

Panel 3: Three themes in interest representation: collective action, political strategies and interest group policy impact

Chaired by: prof. dr. David Lowery (UL), drs. Joost Berkhout (UL) and dr. Caelesta Poppelaars (UvAntwerpen)

Many organizations take up political roles throughout the policy process. We observe companies voicing concerns in the news media, local citizen groups engaging in public consultations, and think tanks providing new frames on existing policies. These political activities, which we can broadly define as interest representation, are usually researched by separate disciplinary fields and demarcated by the type of organization. That is, we observe separate studies on social movement organizations, business associations, civil society organizations, and firms as political actors, literatures that hardly speak to each other (Baumgartner and Leech 1998; Beyers, Eising, and Maloney 2008). Such fragmentation may be understandable given the different focus of the individual scholarly fields, but it is counterproductive to the study of policy processes as a whole. It is here, namely, that we observe the effects of a variety of organizations that formally consult with government, produce policy-relevant reports or publicly contest political decisions.

Explaining variation in the access and influence of these organizations is a classic yet crucial theme in understanding policy making (Lowery, 2007). We therefore propose to study interest representation activities via the framework of the 'influence production process' to stimulate an integrative approach toward activities associated with interest representation (Lowery, Poppelaars, and Berkhout 2008). Rather than focusing on variation in type of organizations, we suggest a threefold distinction that is explicitly related to how interest representation unfolds through a life cycle of organization maintenance and political behavior. This integrative approach better relates interest representation to the study of policy processes and, accordingly, to the NIG research program. We invite both empirical and conceptual papers related to one of the following themes:

First, citizens mobilize for collective action. Such political mobilization provides opportunities for individual citizens to participate in policy making, which seems beneficial in democratic terms. However, the forms of participation engaged in by citizens seems to have changed over recent decades. That is, citizens increasingly participate in interest organizations and decreasingly choose to become member of political parties. At the same time, however, citizen participation is shown to largely exist of 'check book participation' in what remain 'internally undemocratic' organizations (Halpin 2006; Jordan and Maloney 2008). We invite papers that empirically or conceptually evaluate the role of these forms of citizen participation in policy making at different governance levels. As such, this topic relates to the 'citizen and governance' theme of the NIG research program.

A second topic of interest representation concerns influence strategies. Once mobilized and organized, organizations develop the select among a variety of strategies to advance their policy concerns. First, interest organizations have different ways of interacting among themselves and dividing organizational attention to issues among populations of organizations (Gray and Lowery, 1996). Second, they divide their attention between lobbying in different government venues, such as parliament or bureaucratic agencies, and additionally decide 'to go public' or rely on traditional inside lobbying (e.g. Kriesi, Tresh and Jochum, 2007). Existing institutional arrangements affect the opportunities of organizations to lobby government and use media strategies. Papers related to this topic could study organizational populations, address the opportunities of interest groups to lobby bureaucratic agencies or political parties, or focus on how interest groups and their counter-parties deal with the 'mediated' parts of the policy process.

A final aspect of interest representation we hoped to address in this panel concerned how public policies are affected by involving interested parties in the policy process. For example, does 'expert' advice improve the quality of government or does it lead to inappropriate informational dependency of portions of government on external sources of information? For this panel, we invited policy specific analyses that evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of different modes of interest group involvement. This final topic relates to the third theme of the NIG program that, among others, addresses the management of public consultation and participation.

By structuring the study of interest representation via these three themes, this panel aimed to bring together scholars working from different theoretical perspectives, such as those addressing political opportunity structures, social movements, corporatism, and policy evaluation studies, to offer a comprehensive assessment of the role of interest groups in public policy making.

References

Baumgartner, Frank R., and Beth L. Leech. 1998. *Basic interests. The importance of groups in politics in political scientists*. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press.

Beyers, J., R. Eising, and W. Maloney. 2008. Researching Interest Group Politics in Europe and Elsewhere: Much we Study, Little we Know? *West European Politics* 31 (6):1103-1128.

Gray, V., & Lowery, D. (1996). *The population ecology of interest representation: lobbying communities in the American states*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Halpin, D.R. 2006. The Participatory and Democratic Potential and Practice of Interest Groups: Between Solidarity and Representation. *Public Administration* 84 (4):919-940.

Jordan, A.G., and W. Maloney. 2008. *Democracy and Interest Groups. Enhancing Participation?* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Kriesi, H., Tresch, A., & Jochum, M. 2007. Going Public in the European Union: Action Repertoires of Western European Collective Political Actors. *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(1), 48-73.

Lowery, David, Caelesta Poppelaars, and Joost Berkhout. 2008. The European Union Interest System in Comparative Perspective: A Bridge too far? *West European politics* 31 (6):1231-1250.

Lowery, David 2007. Why Do Organized Interests Lobby? A Multi-Goal, Multi-Context Theory of Lobbying. *Polity*, 39, 29-54.