer, 1989; I. H. Simpson, 1989). Employee control can vary significantly based on differences in employees, employers, and industrial relations systems. For instance, cross-country qualitative comparative research by Berg et al. (2004) identified institutional context, labour market conditions, and management and labour strategies as employee work schedule control determinants that operate at the societal level. On the workplace level, Ortega (2009) found that determinants of work schedule control and task discretion – including high-performance work practices, higher position within the organisation, higher workers' abilities, working in smaller organisations, and managerial openness to employee requests – increase the likelihood of employee work control.

Empirically, Study I focuses exclusively on employee work schedule and method control, although its conceptual framework is derived from international studies. Compared to other European countries, especially member states classified as having fragmented, state-centred industrial relations systems, Estonia stands out for its relatively high level of employee work schedule control (Figure 5).

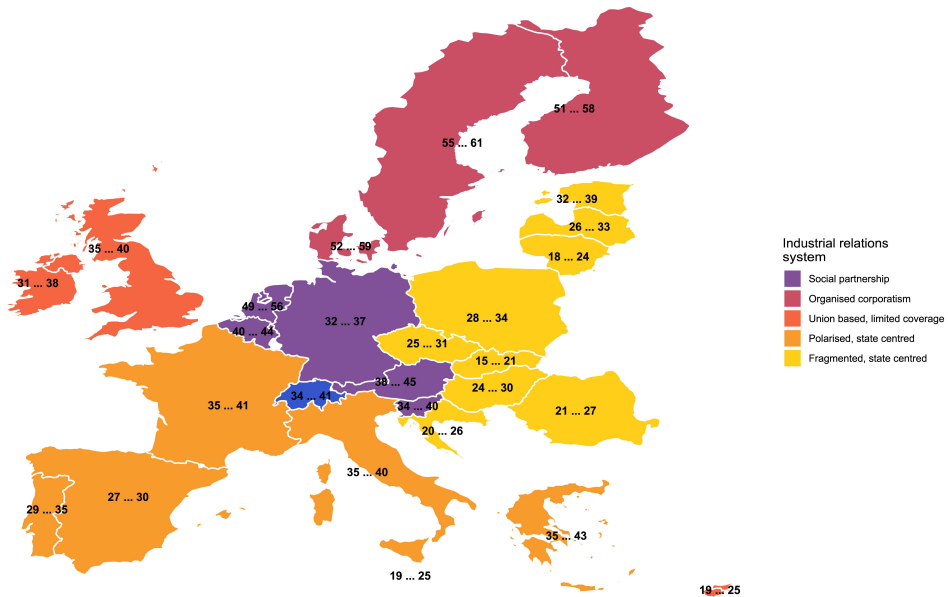


FIGURE 5. EMPLOYEE WORKING TIME CONTROL IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, % OF WORKERS

Note: In the figure, we see the percentages of the workers per country that answered 'Your working hours are entirely determined by yourself' for 'Age' and 'All' when asked 'How are your working time arrangements set?'.

Source: Author's calculation, European Working Conditions Survey 2015 (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2017)

4.1.2. Contribution of the studies

Study I contributes to the research on employee work schedule control by responding to two features of the literature (Masso, 2012). Firstly, the focus on the implications of employee work control has often taken attention away from the variability in employee access to control that, in fact, acts as a primary determinant of those possible implications. In this way, research on employee work control has paid less attention to the qualities and circumstances that actually determine which employees have control over their work. Secondly, much of the literature on employee work control focuses on either employee individual agency or on structural elements in society and organization (Masso, 2012). That both strands of research are valid, however, demonstrates that employment relations in organisations are generally multilevel. For that reason, research on employee work control, in particular, should lead to the development of multilevel theories (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). Accordingly, Study I responds to these features of the literature by outlining a theoretical framework for analysing work control determinants at both the employee level and organisation level.

4.1.3. Main results

A cumulative explanatory framework, considering both organisation-level and employee-level determinants, was tested using a nationally representative linked study of organisations and their employees. The study revealed significant differences in employee work control that could be explained only by considering both employee-level and organisation-level determinants. Job design and characteristics, skills and competencies, and managerial practices were identified as factors that explain variance in both employee work schedule control and work method control. As previously theorised, the research also confirmed that professionals were more likely to have control over their work schedule and work method compared to individuals in other occupations. Additionally, the results of the study indicated that employee work schedule and method control are dependent on the extent to which employees can participate in decision-making but not on working in organizations that have implemented participative management practices.

The analysis demonstrated that when explaining differences in employee work-time control, employee-level characteristics were considerably more important than organisation-level factors. However, the modelling in Study II confirmed the theoretical proposition that collective bargaining and labour market conditions that increase the marketability of scarce skills increase employees' occupational discretion and, consequently, their control over work time. In contrast to expectations, however, the study did not indicate that heterogeneity in managerial practices regarding work-time arrangements influences employee discretion over worktime.

Furthermore, the research demonstrates not only that country-level and employee-level factors influence employee control over work time but that the effect of employee-level factors is dependent on country-level factors. For instance, the positive effect of a higher position in the occupational hierarchy on worktime control was more pronounced in countries where collective representation and employees' bargaining power were more considerable. However, in countries with higher unemployment rates and a greater prevalence of non-standard work time, the positive effect of a higher position in the hierarchy was diminished. Additionally, the positive effect of skills on working time control was stronger in countries with a higher proportion of employers with employee representatives, and the negative effect of being under-skilled was less pronounced in countries with a higher level of employee representation. Finally, the positive effect of job design tended to be smaller in countries with higher unemployment rates. Having identified these trends, however, it is important also to note that, in the data analysed, these contextual effects remained small.

In conclusion, the research found that principles of work organisation at both occupation-level and organisation-level interact. Moreover, both employees and organisations are clustered into and influenced by the institutional context of their respective countries. Consequently, inequality in employee work-time control and its associated benefits are distributed unevenly across social groups.

4.2. Employee participation in occupational health and safety management (Study II)

4.2.1. Context of the study

Given the multitude of competing interests within organisations, the possibility of employee's direct discretion over working conditions in employment relationships is not always a realistic one. Co-determination of working conditions becomes essential, and one way of achieving this is through employee participation (Wilkinson et al., 2010; Deutsch, 2005).

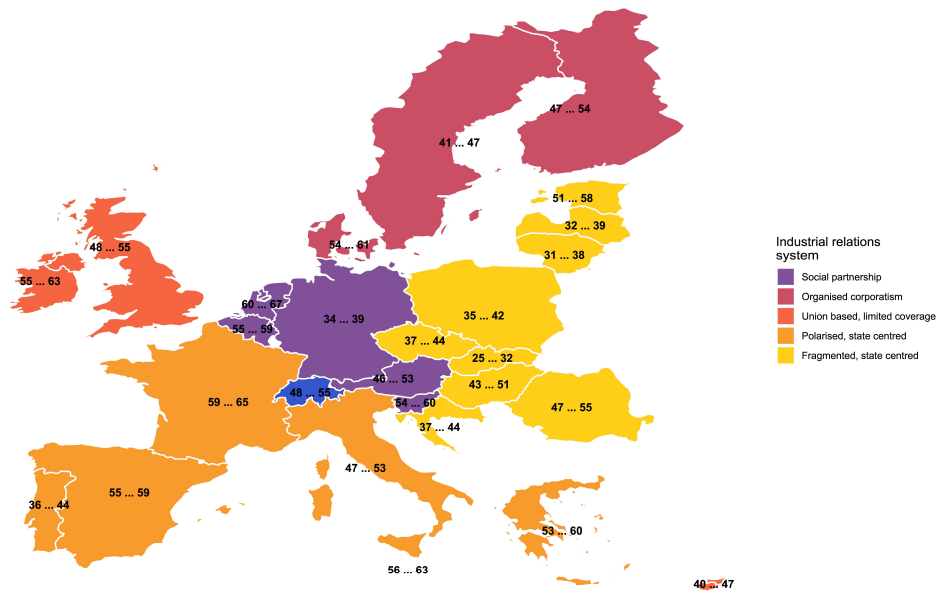


FIGURE 6. EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION IN WORK ORGANISATION OR WORK PROCESSES, % OF WORKERS

Note: Percentages of the workers per country that answered 'Always or most of the time' for 'Age' and 'All' when asked 'Are you involved in improving the work organisation or work processes of the department or organisation?'.

Source: Author's calculation, European Working Conditions Survey 2015 (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2017)

Employee participation is a collaborative process involving groups of employees, their employers' representatives, and managers. This process allows employees to access decision-making and exert influence over day-to-day interactions between supervisors and subordinates, wherein subordinates are granted substantial input into work-related decisions (Heller et al. 1998, p. 15). Accordingly, Study II centres on occupational health and safety (OHS) management and the extent of direct employee participation in OHS management within Estonia (Masso, 2015). Notably, compared to other European countries, and particularly those classified

as having fragmented, state-centred industrial relations systems, Estonia exhibits a relatively high level of employee participation and involvement (Figure 6).

4.2.2. Contribution of the study

The study's primary focus was on the form of involvement or degree of participation (Wilkinson et al., 2010) when it comes to employee participation in OHS management. Forms of involvement refer to whether employees can influence OHS management through information sharing, joint consultation, or joint decision-making. The form of involvement is expected to predict the extent to which employees can influence and control OHS management issues in the workplace.

Cabrera et al. (2003, p. 45) argue that, despite the plethora of studies, there is little known as to which factors determine employee participation and level of participation. Therefore, by focusing on factors that influence employee participation and level of participation within OHS management, the study aims to provide a better understanding of which employees can participate in OHS management and to what extent. Assuming that employee participation has a positive impact, this should also provide greater insight into which employees are most likely to enjoy a safe and healthy work environment. The study contributes to the field by conducting a multidimensional, multilevel analysis of the impact of management culture, safety management, job characteristics, and employee skills on employee participation in OHS management.

4.2.3. Main results

The study addressed the research question from an empirical perspective with the use of Estonian cross-sectional, multilevel data from organisations and their employees. Firstly, the study investigated which of OHS management or safety culture has a greater impact in determining employee participation in OHS management in Estonia. The modelling indicates that when OHS matters fall under the responsibility of a formal safety management structure and positions within the organisation, such as safety specialists, employees are less likely to feel that they can participate in OHS management, regardless of whether employees are involved through consultation or co-decision making. Additionally, the results indicate that as organisations gain more employees, the rules and regulations governing collective action in OHS management also increase, thereby limiting employee involvement and influence in OHS matters. Contrary to expectations, however, employees' and organisations' representatives' orientations toward sharing safety responsibility and organisations representatives' motivation for OHS management were not found to be significant factors influencing employee participation in OHS management.

In addition to safety management and safety culture, it was expected that job characteristics and employee skills would play a role in determining employee

participation. The empirical modelling revealed that professionals were more likely to believe they could participate in OHS management if they could engage in joint decision-making rather than joint consultation alone. Furthermore, the analysis suggested that employees with higher education were more likely to think that they could participate in OHS management. However, contrary to expectations, highly educated employees were more likely to believe they could participate in OHS management through consultation rather than through co-decision making.

In summary, the study demonstrated that OHS management practices vary across employees, resulting in differences in employees' opportunities to participate and exert influence over OHS management. Consequently, assuming that participatory OHS management practices have positive implications for health and safety, employees differ in their access to safe and healthy workplaces. This underscores the argument that in smaller organisations where refined and bureaucratic OHS management systems may not be applicable, the effectiveness of OHS management largely depends on the potential positive effects of employee participation.

4.3. Industrial relations of work accommodation (Studies III and IV)

4.3.1. Context

Work accommodations are efforts to modify any aspect of a job or work environment to enable an individual, often a disabled person, to perform job tasks (Kwan & Schultz, 2016, p. 272). There is substantial evidence supporting the utility of work accommodations in promoting employment and reducing costs (McDowell & Fossey, 2014; Nevala et al., 2015; Schultz et al., 2011; Williams-Whitt et al., 2015). The process of work accommodation can involve individuals selecting workplaces where they can meet their needs and negotiate suitable conditions (Hogan et al., 2012). It may also involve either employee-initiated or organisation-initiated accommodations or a combination of both (Cleveland et al., 1997). Given the unequal power distribution between employers and employees, collective voice mechanisms must also be recognised (Seing et al., 2012; Van Dalen et al., 2010; Williams-Whitt, 2007). Employee representatives, as noted by Lysaght and Krupa (2014, p. 100), can negotiate rights and procedures related to work accommodations into collective agreements, monitor whether members receive the work accommodations they require, and influence organisational policies regarding how positions are posted and filled, thus indirectly influencing job classifications and descriptions and the work capacity of employees needing work accommodations. Compared to other European countries, Estonia exhibits a relatively low level of work accommodation (Figure 7).

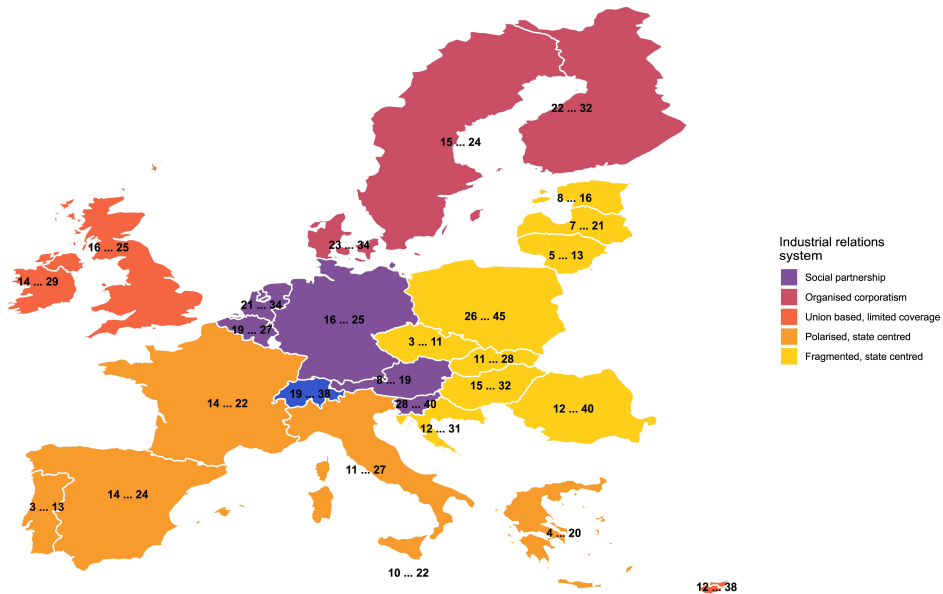


FIGURE 7. WORKERS WHOSE WORKPLACE OR WORK HAS BEEN CHANGED TO ACCOMMODATE HEALTH PROBLEMS, % OF WORKERS

Note: Percentages of the workers per country that answered ‘Yes’ when asked ‘You mentioned earlier that you have an illness or a health problem which has lasted, or is expected to last, for more than 6 months. Has your workplace or work activity been changed to accommodate for your illness or health problem?’.

Source: Author’s calculation, European Working Conditions Survey 2015 (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2017)

4.3.2. Contribution of the study

Until now, a comprehensive comparative analysis of work accommodation practices across different industrial relations systems has been lacking. This study fills that gap by providing a comparative analysis of how cross-country differences in industrial relations impact work accommodations. Given that institutional frameworks can exert significant and varied influences on collective work accommodation practices (Masso et al., 2017; Foster et al., 2020), the study focused on state-centred industrial relations systems across Central and Eastern Europe.

Government employment policies, the involvement of employers’ associations, and employee unions can influence collective employment relations and potentially lead to improved work accommodation policy design and implementation (Clayton et al., 2012; Ferri et al., 2016). Despite this, there is a notable gap in the literature where analysis of the role of government work accommodation policy in conditioning collective employment relations within “state-centred industrial relations systems” should be. This study, in part, serves to fill that gap.

Additionally, the concept of sustainable work is introduced to assess the significance of industrial relations to work accommodation and explore alternative approaches to employing disabled and older individuals in countries with differing state, labour, and employment relations.

4.3.3. Results

Qualitative data was collected via participatory action research that brought together social partners in Estonia, Hungary, and Poland to discuss work accommodations and how social dialogue might enhance the employment prospects of older and disabled people.

In these participant countries, industrial relations systems have been characterised as state-centred, in which social dialogue with government employment policy-makers is crucial but fragmented. In this kind of system, the state is also the main regulator of work accommodations. Presently, no binding collective agreements exist specifically addressing work accommodations, although the regulation of occupational health and safety, which is more common, might serve as a foundation for future negotiations. The potential for further regulation of work accommodations in these countries also allows for a change in perception, whereby social partners would come to see the regulation of work accommodations as the responsibility of the public administration.

At the workplace level, where co-determining working conditions are most prominent in all three countries, the significance of workplace-level representation and the negotiation of work accommodations cannot be overstated. Empowering multi-channel representation at the workplace level and sharing knowledge on work accommodation practices is crucial. Sectoral and national-level partners also need to be open to mutual learning from representation and consultation to facilitate the dissemination of best practices. However, sustaining productive dialogue and future action poses a long-term challenge. The limited resources available to social partners are an obstacle that should not be under-estimated. The development of and acceptance of sustainable working practices requires collaboration among a range of employment relations actors and institutions, including governments, regulatory bodies, employers, employer associations, and employee representatives.

5. DISCUSSION OF CO-DETERMINATION OF WORKING CONDITIONS IN ESTONIA

5.1. The importance of worker control and co-determination in employment relations

The central focus of this thesis is on the factors that have positive implications for worker control and co-determination in work relations. However, it is essential to begin by discussing the significance of worker control and participation. According to the ideals of workplace democracy and industrial democracy, employee control and participation have intrinsic value in so far as the employee should have a say in matters that affect them as both human being and worker. As political scientist Dahl has argued, “if democracy is justified in governing the state, it must also be justified in governing economic enterprises; and to say that it is not justified in governing economic enterprises is to imply that it is not justified in governing the state” (Dahl, 1985, p. 56). Moreover, the evidence of correlational studies indicates that work autonomy has a positive effect on civic participation in the form of volunteer work and engagement in political or trade union activities. This suggests that workplace democracy plays a crucial role in governing the state in a democratic manner (Lopes et al., 2014a).

Beyond the intrinsic values of industrial democracy, employee discretion and involvement are believed and, to some extent, confirmed to have positive implications for workers, organisations, and society as a whole. Among these implications, employee discretion in determining suitable working conditions influences:

- **Equal opportunities in employment**, particularly with respect to the employment of disabled or ageing employees (Kuznetsova & Bento, 2018; Wong et al., 2021).
- **Work-life balance and time adequacy** (Lott, 2015; Leineweber et al., 2016; Applebaum et al., 2006).
- **Safety and health**, in relation to which employee participation is a crucial internal factor influencing the effectiveness of occupational health and safety management implementations (Rahmi & Ramdhan, 2021; Haby et al., 2016). Thus helping prevent exposure to working conditions that could harm safety and health (Bartoll & Ramos, 2020; Nätti et al., 2015).
- **Skill use and development**, where it can prevent the deprivation of skill use and skill development and, as a result of the employee’s role in bridging the conceptualisation and execution of work, enhance motivation and productivity (Marin-Garcia & Bonavia, 2021; Marchinton & Wilkinson, 2000; Rubery et al., 2005).
- The avoidance of **employee alienation** at work (Braverman, 1974).

- These arguments underscore the fact that employee discretion in employment relationships and work control is an intrinsic dimension of the quality of work and an antecedent to the possibility of other positive work qualities. In that sense, it is as important to the Estonian industrial relations system as it is to industrial relations systems overall.

Consequently, it is important to understand to what extent and why there are considerable differences in employee control and participation. Different models of employment relations and co-determination practices exist in parallel, and, on a simple dualist conceptualisation of employment relations, jobs are structured into primary and secondary labour markets and employment systems with considerable differences in employee discretion and job quality (Atkinson, 1984). Therefore, the anticipated positive outcomes of work control and participation vary across employees depending on employee-level, organisation-level, and society-level characteristics.

The question of differences in employee control and discretion is fundamentally linked to the question of interests and power in employment relationships. There are two distinct approaches in the research: one that assumes parties in an employment relationship share compatible complementary and common interests, and another that maintains that inconsistent interests necessitate a fundamental social compromise between the parties (J. D. Hyman & Mason, 1995). Workplace relations are also dependent on broader socio-economic institutions and relations. At the same time, the ongoing interplay between employees and employers redefines and re-establishes the boundaries of employee relations in such a way as to foster either antagonism or cooperation between the different sides (Wilkinson et al., 2012). As a consequence of this, various dimensions of power must be considered when discussing how different relations and institutions empower employees in employment relationships and how these relations and institutions depend on and are recreated by the everyday practices of employees and organisations (Clegg, 1989; Lukes, 2004). Furthermore, the complexity of power dynamics in employment relationships can either facilitate employee control in determining working conditions or obscure questions about their role in co-determining those conditions as circumstances affecting them as human beings.

5.2. Employee control in Estonian industrial relations system

Comparative empirical analyses of industrial relations systems have categorised the Estonian system among market-oriented systems that score the lowest on industrial democracy ratings (Sanz de Miguel et al., 2020). This suggests that, in Estonia, co-determination of working conditions through public sector governance of employment relations, social dialogue, collective bargaining, and workers' participation at the company level is less significant compared to other European countries. On this basis, much of the industrial relations literature has concluded

that the balance of bargaining power between employers and employees in Estonia tends to favour the former rather than the latter. However, the complete picture of employee control and involvement is more complex as employee control of working conditions and employee participation at the company level score above the EU average in Estonia (Sanz de Miguel et al., 2020).

Although the development of industrial relations institutions does not fully determine employee control, it remains a crucial factor influencing the latter. Quantitative comparative analysis, although not including Estonia among the study countries, has shown that union density and generalised trust at the industrial relations system level both influence employee involvement, but only generalised trust impacts work autonomy (Lopes et al., 2017). Studies have also found that countries with a stronger union tradition tend to demonstrate higher empowerment at the workplace level, especially in terms of employees' ability to choose work methods or tasks (Humborstad, 2014). Additionally, by analysing organisational working time policies within the economic and institutional environment, it has been shown that the relationship between the skill profile of employees (i.e., the percentage of employees in highly skilled jobs) and the provision of working time practices that entitle employees to adjust their daily work schedules is positively influenced by lower unemployment rates and higher trade union density (Riva et al., 2018).

Consequently, despite the relative lack of collective mechanisms that empower employees in employment relations in Estonia, individual employee discretion in co-determining terms of employment and working conditions is well developed. However, practices in other European industrial relations systems suggest that collective forms of industrial relations could further empower employees in the Estonian system.

These general conclusions also apply when considering the country-level relationships between industrial democracy and the dependent variables explored in the first two articles of this thesis, i.e., work schedule control and employee participation in occupational health and safety management and work accommodation (see also Figure 8). However, work accommodation, the focus of Studies III and IV, is not one of the usual indicators of workplace democracy and is not central to conceptualisations of workplace democracy. As illustrated in Figure 8, the relationship between work accommodation and the industrial democracy index does not exhibit a clear linear pattern, while Estonian workers report comparatively lower levels of work accommodation for functional limitations or health problems.

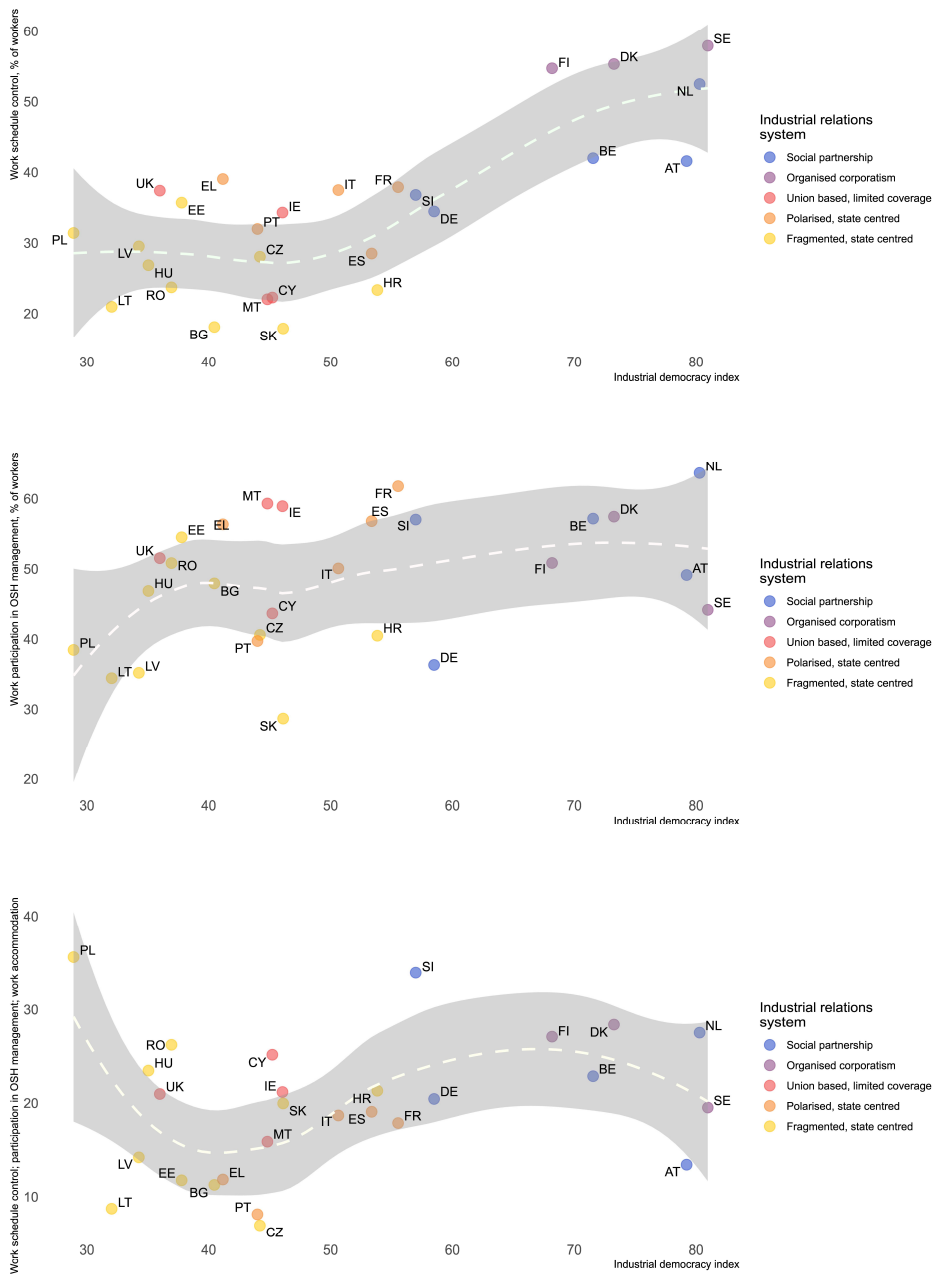


FIGURE 8. INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY INDEX AND EMPLOYEE CONTROL, PARTICIPATION, AND WORK ACCOMMODATION IN EUROPE

Source: Author's calculation, *European Working Conditions Survey 2015* (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2017)

This somewhat contradicts Welz et al.'s (2016) classification of industrial relations systems, which categorised the Estonian industrial relations system as one in which the public regulation of terms of employment and working conditions has concentrated on the inclusion of minorities to promote social justice. As discussed in Studies III and IV, improving labour market participation and quality of employment for disabled and ageing populations requires a shift away from trying to fit people into standard jobs. Instead, jobs should be tailored to suit individual needs. These individualised solutions necessitate employee direct control, involvement, or collective forms of employee relationships that empower workplace-level actors to negotiate and co-determine reasonable accommodations. Commitment to job redesign is instrumental in identifying aspects of the job that need to be re-bargained and re-determined to best utilise skills and promote healthy workplaces for all employees. These issues could form part of an equality bargaining agenda equipped to foster more inclusive labour markets and address current resistance to flexible working practices. Study IV demonstrated that in state-centred industrial relations systems, work accommodations are usually considered an aspect of state employment policy or the responsibility of individual employers and organisational disability management. Here, the question of power centres around the dilemma that each case of accommodating work will be specific to both the job being performed and the specific circumstances of the individual that require workplace-level employee and employer discretion. However, this effectively individualizes changes to terms and conditions of employment and so can conceal the true nature of power in individualised or collective co-determination, all in the name of employee interest.

In this context, social partners could play a crucial role in ensuring that individually tailored work arrangements become a central feature of tomorrow's labour market. Establishing collective knowledge around best practices is a plausible way forward for Estonia to catch up with other industrial relations systems along this dimension of workplace democracy.

Despite these points, it is important to recognise that the impact of collective forms of employment relations on empowering workplace-level actors in co-determining working conditions in Estonian is modest. This takes into account the results from Study II, which indicated that individual-level factors are more critical determinants of employee work schedule control than the country-level institutional framework of the industrial relations system. Nevertheless, collective mechanisms do matter. As Berg et al. (2004) argue, this is due to collective bargaining (and labour market conditions that increase the marketability of scarce skills), which increases employee's occupational discretion and control over working conditions. The analysis in Study II confirms that the bargaining power of employee representatives at the country level increases the likelihood of employee work-time control at the individual level. In more general terms, this suggests that inequality in individuals' control over working conditions is influenced by inequality in employees' access to or exposure to those collective mechanisms of the industrial relations system that can shift the balance of power at the country level.

In conclusion, despite the low level of collective mechanisms for co-determining working conditions in the Estonian industrial relations system and the simultaneous high level of employee discretion in working time and involvement, the empowerment of individuals through collective mechanisms remains crucial. This is especially significant when considering the sustainability of work over the course of life, as it suggests that collective knowledge and practices, in addition to individual knowledge and practices, are essential for matching workers with enabling working conditions.

5.3. Occupational control

Both occupational and organisational principles of work structuring are recognised as crucial for understanding the co-determination of working conditions and workers' control within the industrial relations system (Freidson, 1986, p. 134). The occupational principle focuses on how skills, competencies, and the corresponding authority to make decisions regarding work processes empower workers in bargaining for and determining their working conditions. Traditionally, professional occupations, i.e., occupations in higher positions in the occupational hierarchy, are to a large extent self-regulating, subject to informal collegial interaction and control, and relatively free from the hierarchical administrative controls typical of other occupations (Freidson, 1984). Studies have suggested that work autonomy has declined across all occupations and skill levels in European countries (Lopes et al., 2014a, 2014b). However, other studies have found that European labour markets are witnessing upskilling with some polarisation – although there are significant cross-national differences – and that, individually, neither shifts in the complexity of occupations (deskilling hypothesis) nor changes in employment structure (the focus of the upskilling and polarisation hypotheses) can provide an adequate view of trends in the European labour markets. Instead, it is crucial that both vectors of change be analysed collectively (Martinaitis et al., 2021).

Multilevel employment relations theories propose that occupational and institutional principles interact, as professional control of workers is influenced by the context of the industrial relations system. In line with this theoretical argument, Study I confirmed that professionals in Estonia are more likely to have control over their work schedules and methods compared to workers in other occupations. Furthermore, Studies III and IV demonstrated that professionals are more likely to report that they have been able to participate in occupational health and safety management when they have taken part in joint decision-making processes than when they have been involved in joint consultation alone. Thus, the complexity of professional occupations and the expertise of professional employees contribute to greater employee conceptualisation of work, which cannot be easily subjected to managerial control. The balance of power in this relationship is influenced by both worker characteristics and institutions that facilitate or hinder discretion in the employment relationship. Once again, this underscores the im-

portance of the industrial relations system context. In Estonia's fragmented state-centred system, higher positions in the occupational hierarchy empower employees in employment relations. However, occupational discretion could be yet greater if the industrial relations system could further empower it through collective mechanisms.

One dimension that enhances the effectiveness of occupational control is that professionals use complex knowledge and skills in conceptualising and executing their work. Research suggests that, in addition to the defining characteristics of a profession, skills and competencies themselves empower employee discretion in employment relationships. The interaction with macro-level institutional factors of the employment relations system is also notable, with higher skills having a more significant positive impact on employee work schedule control in countries where collective worker representation at the company level is more developed. On an individual employee level, the studies in this thesis demonstrate that meeting or exceeding skill requirements increases the likelihood of work-time control and participation in occupational health and safety management. Interestingly, the studies also reveal that skill mismatch does not significantly affect employee control. This observation aligns with signalisation theory (Weiss, 1995), which posits that bargaining power and control in employment relationships depend considerably on the value that education signals in social relationships, and not only on actual skills and their usage.

In conclusion, we can observe that the greater value placed on the work of professionals in organisations due to their higher authority, skills, and competencies leads to greater discretion in employment relations. This empowerment is further facilitated by the institutions of the industrial relations system, which shape both individual and collective co-determination of working conditions. Thus, power is embedded not only in one's inherent worth but also in organisational and societal-level structures and practices that create and recreate that worth.

5.4. Managerial control

Organisational principles of work structuring focus on organisational and institutional arrangements in which specifically positioned actors are empowered to conceptualise, design, and control work across various occupational groups (Freidson, 1986, p. 134). Over the years, there has been debate in the literature as to whether we are witnessing a shift toward bureaucracy, where defined structures and rules dictate personal authority in decision-making about work and working conditions, or a shift toward the post-bureaucratic organisation of work, characterised by flattened structures and hierarchies and where decentralisation empowers workers' authority and control in conceptualising and executing work (Maravelias, 2003; Bolin & Härenstam, 2008).

The studies in this thesis indicate that the use of empowering managerial practices differs across organisations and workers in Estonia. The results of Study II suggest that occupational health and safety practices vary among employees,

leading to differences in their opportunities to participate in and influence health and safety management. This indicates that traditional, top-down occupational health and safety management that relies on the knowledge and competencies of work environment specialists may limit employee involvement and influence on occupational health and safety matters. Assuming that participatory occupational health and safety management practices have positive implications for health and safety, these differences result in varying levels of access to healthy and safe workplaces for employees.

Employee involvement and participatory practices at the workplace and employee levels are also influenced by the institutional factors of the Estonian industrial relations system. One interpretation from Study II argues that employees' and organisations' representatives' orientations toward sharing safety management responsibility do not predict control sharing. External organisational contingencies have forced managers to develop safety management practices that are in compliance with organisational performance concerns and evolving employment and working condition regulations. This, in turn, has left less room for value orientations to shape OHS practices in ways that might promote participatory practices.

The first study highlighted that management practices that attempt to centrally conceptualise work practices and arrangements result in less employee control over work schedules and methods, despite the personal resources employees may have to claim greater authority over their working conditions in Estonia. Extensive bureaucratic regulations that coordinate collective action and a stronger reliance on direct managerial control limit individual employee agency and discretion.

As discussed in the introductory sections, labour process theory and the critical management literature emphasise job richness as an important characteristic of job design that allows for employee self-manifestation and enables the use of their skills and competencies. Job characteristics related to task variability, creativity requirements, and the diversity of skills required increase the likelihood that employees can exercise control over their work, as managerial control may be insufficient to account for the increased decision-making load in these work situations.

Employee participation in decision-making about organisational and employment matters is considered one aspect of more democratic and cooperative organisational practices that is also relevant to employee discretion in working conditions. The first study demonstrates that employee work schedules depend on the extent to which employees can participate in decision-making rather than on whether organisations have implemented participative management practices in Estonia. This suggests that actual worker job enrichment and participation practices are more relevant for control than organisational practices aimed at enriching jobs or enabling employee participation. In this case, employee-level agency to influence working conditions is more important than organisational structure, which may either constrain or enable employee agency. Lastly, employees with substantial responsibilities, especially those related to immediate tasks and working conditions, tend to self-control their practices due to inter-

nalised commitment and adherence to the organisation's code of conduct. This self-regulation may be due to increased coercive control (Barker, 1993) associated with higher liabilities and responsibilities. It also aligns with Lukes's theories of power, which are rooted in workers' ability to influence the range of considered options (Doellgast & Berg, 2018). Consequently, internalised expectations regarding one's work processes are as crucial for control as direct external managerial rules and practices.

5.5. Quo vadis worker control in Estonia?

The control exercised by employed individuals over their work and work practices, including participation, varies based on several factors:

- **Occupational relations to environmental elements:** Relating to how an occupation is positioned within its regulatory and market environment.
- **Occupational integration into the division of labour:** The role an occupation plays within the larger division of labour.
- **Relations between occupational segments:** How different segments within an occupation interact.
- **Nature of work tasks:** The nature and degree of uncertainty associated with work tasks (R. L. Simpson, 1985).

The relationships between workers and the structures of the industrial relations system in which they are embedded create and re-create the power balances that determine terms of employment and working conditions. Similar to other industrial relations systems, Estonian employees' authority to make decisions or participate in decision-making regarding their work circumstances is constrained. However, despite the presence of modest (cooperative) collective mechanisms that empower employees, it can be argued that industrial democracy is well-developed in Estonia. Nonetheless, the prospect of future convergence with other industrial relations systems is not guaranteed. Previous empirical studies have suggested that before 2010, significantly different rates of change led to the increasing polarisation of job discretion between occupations and between Nordic and other European countries. Institutional differences, particularly employment policies and trade union influence, were identified as drivers of cross-national variation in job discretion (Holman & Rafferty, 2018). This implies that while previous developments provide reason for optimism regarding workplace democracy, employee-level and workplace-level factors such as occupational structure may be more crucial than regulatory institutions in Estonia, and so the hoped-for development is not assured.

It is important to keep in mind the theoretical contention that, rather than progressing toward workplace democracy, the evolution of employment relations may point to ever more sophisticated control practices, such as high-performance

work design or high-involvement work systems that act as a form of total control, akin to a panopticon (Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992). These practices are not merely imposed by managers, organisations, or the environment but are outcomes of the ongoing interaction in employment relationships (Wilkinson et al., 2010). Still, it is essential to recognise that power cannot be conceptualised solely from a conflict perspective (“power over”) but also from consensus perspectives (“power to”) (Clegg et al., 2006). This facilitative dimension of power is the clay from which relationships in industrial relations are formed, including binding obligations. The studies on work accommodations in this thesis, for instance, highlight a sphere of working conditions where consensus-building and finding a balance in worker-organisational control and its mechanisms are required for inclusive participation and involvement.

Finally, it is crucial to reflect on methodology as a tool for both questioning and legitimising the balance of power in co-determining terms of employment and working conditions. As previously discussed, in cross-sectional studies (Studies I and II), even when the causal mechanisms of the relationship are specified, the statistical analysis holds only so long as any theoretical assumptions hold. Moreover, both survey methodology and participatory seminars presume that individuals can express the true nature of their power relationships in employment relations. However, this assumption is challenged by an extensive body of literature on power and control in employment relations that argues that the nature of power and how it is embedded in the structure of relationships may not be fully disclosed in survey or interview conversations. Furthermore, neither surveys of perceived control and participation nor action research, which are intended to empower workers and their representatives through knowledge sharing and creation, operate in isolation but are part of the broader policy landscape, which can reshape economic, administrative, and professional dependencies. In sum, although much may remain hidden, it is imperative to continue studying employment relations practices as they raise fundamental questions about the kind of working life we want to have in our society.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of Estonian industrial relations raises critical questions about the co-determination of working conditions and the distribution of power among workers within organisations and institutions. Workers' perceived personal control takes various forms, including autonomous discretion over working conditions, participation in the management of work and working conditions, and co-determination of working conditions through collective mechanisms such as dialogue and bargaining.

Worker discretion in co-determining working conditions varies not only among workers but also across organisations and industrial relations systems in which workers are embedded. The ideals of workplace democracy stipulate that employee control has intrinsic value and self-worth, as employees should have a say in circumstances that affect them as human beings and workers. Moreover, differences in work control imply differences in opportunities and variations in the quality of work and life. These differences are shaped by employee-level, organisation-level, and industrial-level factors that influence the positive and negative effects of employee work control.

It is crucial to keep in mind, however, that employment is a collective endeavour and individual control is conditioned by, and should take into account, the individual and collective control exerted by others, collectives, and institutions. Power in employment relations should not only be viewed from the perspective of one's power over others but also from the perspective of the power to achieve societal objectives. Despite the abundance of theory, there is a lack of metrics and evaluations to determine the most beneficial balance between parties' discretion, particularly concerning employee welfare. This presents a significant area for future research in industrial relations.

The ongoing changes in the nature of work and employment remind us that worker control is a dynamic historical process. Arguments over whether the world of work is moving towards greater or lesser worker discretion in employment relationships carry a degree of uncertainty. Nevertheless, despite the overall deterioration and reduction of disparities in employee control across Europe from 1995 to 2015, Estonia has been one of the few countries where workers' decision latitude improved relative to other countries (Warhurst et al., 2019).

The collective industrial relations literature suggests that the balance of bargaining power between employers and employees in Estonia often favours the former. Comparative empirical analyses of industrial relations systems have classified Estonia among market-oriented systems that score the lowest on industrial democracy ratings (Sanz de Miguel et al., 2020). However, when it comes to employee control of work schedules and methods and employee participation at the company level, Estonia scored above EU averages. Unfortunately, Estonian workers report comparatively lower levels of work accommodations for functional limitations or health problems, despite some comparative industrial relations

analyses suggesting that public regulation has focused on the inclusion of minorities to promote social justice (Welz et al., 2016).

Despite the lack of collective mechanisms that empower employees, employee discretion in co-determining terms of employment and working conditions is well-developed in Estonia. Nevertheless, the practices of other European industrial relations systems suggest that collective forms of industrial relations could further empower employees in the Estonian system. In particular, collective mechanisms of voice and action may have a crucial role to play in accommodating work and ensuring that the tailoring of work demands to individual concerns becomes a central feature of tomorrow's labour market.

As theory and research suggest, both occupational and organisational principles of work structuring are crucial for understanding the co-determination of working conditions and worker control in the industrial relations system (Freidson, 1986, p. 134). The empirical studies focusing on Estonia confirm that professionals are more likely to have control over their work schedules and work methods than workers in other occupations, as well as being better positioned to participate in occupational health and safety management.

Furthermore, as multilevel employment relations theories suggest, occupational principles and institutional principles interact, as professional control of workers is clustered into and influenced by the industrial relations system context. In the fragmented state-centred industrial relations system of Estonia, higher positions in the occupational hierarchy lead to greater control. However, occupational discretion could be even greater if the industrial relations system empowers it through collective voice and practice. Power is not only based on an individual's worth but also on organisation-level and society-level structures and practices that create and recreate that worth.

Employees are also embedded within organisations where interactions create and recreate boundaries for actors' discretion and behaviour. The studies show that empowering managerial practices differ across organisations and workers. Consequently, employees differ in their opportunities to participate and have influence in health and safety management and worktime and method discretion. More extensive top-down management practices and workplace regulations that coordinate collective action, as well as a stronger reliance on managerial direct control of employees, limit individual employee agency and discretion. Employee involvement and participatory practices at the workplace and employee level are also influenced by institutional factors of the industrial relations system. Employee control and participation in the industrial relations system assume relations of autonomy and dependence between the parties involved, and the power in these relations also shapes the existing practices.

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

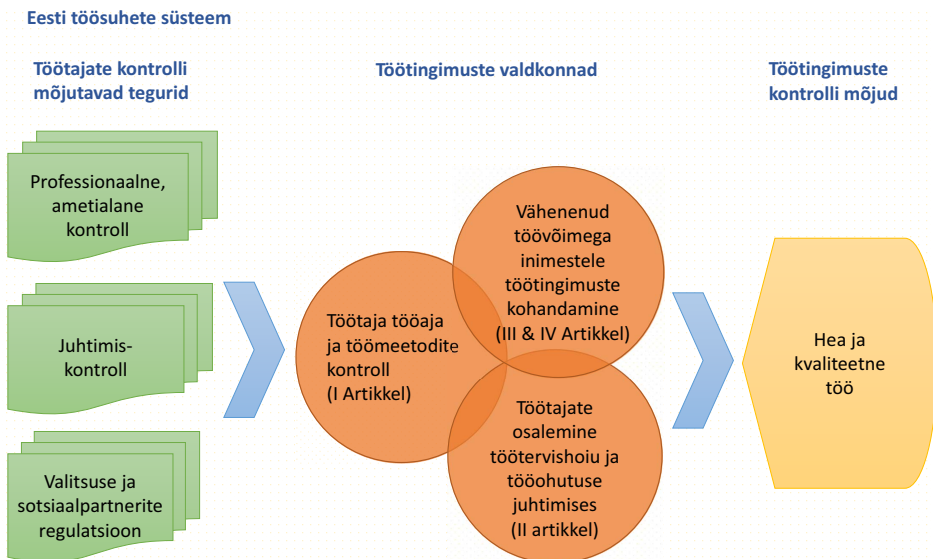
Töösuhted Eestis: töötajate kontroll ja osalus töötingimuste kaasotsustamisel

Minu doktoritöö katustekst käsitleb töösuhteid, ja täpsemalt töötingimuste kaasotsustamist ja töötajate võimalust otsustada oma töötingimuste üle Eesti töösuhete süsteemis. Läbi ajaloo oleme näinud, kuidas töötajate ja organisatsioonide vaheline võimu tasakaal töötingimuste kujundamisel on järjepidevalt muutunud. Võrreldes teiste Euroopa riikide töösuhete süsteemidega on Eesti kuulunud riikide perre, kus töötajate võimalused töötingimuste üle otsustamisel on suurenenud sõltumata sellest, et kollektiivsed töösuhted ei ole nii väga levinud.

Doktoritöö keskne fookus on teguritel, mis võimaldavad töötajatel kujundada oma töötingimusi ja osaleda töötingimuste üle koosotsustamisel. Töökoha demokraatia ideaalide kohaselt on töötaja kontrollil ja osalusel sisemine väärtus, kuna inimestena peab neil olema võimalus kaasa rääkida neid puudutavates küsimustes (Dahl, 1985, lk 56). Lisaks sisemisele väärtusele osutavad varasemad uuringud, et töötajate iseseisev ja koosotsustamine võib suurendada paremat oskuste kasutamist, töö tootlikkust, töö-elu tasakaalu, töötajate tervist ja teisi oodatavaid tulemusi (vaata ülevaate viiteid lk 34). Nende oodatavate positiivsete mõjude tõttu on ka oluline mõista, miks töötajate kontrollis ja osaluses on märkimisväärsed erinevused. Töötajate kontrolli ja otsustuvõimaluste erinevuse küsimus on seotud otseselt küsimusega võimust töösuhetes. Töösuhetes võim kujuneb ajas vastastikusel mõjutamisel, mille väljenduseks on ka huvide vastandumise või ühistes huvides koostöö tegemine (Wilkinson jt, 2012). Võim võib väljenduda nii lihtsas mõjus teise osapoolle üle kui ka keerukamates mehhanismides, mis kujundavad osapoolte valikuid (vaata ülevaate viiteid osas 2).

Doktoritöös uurin kolme erinevat töötingimuste valdkonda, et iseloomustada töötajate võimalusi kujundada oma töötingimusi. Esimeses artiklis analüüsitakse töötajate võimalusi iseseisvalt valida tööaega ja töömeetodeid. Teises artiklis analüüsitakse töötajate osalemist töötervishoiu ja tööohutuse juhtimises. Kolmandas ja neljandas artiklis analüüsitakse vähenenud töövoimega inimestele töötingimuste kohandamise kollektiivseid töösuhteid. Artiklites keskendutakse küsimusele, mis mõjutab töötajate võimalusi mõjutada oma töötingimusi kas läbi iseseisva otsustamise või osalemise töötingimuste juhtimises. Doktoritöö temaatilised fookused on visualiseeritud järgnevalt toodud joonisel.

Doktoritöös töötingimuste ja töösuhete uurimiseks kasutati segameetodeid. Esimeses ja teises artiklis iseloomustati töötajate ja tööandjate käitumist läbilõikelise mitme-tasandilise küsitlusuuringu – Eesti Tööelu uuring andmestikuga kasutades analüüsimiseks mitme-tasandilise regressiooni mudelit. Teises ja kolmandas artiklis kasutati kvalitatiivset osalusuuringut töösuhte osapoolte praktikate iseloomustamiseks ja kujundamiseks.



JOONIS 1. DOKTORITÖÖ TEMAATILISED FOOKUSED

Töö ja tööhõive muutuva olemuse tõttu ka töötajate kontroll on dünaamiline ajalooline protsess, kuigi küsimus, kas töömaailm liigub suurema või väiksema töötaja kaalutusvõimaluste poole, jääb teatud määral ebaselgeks. Hoolimata sellest, et Euroopas oleme perioodil 1995–2015 pigem näinud töötajate kontrolli ja erinevuste vähenemist, on Eesti olnud üks nendest riikidest, kus töötajate otsustusvabadus on võrreldes teiste riikidega suurenenud (Warhurst jt 2019).

Töösuhete süsteemide võrdlusanalüüsid asetavad Eesti riikide perre, kus on pigem on madal töösuhete demokraatia (Sanz de Miguel jt 2020). Nende analüüside järgi meie töösuhete süsteemis kollektiivsed töötingimuste kokku leppimise mehhanismid on vähelevinud võrreldes näiteks Lõuna- ja Põhja-Euroopa riikidega. Selle põhjal järeldatakse, et töötajatel on pigem vähe võimalust otseselt mõjutada oma töötingimusi. Siiski teisalt võrdlusanalüüsid näitavad, et mitmes aspektis töötajate võimalus valida oma töötingimusi ja osaleda töötingimuste kujundamisel on ka Eestis kõrge – kuigi kollektiivsed mehhanismid on olulised siis need ainuüksi ei determineeri töötingimuste kujunemist (Sanz de Miguel jt 2020). Doktoritöö artiklites vaadatud töötingimuste valdkondadeski – töötaja võimalus valida tööaega ja osaleda töötervishoiu ja tööohutuse juhtimises – oleme kõrgemal tasemel kui töösuhete demokraatia koondnäitajad osutaksid. Samas, kuigi töötingimuste kohandamises vähenenud töövõimega inimestele näitaja osas oleme pigem sünkroonis töösuhete demokraatia koondnäitajaga. See mõneti vastustab varasemaid hinnanguid töösuhete süsteemide võrdlusanalüüsides, mille järgi Eesti töösuhete süsteemi fookuseks pole niivõrd kollektiivsed töötingimuste kokku leppimise mehhanismid kuivõrd regulatsiooniga võrdsete õiguste ja võimaluste loomine sealhulgas vähem kaitstud töötajatele (Welz jt 2016).

Hoolimata sellest, et Eesti töösuhete süsteemis on kollektiivsetel mehhanismidel tagasihoidlik roll, on töötajatel võrreldes teiste Euroopa riikidega sageli

suurem otsustusvõimalus töötingimuste üle. Samas näitab teiste riikide töösuhete süsteemi kogemus, et kollektiivsete praktikate levik ka Eesti töösuhete süsteemis looks töötajatele rohkem võimalusi kujundada oma töötingimusi. Kollektiivsed praktikad võivad kaasa aidata näiteks ka töötingimuste kohandamise levikule, mis osas oleme praegu pigem teistele eest vedavatele riikidele järele vaatajad.

Töötajate iseotsustamine ja kaasotsustamine oma töötingimuste üle sõltub lisaks töösuhete süsteemi eripäradest ka töötajate ja organisatsioonide erinevustest. Doktoritöö analüüside järgi on paremate oskuste ja teadmistega ning kõrgemal ametialasel positsioonil töötajatel suuremad võimalused otsustada oma töötingimuste üle. Näiteks professionaalidel on suurem kontroll oma töögraafiku ja -meetodi üle ning nad saavad rohkem osaleda tööohutuse juhtimises teiste ametitega võrreldes. Kuid uuringute järgi võib arvata, et kollektiivsed mehhanismid suurendaks veelgi individuaalsete tegurite mõju ja seeläbi suurendaks iseseisvat või kaasotsustamist. Kollektiivsed mehhanismid aitaks seeläbi parandada võimalusi kujundada oma töö tingimusi nendel töötajatel, kelle personaalsed võimalused on pigem ahtamad.

Töötajate võimalust kontrollida oma töötingimusi mõjutab nende organisatsioon. Töötaja ja organisatsiooni koostoimine ja vastastikku mõjutamine loob ja võtab töötajalt kaalutusvõimalusi ja otsustuskohti oma töötingimuste üle. Uuringud osutavad, et kuna juhtimispraktikad varieeruvad organisatsiooniti, on ka töötajatel erinevad võimalused osaleda töötervishoiu ja -ohutuse juhtimises ja/või tööaja ja -meetodite valikus. Ülevalt alla toimuva juhtimise lai levik piirab töötajate kaalutusvõimalusi ja kontrolli oma töötingimuste üle. Samas töötajate osalemist organisatsiooni otsustusprotsessis toetavate juhtimispraktikate levik sõltub sageli laiemast kollektiivsete töösuhete süsteemist ja süsteemi demokraatlikkusest.

Töötaja võimalus ise kujundada oma töötingimusi võib tähendada paremaid tööõhuvõimalusi ja paremat tööelu kvaliteeti. Siiski siinjuures tuleb rõhutada, et tööelu ja töösuhted on olemuselt kollektiivsed sotsiaal-majanduslikud suhted ja töötajate iseotsustamine ja iseseisev kontroll töötingimuste üle peab arvestama teiste töötajate ja organisatsiooni ühiste vajadustega ja sellest kantud kollektiivse kontrolliga. Seepärast ei peaks kontroll töösuhtes tähendama vaid töötaja või organisatsiooni kontrolli teise üle, pigem seda, kuidas tööelus ja ühiskonnas toimida ja saavutada ühine heaolu. Siinjuures puudub hoolimata teooriate paljususest paraku mõõdupuu, milline peaks olema võimu ja kontrolli optimaalne tasakaal sageli vastandlike huvide vahel näiteks töötaja heaolu. Usutavasti annab see mõtteainest ka tulevastele uurimistöödele.

Tähelepanu tuleb pöörata ka uurimismeetodite piiratusele. Töös kasutatakse läbilõikeliste küsitlusuuringute ja osalusuuringuga kogutud andmeid. Andmetes tuvastatud seosed osutavad võimalikele põhjus-tagajärg seostele vaid teoreetiliste eelduste kehtimisel. Veelgi enam, arvestada tuleb, et kasutatavad meetodid eeldavad, et inimesed uuringute tavapärasest vestluses avada võimu keerukat mitmetahulist olemust töösuhetes. Võimusuhted on aga sageli varjatud tähenduses, et üksik-indiviidil on pea võimatu tajuda ja märgata kõiki tegureid, mis mõjutavad teda puudutavat. Ehkki palju võib jääda varjatuks, on tarvilik jätkata töösuhete praktikate uurimist, kuna need tõstavad esile põhiküsimusi selle kohta, millist tööelu me oma ühiskonnas tahame.

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PUBLICATIONS

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