What makes a social system change? Examples of a German and a Danish system of social dialogue

Certain differences may be observed in the systems of social dialogue in Germany and in Denmark. In both these countries, gradual changes are occurring at present; however, while those under way in Denmark strengthen the existing system of dialogue and improve economic efficiency, in Germany the system is undergoing an ever stronger erosion, with the significance of the trades union and of sectoral collective agreements diminishing in particular. The attempt at increasing the effectiveness of the economy is therefore being made by means of dismantling the existing system of social dialogues rather than by reforming it, which might improve its usefulness for the economy. The main query the article poses is what makes the changes of the system of social dialogue in both countries evolve in diverse directions? In order to obtain the answer to this question, three groups of factors are analysed: (1) a configuration of social interests supporting the system or aimed at changing it, (2) dominating values and ideas, which will defend the system or change it, and (3) its institutions, which on the one hand make it possible to implement specific changes (they are being less or more flexible or open to institutional innovations) but, at the same time, they impose systemic restrictions, which defend the inviolability of specific social interests and counteract the reforms which are either too radical, or are incompatible with these interests.