

Papers for NIG Annual Work Conference 2010: Workshop 4

Interest Groups and the Policy Process: Revisiting Research on State-Society Relations in Multi-layered Political Systems

Panel leaders: Jan Beyers and Caelesta Braun-Poppelaars, University of Antwerp

Discussant: Arco Timmermans, Leiden University & Montesquieu Institute The Hague

Paper 1: The European Union and Dutch Government-Business Relations. From corporatism to statism?

Markus Haverland, Erasmus University Rotterdam, haverland@fsw.eur.nl

There is a strong research tradition that study the impact of the European Union on its member states (see e.g. Graziano and Vink 2007, Featherstone and Radaelli 2003). A lot of research has focused on the impact on national policies, complemented more recently with research on the impact on political structure and political processes. This study deal with interest group politics which is is part of the latter dimension of the political system. In reviewing the state of the art on the impact of the EU on domestic interest groups, Eising states that this area is underresearched. In particular “it is yet unclear how the EU affects pluralistic, corporatistic, or statist regimes” (Eising 2007). This paper seeks to contribute this line of research by analysing the effect of European integration on Dutch government-business relations. I hypothesize that the EU involvement changes domestic corporatist patterns into domestic statist patterns. The hypothesis will be tested for policy-making concerning chemicals over the last decade.

Paper 2: An exchange theory of the activities of interest organizations

Joost Berkhout, University of Amsterdam, d.j.berkhout@uva.nl

Based on several theories of interest representation and social exchange theory, I develop a model that evaluates group activities as exchanges between different parts of the organizational environment. In this framework, I conceptualize the activities of interest organizations to be the result of: (1) the exchange between constituents and group

leaders, (2) the exchange between organizational representatives and policy makers, and (3) the exchange between interest organizations and the news media. Interest organizations intermediate between the different domains. They are assumed to make different choices in the prioritization of the related activities. These exchanges are governed by what I label the logic of influence, the logic of reputation and the logic of support. This framework adds to the existing literature in three ways. First, each of these logics of exchange is loosely embedded in varying research traditions. That is, the logic of influence fits in neo-corporatist thinking (e.g. Schmitter and Streeck, 1999), the logic of reputation relates to social movement literature (e.g. Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993) and the logic of support draws on (neo) pluralist literature (Salisbury, 1969, Gais and Walker, 1991, Olson, 1965). The combination of these varying insight leads to a more complete understanding of the choices and constraints of a more diverse group of political organizations. Second, while each of these traditions point to exchanges as focus-points of research, multiple exchanges have rarely been considered in an interrelated manner. Third, I formulate expectations on the circumstances under which each of these exchanges matter and are likely to occur. I thus contribute to the theoretical development of each of the logics of exchange by evaluating the explanatory power of contextual forces affecting potential exchanges. Apart from these potential contributions to a theory on political strategies, I contribute to the construction of group theory more broadly. That is, I explicitly incorporate aspects of the population of interest organizations as explanada for the behavior of interest groups. By doing this, I am able to better evaluate the importance of the variation in population level phenomena (diversity, density, clustering) for organizational behavior and group politics more broadly.

Paper 3: Ties that count. Explaining interest group access to policymakers

Jan Beyers and Caelesta Braun-Poppelaars, University of Antwerp, jan.beyers@ua.ac.be / caelesta.poppelaars@ua.ac.be

The degree to which interest organizations gain access to policymakers has often been explained with conceptual frameworks such as political opportunity structures, typologies such as (neo-)corporatism versus pluralism, or the supply of access goods in a dyadic

relation between interest groups and policymakers. These studies either focus on systemic macro-level factors or study individual-level strategic decision-making. This paper accounts for the impact networks within and between coalitions have on the likelihood that interest groups gain access to policymakers. Our empirical focus is on the Dutch interest group system for which we examine how structural network characteristics, the coalitions among groups and the position of interest organizations shape access. Our analysis based on data collected among 107 Dutch interest groups and 28 public policymakers leads to the conclusion that occupying a network position which connects distant actors – weak ties – is more important than individual organizational features such as the resources an interest organization possesses.

Paper 4: Policy agendas and interest group activity in Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom

Anne Rasmussen, Leiden University, rasmussena@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

Existing research shows that there is variation in how active different types of interest groups are. Especially business groups are portrayed as demonstrating higher levels of activity in their interaction with the political system than a number of other types of groups. However, so far little systematic research of the activity levels of interest groups has been conducted outside the US, and it has not been considered whether differences between the activity levels of different types of groups ultimately relate to other factors, such as the policy agendas these groups try to influence. To fill this gap, I use a multi-level count model to examine whether there is any systematic variation in the activity levels of the groups depending on group types and the policy areas in which they seek influence. The analyzed datasets consist of official records of interest group interaction with the national parliament and administration in Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The findings illustrate that business dominance is partly a result of the policy areas in which business groups are active. Hence, in several of the models the differences in the activity levels of different types of groups are weakened or cancelled out when we control for the type of policy agendas that these groups seek to influence. In

this way, the results deliver preliminary evidence that future research of the activity patterns of interest groups should be closely linked to the study of policy agendas.