

Workshop title:

Conceptualizing and Comparing Interest Groups and Interest Group Systems

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Abstract

When starting their project on the ‘Organization of Business Interests’ (OBI) in the early 1980s, Philippe C. Schmitter and Wolfgang Streeck (1999) conceptualized business interest associations (BIAs) as being confronted with two different sets of opposite logics: on the one hand, BIAs would face the juxtaposition between the ‘logic of influence’ (BIAs want to influence public policy-making and must, therefore, accept a lot of compromises) and the ‘logic of membership’ (BIAs have to represent the interests of their members in order not to lose them). On the other hand, Schmitter and Streeck also saw BIAs challenged by finding a position between the ‘logic of effective implementation’ and the ‘logic of goal formation’, with the former pointing to a more routinized ‘administrative’ associational behavior and the latter to the idea of an association pursuing long-term goals. When combining the extremes of the two dichotomies, Schmitter and Streeck showed that BIAs would become similar to other forms of corporate actors. More in detail, they would imitate: *a*) governments (logic of influence and logic of effective implementation); *b*) firms (logic of membership and logic of effective implementation); *c*) movements (logic of influence and logic of goal formation); *d*) clubs (logic of membership and logic of goal formation).

While this conceptual framework sounds convincing, it is nevertheless weakened by some important *lacunae*: first of all, there have never been systematic operationalizations and/or conceptualizations of the two abovementioned dichotomies. Second, our current understanding of what a government, a firm, a movement and a club is, has most probably changed with regard to what Schmitter and Streeck had in mind thirty years ago: thus, these

conceptual changes have to be taken into account, but can also contribute to a more accurate description of the ideal types.

In line with this, the workshop focuses on the conceptualization and the operationalization of Schmitter's and Streeck's dichotomies. We are firmly convinced that the great amount of recent empirical contributions to the interest group literature¹ has to be linked to a more sophisticated conceptual analysis. We also think that the conceptual framework originally developed by Schmitter and Streeck – if accurately refreshed and upgraded – is not only applicable to BIAs (for which the authors had created it), but to all kinds of interest groups: in fact, having two dichotomies makes it easy to develop an ideal type analysis. If we are able to locate every interest group with regard to every dichotomy, then we will also be able to say in how far a single group comes close to the ideal types of governments, firms, movements, and clubs. This takes up ideas of (fuzzy) property spaces as developed in some more recent approaches in social science methodology (Ragin 2000: 77; Schneider and Wagemann 2012: 97; originally: Lazarsfeld 1937).

Such an analysis of ideal types can then also lead to an analysis of national interest group systems in comparative perspective. More in detail, it appears to be reasonable to hypothesize a sort of linkage between the relative predominance – in a particular interest group system – of a particular ideal type, and the characteristics of that interest group system as a whole. In this respect, the path-breaking publications by Richardson (1993) and, to some extent, Norton (1999)² date back to (more than) fifteen years ago; therefore, we are convinced that an update of their research agenda is necessary.

Outline of Topic

In modern industrial democracies, interest groups are crucial actors. Nevertheless, the study of interest group politics is a relatively small field within political science, also because fewer scholars work in this area than in party politics or policy studies, for example. However, this limited development is also connected to various conceptual, methodological and disciplinary barriers which render the accumulation of knowledge in interest group research difficult (Beyers *et al.* 2008, 1103).

¹ For an accurate and complete literature review, see: Hojnacki (2012).

² Something different was developed by Halpin and Jordan (2012), who focus on interest group populations with respect to their size, density and diversity over time.

Notwithstanding, during the last fifteen years, there have been an ever increasing number of scholars who have dealt with this topic: this has also become manifest in empirical analyses of the influence of interest groups on the policy-making process (Arts and Verschuren 1999; Verschuren and Arts 2004; Dür and de Bièvre 2007; Dür 2008; Klüver 2009; 2013; Baumgartner *et al.* 2009; Lowery 2013; Pedersen 2013) and of their lobbying strategies (Gray and Lowery 1996a; 1996b; Page 1999; Broscheid and Coen 2003; Binderkrantz 2005; Leech *et al.* 2005; Mahoney 2007; Holyoke 2009), usually analyzed with regard to their potential to get access to policy-makers (Bouwen 2004; Eising 2007), etc.

Unfortunately, empirical comparative studies are not so numerous: this is particularly true where national interest group *systems* are concerned, and not only single organizations are targeted. There are several reasons for this: first of all, from a conceptual point of view, a major problem is an abundance of neologisms and a sort of terminological chaos in defining what an interest group is or should be (Beyers *et al.* 2008). This often implied the risk to ‘compare apples and oranges’. Second, the European and American literatures on interest groups developed largely separately over the previous decades: while the European tradition is rather rooted in policy studies, American scholars are more concerned with lobbying strategies or the associational membership (Mahoney and Baumgartner 2008). For a long time, this divergence has therefore been an obstacle to a fruitful dialogue between the two banks of the Atlantic Ocean in interest group research. From a more pragmatic point of view, the lack of international datasets made such comparative analyses almost impossible (Berkhout and Lowery 2008).

We have to refer to Richardson (1993) and, to some extent, Norton (1999), in order to quote attempts to develop a truly comparative study of interest group systems. While Richardson’s main purpose was to present macro-political institutions (governments, parliaments, bureaucracies, independent authorities, etc.) in their broad characteristics and in terms of their relationship to their national interest group systems (also including the European Union), Norton focused on the relationship between interest groups and national parliaments in six countries and in the EU. More in detail, he hypothesized that governments are the principal targets for interest group demands, while parliaments are targets only in so far as they retain some independent capacity to affect policy outcomes; however, they are channels rather than targets.

A quite different purpose has been recently followed by Halpin and Jordan (2012), who focused on national interest group populations with respect to their size, density and diversity over time, following a population ecology perspective largely derived from biology. Their

main research questions were: how many organized interests are there in different societies and how quickly are they growing (or decreasing)? Do different types grow (or decrease) at different rates? In other words: their perspective has mainly been *systemic* and interest group-oriented, without necessarily referring to other arenas, such as parliaments or governments.

Our approach in this workshop is quite different both from Richardson's or Norton's or Halpin's and Jordan's studies, but is also characterized by comparative ambitions: starting from the well-known project on the 'Organization of Business Interests' (OBI) by Philippe C. Schmitter and Wolfgang Streeck (1999),³ we would like to compare national interest group systems with respect to their division in sets of interest groups similar to governments, firms, movements and clubs. To do this, a first aim of the workshop is conceptual and methodological, since there have never been systematic operationalizations and/or conceptualizations of the two dichotomies upon which Schmitter and Streeck based their analytical framework. The (rather ambitious) goal is to develop the conceptual dimensions and empirical variables which mark the four competing imperatives and logics stressed by Schmitter and Streeck: the logic of influence vs. the logic of membership, and the logic of effective implementation vs. the logic of goal formation.

This, in turn, will make it possible to offer preliminary suggestions about the main features of the different national interest group systems under scrutiny, since we expect them to refer to different compositions of sets of interest groups. Note that variation can occur both with respect to national interest group populations and to sub-populations, such as those regarding single policy sectors. We can assume, for example, that there is a proportionality between the prevalence of interest groups in a given system favoring the logic of influence rather than the logic of membership and the number of institutional access points of a particular country: the more polycentric the policy-making process is, the easier it is for interest groups to be influential, and the more interest groups are likely to take advantage of that institutional setting by pursuing a logic of influence rather than a logic of membership⁴. Similarly, it seems to be reasonable to hypothesize an inverse proportionality between the prevalence of interest groups pursuing the logic of effective implementation rather than the logic of goal formation and the level of ideological polarization characterizing a particular

³ The paper to which we refer is a considerably shortened version of a piece that appeared as far back as 1981, when it was published as a discussion paper at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin (WZB Discussion Paper IIM/LMP 81/13).

⁴ However, the direction of the causal relationship is not given a priori: while it might be that many access points push interest groups to follow the logic of influence rather than the logic of membership, it could also be the case that many interest groups pursuing a logic of influence rather than a logic of membership shape the country's institutional setting towards a polycentric one.

country: the greater the level of the ideological polarization, the more interest groups, in order to fit with the socio-political context in which they operate – this also been called ‘Political Opportunity Structures’ in social movement research⁵ – are likely to distinguish themselves with respect to political rather than administrative rationality and, therefore, to prefer the logic of goal formation over the logic of effective implementation.

Relation to existing research:

Over the last fifteen years, an impressive amount of empirical research on interest groups scholarship has been produced (Hojnacki *et al.* 2012). Whereas interest group research in the decades immediately after the publication of Olson’s seminal book on the logic of collective action (Olson 1965) spent a great deal of effort modeling the decision-making processes of individuals, trying to understand why anyone would contribute to collective action, the newer literature especially focuses on:

- a) the influence of interest groups (Arts and Verschuren 1999; Verschuren and Arts 2004; Dür and de Bièvre 2007; Dür 2008; Klüver 2009; 2013; Baumgartner *et al.* 2009; Lowery 2013; Pedersen 2013);
- b) their lobbying tactics and strategies (Gray and Lowery 1996a; 1996b; Binderkrantz 2005; Leech *et al.* 2005; Mahoney 2007; Holyoke 2009; Binderkrantz and Krøyer 2012), above all with respect to the distinction between insider strategies (Page 1999; Eising 2007; Bohemke *et al.* 2013) and outsider strategies, i.e. media visibility (Danielian and Page 1994; Kollman 1998; Thrall 2006; Bernhagen and Trani 2012; Binderkrantz 2012);
- c) their intra-organizational structures, especially with respect to resources they are able to spend in order to have a role in the policy-making process (Austen-Smith 1996; Crombez 2002; Eising 2007), and internal democracy (Halpin 2006; Grant and Maloney 2007; Binderkrantz 2009);
- d) the interest group system as a whole, with respect to its size, density, and diversity (Lowery and Gray 1995; Lowery *et al.* 2010; Halpin and Jordan 2012).

Among the topics just listed, the workshop is especially related to the third and fourth literatures, namely the intra-organizational structures of interest groups and their populations

⁵ Within the large bulk of literature dealing with social movements, we particularly refer to the well-known book by Diani and Della Porta (2006).

which mainly target the *systemic* perspective. However, this does not mean that the workshop would exclude the other topics (interest groups' lobbying tactics and strategies)⁶.

Finally, this workshop is also linked to the growing literature on concept formation. Indeed, in recent years, there have been an ever increasing number of scholars who have dealt with this topic (Collier and Mahon 1993; Goertz 2006), and Sartori's (1970) traditional ideas of concept formation have been substantially developed further. This also represents a methodological challenge, since working with Schmitter's and Streeck's two dichotomies has to be connected to the most recent discussion on the differences (but also synergies) between (qualitative) concept formation and (quantitative) measurement (Gerring 2012; Goertz and Mahoney 2012).

Likely participants:

The workshop directors aim at a good mixture from senior and junior participants working predominantly on interest groups / interest group systems, but also on concept formation, policy studies and/or EU studies. Since the focus of the workshop is comparative, a certain balance with regard to geographical origin is desired. The participation of a limited number of non-European scholars (or scholars working on non-European topics and areas) will be helpful.

Type of Papers required:

The workshop welcomes original and innovative papers emphasizing both conceptual and methodological aspects in the empirical study of interest groups. We also encourage papers that use or discuss different methods for collecting and analyzing data referring to the most relevant empirical dimensions of interest group research, such as intra-organizational characteristics and lobbying strategies. To sum up, the workshop will be open to all scholars interested in:

- i) contributing to a better understanding of the conceptualization and analysis of interest groups and interest group systems;

⁶ On this point, it would be noteworthy to analyze the empirical correlation between the dominance of set-types of interests groups (again: 'governments', 'firms', 'movements', and 'clubs' like groups) and types of lobbying strategies: are interest groups pursuing the logic of influence rather than the logic of membership more likely to be interested in lobbying policy makers (and vice-versa)? And among these kinds of groups, are interest groups more similar to governments more likely to develop 'insider lobbying strategies' than those more similar to social movements (and vice-versa)?

- ii) analyzing national interest groups with respect to their domains, their intra-organizational structures, their resources and outputs;
- iii) describing national interest group systems with respect to their size, and with respect to their connotation, in terms of governments, firms, movements and clubs like groups.

In terms of the workshop structure, the whole first day will be devoted to conceptual and methodological clarifications with regard to the operationalization of interest group (systems) characteristics. The second and third days will concentrate on empirical comparative or single-case studies, following the outline given here. The fourth day will place the results in a broader research agenda, also opening the discussion to policy studies, reflections about (associative) democracy and questions about collective action in general.

Biographical note

Claudius Wagemann is professor of social science methodology in the Department of Political Science at the Goethe University Frankfurt. With regard to interest group research, he published a book (Routledge) on Private Interest Governments and several articles and book contributions. He has also widely published on qualitative comparative methods, most notably QCA and fuzzy sets. Furthermore, his research agenda includes right-wing extremism from a social movement perspective, political parties, and the Quality of Democracy.

Andrea Pritoni is a post-doc researcher at the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the University of Bologna. His research interests are mainly oriented towards the fields of comparative politics (such as electoral systems, party systems and governmental systems), interest groups, and policy analysis (with a particular focus on the banking and insurance sector).

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