Accessing political arenas

Interest group access to the bureaucracy, parliament and the media

Abstract

A key concern for interest groups is finding a channel for voicing their interests and influencing public policy. This article combines two perspectives on interest group representation to explain the pattern of interest group access to different political arenas. First, it argues that access to political arenas is determined by the match between the resources and demands of interest groups and gatekeepers – politicians, bureaucrats and reporters. Second, from a partly competing perspective, it is argued that access is cumulative and converges around wealthy and professionalized groups. Based on a large-scale investigation of group presence in political arenas in Denmark combined with survey data on group resources, the analyses provide evidence for a pattern of interest group involvement we call privileged pluralism. This describes a system where multiple political arenas provide opportunities for multiple interests to engage, but where unequally distributed group resources also lead to cumulativity across all arenas.

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Interest groups are central to political representation. Groups voice their concerns in the media, lobby politicians and seek access to relevant bureaucrats. Although it is complicated to ascertain group influence, it is indisputable that many interest groups have decisive political influence (Baumgartner et al. 2011; Dür 2007). For decades, scholars have debated the extent to which interest group systems provide different societal groups with equal opportunities for representation (Dahl 1961; Olson 1971; Schattschneider 1975; Truman 1951). The underlying premise is that diversity in group representation is a democratic good – but many studies have found significant bias in the group system, with overrepresentation of privileged groups such as business interests (Danielian and Page 1995; Schattschneider 1975: 34-35; Schlozman 1984; Schlozman et al. 2012; Walker 1991: 3).

While most studies have focused on the composition of the interest group population or the representation of groups in specific settings, evidence suggests that group representation varies across political arenas (Bouwen 2004; Halpin et al. 2012; Salisbury 1984: 74-75). This issue is crucial because interest groups striving to affect public policy seek access to different arenas (Beyers 2004; Binderkrantz 2005; Kriesi et al. 2007). Baumgartner and Jones (1993: 35) argue that it is democratically less important whether a particular venue confers advantages to specific groups than whether multiple venues exist in a political system. From the perspective of interest representation, there are positive implications of different political arenas providing opportunities for different groups to voice their concerns. If, on the other hand, the same types of groups dominate all political arenas, the losers in one arena have nowhere to turn and public policy as well as democratic debate will be affected by a consistent representation bias.

We define a political arena as a political institution of importance for political decisions and/or the political agenda of a society. Here we focus on interest group access in the executive bureaucracy, parliament and the media. Examining these political arenas allows us to address the
extent to which different arenas permit different groups and types of interests to be politically represented. Furthermore, existing studies of group access across political arenas are mainly descriptive (Halpin et al. 2012; Salisbury 1984). Here, we go beyond description by conducting a systematic test of the importance of group type and resources in explaining access to the bureaucracy, parliament and the media.

Interest groups are seen as rational actors screening political arenas for the best prospects for success (Binderkrantz and Krøyer 2012; see however Pralle 2003). However, access to political arenas is not automatic. Groups gain access to political arenas to the extent that they possess relevant assets (Bouwen 2004). In this sense, group access is a result of an exchange between groups and gatekeepers in different arenas (Bouwen 2004; Braun 2012: 7; Öberg et al. 2011). Crucially, the goals and assets of interest groups vary. For example, groups interested in affecting the political agenda will direct much attention to the media, while groups seeking influence on the preparation and implementation of policies are more likely to approach bureaucrats (Gais and Walker 1991). The relevance of different assets also varies across arenas (Bouwen 2004). A business group may provide detailed technical information valuable to a bureaucrat or a minister preparing a policy decision, but not very attractive for a journalist trying to sell newspapers. This perspective leads to the expectation that the patterns of group representation differ across arenas. This expectation is tested alongside a competing perspective emphasizing spillover effects across arenas and the general relevance of resources such as a large professional secretariat.

The empirical analysis of arena access draws on a study of Danish interest groups. Denmark has traditionally been regarded as one of the world’s more corporatist countries, but in recent decades corporatism has been in decline (Öberg et al. 2011). At the same time, parliament has gained in relevance as a target of interest groups, and – in keeping with developments in other liberal democracies – the media has become an increasingly important political arena (Binderkrantz
This analysis therefore draws on a unique dataset combining measures of group access across three arenas with information from a survey of all national interest groups. This allows us to trace each individual group as it appears in the media, in the bureaucracy, and in parliament – and to link this with survey data on group resources.

After discussing the conceptualization of group diversity, the paper proceeds to a detailed discussion of the resource exchange model of group access and the competing model of cumulativity. Subsequently, research design and data are presented and the empirical analysis of arena access is conducted.

**Bias and diversity in arena access**

The issue of diversity versus bias in interest group systems is classic. Ever since Schattschneider (1960/1975) questioned the pluralist assumption of a relatively well-balanced group system, scholars have investigated the extent to which different groups have successfully mobilized and gained political influence (Baumgartner and Leech 1998: 100-19; Jordan et al. 2012; Lowery and Gray 2004; Schlozman et al. 2012; Walker 1991; Wonka et al. 2010). One challenge in assessing the degree of diversity in group representation is that there is no way to know what unbiased group presence would look like. Some groups may be compared to relevant societal groups (see Schlozman 1984), but for many group types it is not feasible to establish how their “natural” presence in the group system might look (Baumgartner and Leech 1998: 93). It is, however, possible to compare the share of different types of groups in politically mobilized interest group populations to the level of political access obtained (Danielian and Page 2006) and to establish the relative success of groups across different political venues (Halpin et al. 2012).

In addressing diversity in political voice it is essential to capture the nature of the interests being represented in political arenas (Schlozman 2012: 30). We define interest groups as
membership organizations working to obtain political influence. Group members may be individuals, firms, governmental institutions or other interest groups. In contrast to some scholars, our interest is thus restricted to membership groups and we do not include individual businesses or institutions (Jordan et al. 2004: 200). Within the set of groups delimited by this definition we find groups representing very different types of members or causes – some organize well-defined sectional groups, for example related to the labor market, whereas others work for broader causes like animal protection or human rights. A division into the following group categories speaks to the main themes of the literature: 1) business groups, 2) trade unions, 3) institutional groups, 4) identity groups, 5) public interest groups, 6) professional groups and 7) leisure groups.

Perhaps the most recurrent theme in the interest group literature has been the overrepresentation of business interests. From Schattschneider’s (1975: 34-35) ascertainment that the “heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent” to more recent accounts of group representation, a main concern has been to determine the relative (over-)weight of business interests in the pressure group system (Danielian and Page 1994; Schlozman et al. 2012). In many respects, trade unions constitute the immediate counterpart to business, and in corporatist settings these group types are traditionally the quintessential participants (Molina and Rhodes 2002; Schmitter 1974). Particularly in Scandinavia, institutional providers of public or semi-public services – that is, associations of local authorities, schools, museums and other types of institutions – have also played a prominent role in corporatist arrangements. From a democratic perspective, these groups are important because they represent a set of interests related to the provision of public services. Although these institutional groups are private actors, they draw their members and finances from public sources (Rhodes 1986).

Another crucial concern is the political representation of groups and causes not related to the market and/or vocations, professions or institutions. Berry (1999) argues that the voice of such
citizen groups in US politics has been on the rise, while others are more skeptical about the role played by these representatives of public interests and disadvantaged constituencies (Schlozman 2012: 34). The broad class of citizen groups, however, masks the important distinction between organizations that seek public goods and those seeking benefits for limited constituencies such as patients or minority groups (Dunleavy 1991; Schlozman 2012: 31). Consequently, our category of “identity groups” covers sectional groups, e.g. for patients, minorities, the elderly, students and other non-labor market groups. “Public interest groups,” meanwhile – consistent with Berry’s definition in his early work (1977: 7) – encompasses groups seeking collective goods, the achievement of which would not selectively or materially benefit their members or activists. These latter groups have been argued to face particularly harsh obstacles in organizing for political influence, and in effect to be underrepresented in political arenas (Olson 1971; Schlozman et al. 2012: 277).

We also include a category of “professional groups,” representing, for example, specific types of teachers or doctors, and one of “leisure groups,” including groups organized in relation to private interests such as sports or religious and spiritual interests. These groups are numerous, but their political participation is often rather peripheral because their main purposes are non-political (Jordan et al. 2004). Nevertheless, their inclusion allows us to complete the picture of the interest group types represented in political arenas.

Political arenas: bureaucracy, parliament and media

Interest groups participate in various stages of political processes, from the formation of the political agenda to the eventual implementation of policies (Bernhagen and Trani 2012: 50). Throughout these processes, they seek access to and interact with administrative and parliamentary decision makers and with reporters (Baumgartner and Leech 1998; Beyers 2004; Eising 2007a).
While Congress has been at the center of much US research, European scholars have traditionally been more preoccupied with group interaction with bureaucrats (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Rhodes and Marsh 1992). In reaction to the increasing political importance of the media, this arena has also increasingly attracted the attention of group scholars (Bernhagen and Trani 2012; Binderkrantz 2012; Danielian and Page 1994; Kepplinger 2002; Kollman 1998).

Ultimately interest groups are relevant insofar as they channel interests into political influence. A crucial step in gaining influence is capturing the attention of relevant actors – that is, accessing political arenas. Access signifies political importance and eventually a higher likelihood of political influence (Eising 2007b: 387). As argued by Hansen, “the policy views of advocates with access receive consistent, serious consideration” (1991: 11). In contrast, groups that do not take part in the policy process are less likely to successfully defend their interests, as acutely captured in the Washington adage, “If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu” (Schlozman et al. 2012: 309). While access does not necessarily imply influence, it constitutes a necessary step towards achieving influence over the political agenda or specific decisions (Bouwen 2004; Eising 2007b; Truman, 1951). Being in contact with members of parliament, having access to relevant bureaucrats and being present in the media are relevant measures of interest group positions in these arenas.

While this study is the first to systematically compare group access across arenas and test the role of group type and resources, there is some evidence that different arenas provide different types of groups with political opportunities. First, several studies have analyzed the strategies employed by interest groups and demonstrated variation in the extent to which different types of groups target political arenas (Beyers 2004; Binderkrantz 2005; Kriesi et al. 2007). Second, a few studies have found different patterns of representation in different arenas (Halpin et al. 2012: 133; Salisbury 1984: 74-75). A common theme in these studies is that publicly visible arenas are more attractive to
groups pursuing broad political goals, whereas business interests are more likely found in less visible arenas. In the next section we link this argument to an exchange model of arena access.

**An exchange model of arena access**

Arena access can be seen as the result of an exchange of resources between interest groups on the one hand, and arena gatekeepers – politicians, bureaucrats and reporters – on the other. Resource dependencies matter because neither state institutions nor interest groups can autonomously pursue and achieve their political goals. The interaction of groups and gatekeepers can thus be seen as a series of interorganizational exchanges based on interdependent relationships (Beyers and Kerremans 2007; Bouwen 2004: 339; Braun 2012; Pfeffer and Salancik 1987). This line of reasoning is consistent with prominent perspectives in the American and European literature arguing that group access may be explained as the result of group ability to supply decision makers with relevant resources. In return groups gain access and eventually political influence (Bouwen 2004; Eising 2007b; Jordan and Maloney 1997; Hall and Deardorff 2006; Hansen 1991; Woll 2007; Öberg et al. 2011). Similarly, the media literature has described the relationship between reporters and their sources as an exchange of resources in which newsworthiness is continuously negotiated (Cook 2005).

These studies focus on the external constraints to arena access, arguing that some groups do not possess the resources needed to access a given arena. However, there is another – often neglected – side to the exchange. Groups may have different preferences when seeking access (Pralle 2003: 240). To some groups, it is very important to “go public” in order to appeal to their (potential) members. Other groups may prefer to work behind closed doors in order to strike deals on policy concessions. Following this reasoning, our argument consists of two elements: first, different types of groups possess resources of different composition. Some groups control *insider*
resources, which are particularly relevant for inclusion in decision-making processes, while other groups score higher on outsider resources, which matter more in public arenas. Second, interest groups pursue diverse political goals, which affect the priority given to different arenas. Groups emphasizing agenda setting influence are, for example, expected to be more attracted to the media arena, while groups interested in affecting concrete policy decisions are more likely to approach bureaucrats. In effect, group representation is expected to vary across political arenas.

In explaining group access to decision makers, many different resources have been cited as important. An influential strand of US scholarship simply emphasizes financial resources as the key to buying either votes or the time and attention of legislators (Austen-Smith and Wright 1996; Hall and Wayman 1990). Later contributions have addressed intangible resources, such as the provision of expertise, political intelligence and propaganda (Hansen 1991: 3-5; Hall and Deardorff 2006: 72-74). Similarly, European contributions have pointed to the dependence of government institutions on groups for information, consent and active cooperation (Eising 2007b: 385). Scholars in the corporatist and network tradition have described group access as an effect of the ability of groups to control their membership and contribute to the policy process by moderating public opinion (Marsh and Rhodes 1992; Rokkan 1966; Öberg et al. 2011: 367-8). In sum, interest groups may possess insider resources consisting of information and expertise of relevance to the policy process on the one hand, and external control – for example of members – of relevance to the political fate of policies on the other. These resources are likely to affect the relative access of groups to decision makers.

Insider resources can be contrasted to outsider resources, which are of particular relevance for group access to public arenas. In a study of outside lobbying, Kollman (1998) emphasized the ability of groups to mobilize citizens in collective action efforts. Groups also differ in the extent to which their causes have broad public appeal. Groups pursuing issues of relevance only to narrow
societal sectors have fewer outsider resources – in the form of the ability to make claims of broad appeal – than groups focusing on issues of broad societal relevance (Binderkrantz and Krøyer 2012). Groups also differ in the extent to which their causes correspond with news values. Studies of news media have identified specific news values that are instrumental in determining the kind of stories and sources reported upon. Wolfsfeld (2011: 72) argues that the media are, above all, dedicated to telling a good story, implying for example that stories involving drama and conflict are more likely to appear in the news. News value theory also emphasizes personalization as a factor affecting the likelihood that stories are reported by the media (Galtung and Ruge 1973). Groups with the ability to provide reporters with personalized case stories therefore have a competitive advantage. Accordingly, interest groups may possess outsider resources due to their representation of causes with broad public appeal or their ability to provide reporters with stories of news value. These resources are likely to affect the relative access of groups to public arenas.

The second element in our argument is the political goals of groups. In previous accounts of resource exchange, the assumption has simply been that interest groups interact with decision makers in order to gain influence (Bouwen 2002; Hall and Deardorff 2006; Hansen 1991; Öberg et al. 2011). While this may be an appropriate assumption when studying interactions with public institutions, a more nuanced view of group goals includes attempts at agenda setting alongside influence of specific policy decisions (Bernhagen and Trani 2012: 50). All interest groups can be expected to include these different political goals in their portfolios, but the balance between goals is likely to vary. Groups focusing relatively more on agenda setting are therefore expected to seek access to public arenas to a higher degree than groups focusing relatively more on affecting decision making. These latter groups are more likely to seek access to decision-making processes.

In relating these speculations to group types, we expect sectional groups – for example, trade unions, business groups and institutional groups – to be relatively more concerned with affecting
specific policy decisions of immediate interest to their membership. Public interest groups are likely to give higher priority to agenda setting. These groups generally work for broad causes and have an interest in communicating to rather diffuse sets of members and potential members. Here, the crucial goal of group maintenance therefore affects the political work of groups (Berkhout 2013; Gais and Walker 1991: 105; Dunleavy 1991; Lowery 2007).

In terms of resources, public interest groups are expected to be relatively well-equipped with outsider resources. Again, these groups work for broad causes and can therefore raise issues that are likely to have public appeal. Many identity groups also have an advantage in terms of outsider resources due to their representation of groups such as the elderly or patients, which enables them to make use of personalized angles. Insider resources, meanwhile, are predominantly found among the groups representing sectional interests related to the private or public sector – that is, business groups, trade unions, institutional groups and professional groups. Such groups possess important information and expertise and represent constituencies that are important to societal production (Rokkan 1966).

Arena access is most likely when the goals and resources of a group fit the needs of the relevant political arena. The bureaucracy constitutes the predominant insider arena, where political decisions are prepared and implemented and important information is exchanged. To prepare decisions that are technically implementable and politically feasible, bureaucrats need technical expert information and information about the political support of core actors in the public and private spheres. This makes for a clear match between the bureaucracy and business groups, trade unions, institutional groups and professional groups. These groups possess relevant resources and pursue goals related to the preparation or implementation of specific decisions, which draws them towards bureaucrats.
A similar match is found for public interest groups and the media. The media is the most public arena and the gatekeepers – reporters – are interested in news stories with broad appeal or a personalized angle. Public interest groups are, on balance, expected to be more focused on agenda setting, and their causes have broad appeal. Many identity groups also possess resources – in terms of delivering personalized stories – that are relevant for public arenas. Some identity groups even represent groups such as sick children, who tend to attract widespread sympathy and therefore media attention (Ingram and Schneider 1993).

While identity groups are expected to be more interested in affecting specific decisions of relevance for their membership than in public agendas, drawing them towards decision-making arenas, their lack of insider resources is a disadvantage. We therefore expect them to be better represented in the media than in the bureaucracy.

Parliament is a more ambiguous arena, as it plays an important role in decision making and as a more open forum for agenda setting (AnDevég and Nijzink 1995). Legislators may also value both insider and outsider resources. MPs actively involved in devising policy proposals (Eising 2007b: 385) may value the expertise of insider groups, while colleagues who seek to draw public attention to themselves and their political goals may be more interested in giving access to groups with outsider resources. Moreover, the role of parliament varies between presidential and parliamentary systems as well as within both system types. While the Danish parliament is involved in agenda setting as well as specific decision making it is, compared to other parliaments, relatively powerful in terms of agenda control and less so in terms of drafting legislation. In fact, the government has almost a monopoly on introducing bills (Binderkrantz 2003; Mattson and Strøm 1995: 298-300). We therefore expect public interest groups and identity groups to be relatively well-represented here, while groups with insider resources are likely to prioritize contact with the bureaucracy.
In sum, we argue that the access of interest groups is a product of the match between the preferences and resources of the group on the one hand, and the demand for resources on the part of the gatekeepers in the different political arenas on the other. Therefore we expect unions, business groups, institutional groups and professional groups to be best represented in the administrative arena, while identity groups and public interest groups are more likely to be found in the media and parliament. The last category, leisure groups, has neither insider nor outsider resources. Their political involvement is typically rather sporadic, and we expect them to be relatively poorly represented across all arenas.

A competing perspective: general resources and cumulativity in arena access

The exchange model posits that the resource exchange between groups and gatekeepers varies according to the arena in question. Competing theoretical perspectives emphasize factors that lead to cumulativity in group access across the media, parliament and the bureaucracy. Importantly, resource differentials may matter for access to all arenas. We know from previous research that group resources such as finances and staff dedicated to monitoring and lobbying affect the political role of interest groups (Binderkrantz 2005; Eising 2007b). These resources may very well be relevant across arenas, as they affect the ability of groups to engage professionally with gatekeepers. All political gatekeepers – politicians, bureaucrats and reporters – are busy people dealing with a crowded and rapidly changing political agenda. They are all likely to prefer clear and constructive communication that suits the political reality of the moment. Group finances and staff resources serve as a proxy for this professionalization. Lobbying efficiency is likely to be the product of the amount of money a group has at its disposal – and especially the amount of money it invests in a professional secretariat. Therefore, group access across all arenas is expected to be positively related to group finances and staff.
Access to one arena may also spill over to other arenas, leading to cumulativity in arena access. Bennett (1990) argues that reporters “index” the range of voices and viewpoints in the news according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate. Also, Cook (1998) discusses how public officials are generally seen as more reliable sources than other actors. The effect is a systematic bias in the pattern of actor appearance that favors public officials (Bennett 1990: 106; Thrall 2006: 408). By the same reasoning, interest groups with privileged access to decision-making processes possess an inherent news value similar to that of public officials because of their insider access to public decision making. The very groups that dominate the inside game of politics can, according to this reasoning, then also be expected to be predominant in the outsider arena of the media (Thrall 2006: 408). Similar spillover effects may be present, for example, from media to parliament, where media attention may be instrumental in attracting the attention of politicians (Berkhout 2013: 228), and from parliament to the bureaucracy, where bureaucrats may anticipate the reactions of legislators and thus provide access to groups that enjoy legislative attention.

This paper’s empirical analysis juxtaposes these two theoretical perspectives. On the one hand, we have argued that different patterns of group access can be expected in different arenas. Interest groups and arena gatekeepers exchange resources, and relevant resources and assets vary between closed circles of decision making to public arenas such as the media. Thus we expect business groups, trade unions, professional groups and institutional groups to be relatively well-represented in the administrative arena, and public interest groups and identity groups to fare relatively better in the media and parliament. At the same time, general financial and personnel resources are relevant in all arenas, and spillover effects may lead to convergence in arena access.

**Research design**
Establishing suitable empirical indicators is a major challenge in investigations of arena access. Crucially, the concept of access implies that groups have successfully entered the relevant political arena and gained the attention of bureaucrats, politicians or the media. Previous studies of access have utilized a wide range of methods, such as survey responses from groups, interviews with decision makers and tallying appearances in the media or on public boards (Bouwen 2004; Braun 2012; Christiansen et al. 2010; Danielian and Page 1994). Reflecting our interest in reaching general conclusions about the involvement of groups in different arenas, measures allowing for large-scale analysis of access are prioritized over more labor-intensive indicators. Rather than relying on surveys to measure self-reported access, for example, it is preferable to establish indicators of actual group access. We have established measures of: 1) group representation in public boards and committees, 2) group meetings with parliamentarians/parliamentary committees and corresponding parliamentary responses and 3) group appearances in newspapers.

In the administrative arena, group representation on public boards and committees constitutes a primary mechanism of incorporating interest groups in decision making (Christiansen et al. 2010). We have established a database of all committees and boards active on December 31, 2010. All committee members have been registered and those representing national interest groups constitute the units of administrative access. The unit of analysis here is number of group appearances in public boards or committees. 1,898 administrative appearances by groups were registered.

For parliament, a particular challenge has been the lack of any formalized integration of groups into parliamentary decision making. A main data source in previous studies of contacts to parliament has been letters sent to parliamentary committees (Binderkrantz 2003). This measure is not suitable in the present context because it does not indicate any passing of a threshold of access. It is, however, suitable to rely on parliamentary responses to interest group approaches as an indicator of group access. We judge that a parliamentary committee or an individual member of
parliament can be said to have reacted to a group letter if, for example, the member or committee asks the relevant minister to comment. We have recorded all letters sent to parliamentary standing committees and traced whether or not they led to: 1) a committee question to the minister, 2) a question in the general session of parliament, and/or 3) an interrogation of the minister. Further, we have registered every meeting (deputation) that groups have with parliamentary committees, and have also used data from the calendars of a selection of members of parliament. The calendars were checked for all meetings with national interest groups. These two types of meetings are regarded as additional indicators of parliamentary access. The different measures were combined in a database with a total of 931 parliamentary appearances for the parliamentary year 2009/10.

Media access is operationalized as appearance in a news story. Two large national newspapers with opposite political leanings were selected for analysis (Jyllands-Posten and Politiken). The papers’ first sections and business sections were searched for articles with interest group appearance. Front pages were registered for a full year (from July 1 2009 to June 30 2010), and the remaining pages were recorded for half a year (by coding two weeks, skipping two weeks, coding two weeks and so forth). We omitted appearances where the group was framed negatively, as these cannot meaningfully be seen as constituting group access to the media arena. We registered a total of 3,673 relevant media appearances.

Another crucial step in evaluating arena access is establishing a list of the Danish interest group population. A large number of groups were identified during the process of establishing

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1 The data were difficult to obtain. We contacted 44 individual MPs and four party secretaries, meaning that we contacted 87 of the 179 MPs in the Danish parliament either directly or via their parties. Two parties did not want to participate. In total we obtained access to the calendars of 33 MPs. These data are not perfectly representative; however, we conducted the multivariate analyses excluding these observations and arrived at similar results.
indicators of arena access, but other groups may seek influence without obtaining access – or at least not access through the channels identified here. We therefore constructed a population list relying on an existing list of previously identified groups (see Christiansen 2012). The list was updated through internet-based searches of group names, identifying name changes, mergers and abolishment of groups. All groups identified in either of the indicators of access to political arenas as well as groups found in online group directories have been added to the list. The final list included 2,541 groups.

To obtain information about group resources, a survey was administered to the group population. A crucial step was to identify whether groups were in fact politically active. The first set of survey questions was designed to distinguish between politically active groups and other groups. 1,645 groups – corresponding to 65 percent – responded to the survey, and the 1,109 of these that reported to be politically active are used as the reference population of interest groups. Measures of group resources were obtained from the survey, including annual group income and number of employees working with politics broadly (contacts to bureaucrats, politicians or reporters as well as conducting analyses and monitoring the political process). To obtain linearity the measures were logarithmically transformed and recoded to range from 0 to 1. The full questionnaire as well as the frequency distributions of group answers may be found at http://XXX.XX.

All data were linked by assigning each group a unique identification number. For each group we can combine information obtained from the survey with access data for the three arenas. For each arena, groups are given an appearance score, which reports how many times the group appeared in that arena. The maximum number of appearances was 120 for the administrative arena, 22 for the parliamentary arena and 254 for the media arena. Finally, all groups were coded into different group categories based on the categorizations discussed above (a more detailed coding
schema can be found at http://XXX.XX). This categorization was performed by the authors, with a reliability test of 100 groups resulting in a Cohen’s Kappa of 0.906.

Overall, we have collected data on group access across three political arenas in a full year with a total of 6,502 observations. In combination with the population-wide survey, we have a unique opportunity to study diversity in interest group access using the survey as a baseline for evaluating this diversity.

Interest group representation across arenas: bias or diversity?
The combination of data on group appearances across three arenas allows us to investigate differences as well as similarities in group access. Do we find that different groups and group types are represented in the media, parliament and the bureaucracy, or do we find similar patterns of representation between the arenas? Table 1 presents an overview of the 846 unique interest groups identified in at least one arena and their appearances in the bureaucracy, parliament and the media.

Table 1: Overlap in arena access, numbers and column percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arena</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only in the media</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only in parliament</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only in the bureaucracy</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In media and parliament</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In media and bureaucracy</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In parliament and bureaucracy</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In all arenas</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>15</td>
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It is evident that most groups are found in one arena only. In fact, 65 percent have been identified in only one of the three arenas, and all arenas have a rather high number of uniquely active groups. On the other hand, a significant number of groups – corresponding to 15 percent – occur in all three arenas, while the remaining groups appear in any combination of two arenas. These patterns correspond well to previous findings of relatively little overlap between interest groups identified in different data sources (Berkhout and Lowery 2008; Halpin et al. 2012). It is possible that more overlap would have been found if additional sources had been used to uncover group access in different arenas, but given the relatively extensive coding of group access across all policy areas in a full year it is likely that the general pattern, with many groups appearing in one arena only, would have been sustained.

An important part of the picture, however, is that the 15 percent of groups occurring in all three arenas account for a full 66 percent of all appearances (numbers not in table). Also, while there is generally little overlap in group presence across arenas, it should be noted that the pattern is different for the most dominant groups. Five groups – The Danish Consumers Council, The Danish Confederation of Trade Unions, The United Federation of Danish Workers, The Confederation of Danish Industry, and The Danish Chamber of Commerce – are among the ten most dominant in all three arenas. Alongside the many groups accessing only one arena, we thus find an elite corps of groups with high access across the board. This is our first indication that factors driving towards cumulativity on the one hand and arena-specific dynamics on the other combine to account for group access to different arenas.

Table 2 displays the distribution of group types appearing in different arenas. For each arena, the first column shows the distribution of unique interest group appearances, while the second
column reports the distribution of all appearances in the arena. As a standard of comparison, the table includes the distribution of the population of politically active interest groups as identified in the group survey.
The pattern of group access in different arenas reveals a number of interesting points. First, the contrast between business representation in the bureaucracy and the two other arenas is marked. Those who view business groups as particularly dominant political players will find overwhelming support for this position in the patterns of access in the bureaucracy. In fact, 42 percent of all seats on public boards and committees are occupied by a business representative, and almost 40 percent of groups appearing in this arena are business groups. In the media and parliament, the share of business groups is closer to (or even a little lower than) their share in the general group population, but regardless of indicator, they stand out as the best-represented type of group.

Trade unions, institutional groups and professional groups were also assumed to be well-equipped for interacting with bureaucrats. Here, evidence is mixed. Unions constitute a larger share
of the groups winning access to the bureaucracy than their share of the general population, which supports the expectations. However, their representation is broadly similar across arenas: the fit between the resources and goals of unions and the administrative arena does not seem to be any better than the fit in other arenas. Institutional groups display almost the same pattern, though here it should be noted that their high share of total access is mainly driven by two large groups representing local and regional authorities: Local Government Denmark and Danish Regions.

Professional groups, meanwhile, are underrepresented in the bureaucracy compared to their share of the general population. This may be a result of these groups being less politically active. Nevertheless, professional groups are better represented in the bureaucracy than in the other political arenas. This supports the expectation that the goals and resources of professional groups fit the preferences of bureaucrats better than the preferences of politicians and journalists.

A notable contrast to business groups is found among identity groups and public interest groups, which were expected to align more closely with the logic of the more public and agenda-oriented arenas. Corresponding to this line of reasoning, neither group type has much success with accessing administration forums. Even though identity groups constitute 14 percent of the group population, their share of seats on public boards and committees is only 4 percent. Public interest groups fare better, but their administrative representation is still far below their share of the general group population. Furthermore, these positions are mainly accounted for by two major public interest groups – the Danish Consumer Council, with 73 seats, and the Danish Society for the Preservation of Nature, with 21 seats.

In parliament and the media, the representation of identity groups and public interest groups is much larger. The share of unique groups appearing is higher than their population shares, and especially in parliament these groups also account for a high share of total appearances. For identity
groups this could be a result of their ambition to affect decisions relevant to their membership combined with their lack of resources attractive to the bureaucracy.

Finally, as expected, leisure groups are not very present in either arena. With a share of 12.7 percent in the group population, their levels of 2.7, 4.5 and 2.4 percent respectively of arena appearances are not impressive. As acknowledged above, however, many of these groups – for example sports associations – do not primarily pursue political goals and therefore are rather sporadic political participants (Jordan et al. 2004).

Generally, we find clearly diverging patterns of access in different arenas. This corroborates the conclusion of Halpin and colleagues (2012: 133) that the lens through which one chooses to view group mobilization is crucial for what is found. Particularly, the administrative arena is relatively dominated by business groups, while the other arenas exhibit a much higher share of identity group and public interest group activity. It is also interesting that the patterns differ according to whether we look at mere presence – appearing at least once in an arena – or level of access. This corresponds with previous findings that a few very dominant groups are able to attract much attention, with many other groups appearing infrequently (Danielian and Page 1994: 1067-1068).

**Group types or group resources? Explaining arena access**

In this section we contrast the two competing perspectives on arena access. Table 3 presents the result of multivariate analyses of arena access, including dummy variables for group type and resource variables measuring group income and number of political employees. Due to the nature of our dependent variables – discrete counts of access – we estimate count models. Because data are
characterized by overdispersion, the negative binomial regression model is the most appropriate choice (Long and Freese 2006: 372).²

Table 3: Negative Binomial Regression with group access as dependent variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group type</th>
<th>Administrative arena</th>
<th>Parliamentary arena</th>
<th>Media arena</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficients (%)</td>
<td>Coefficients (%)</td>
<td>Coefficients (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(standard errors)</td>
<td>(standard errors)</td>
<td>(standard errors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% change</td>
<td>% change</td>
<td>% change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade unions</td>
<td>-0.258 (0.211)</td>
<td>-8.5</td>
<td>0.291 (0.199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional groups</td>
<td>-0.588* (0.298)</td>
<td>-13.4</td>
<td>0.413 (0.264)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional groups</td>
<td>0.522 (0.276)</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>-0.443 (0.361)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity groups</td>
<td>-0.564* (0.246)</td>
<td>-18.0</td>
<td>1.212*** (0.199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobby groups</td>
<td>-0.907*** (0.278)</td>
<td>-26.3</td>
<td>-0.464 (0.278)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public interest groups</td>
<td>-0.722** (0.237)</td>
<td>-23.4</td>
<td>0.585** (0.198)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political employees</td>
<td>5.562*** (0.546)</td>
<td>136.7</td>
<td>4.739*** (0.452)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group income</td>
<td>4.447*** (0.918)</td>
<td>102.6</td>
<td>1.061 (0.592)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-4.341*** (0.611)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.543*** (0.396)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1.025</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.025</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Levels of significance: * = 0.05, ** = 0.01, *** = 0.001. The columns “% change” report the change in expected counts for a one-unit change in the independent variable holding all other variables constant.

When we compare business groups with other groups with insider resources – that is, trade unions, institutional groups and professional groups – their patterns of arena access are in most instances not significantly different. The only exception is that institutional groups are less likely than

² Since we compare the population of groups with groups accessing specific arenas in a given year there are a large numbers of zeros in the data. Consequently, we have tested the appropriateness of the chosen model against a zero-inflated negative binomial regression. The evidence is mixed, and the Vuong test indicates that a zero-inflated model would provide a better fit, while plotting the predicted counts against the observed counts indicates that the negative binomial model provides the best fit. Since our theoretical expectations do not indicate that some groups would always obtain zero access to political arenas, negative binomial regressions are reported in the analyses (Long and Freese 2006: 405-414).
business groups to have high access to the administrative arena (the reference category in the models).iii

The representation of identity groups and public interest groups is clearly different from that of business groups. The results support the expectation that identity groups and public interest groups are more present in relatively open, public arenas than in closed administrative circles of decision making. If we compare identity groups and public interest groups to business groups, their levels of administrative access are 18 percent and 23 percent lower, respectively. In contrast, their levels of access to the media and parliament are between 20 and 53 percent higher than that of business groups. The analysis also affirms a generally low level of access for leisure groups – between 14 and 26 percent lower than that of business groups (although the effect is not significant with regard to parliament).

The role of finances and staff is rather constant across different arenas. The number of political employees positively affects access to all arenas. High income also leads to more access to the bureaucracy and the media, while it does not significantly affect levels of access in parliament – or perhaps more correctly, it does so only through the effect of income on the number of political employees.3 The amount of change related to these general resources is rather large, with changes in access between 108 and 162 percent as a group moves from 0 to 1 on the variable measuring political employees. Because this variable has been recoded to range from 0 to 1, this equals the largest possible differential in the number of political employees: a move from zero to 280 employees working on the political tasks of the organization.

The effect of finances and staff supports the argument that the same factors are important for accessing different arenas and thus that cumulativity in arena access is present. A more direct test is

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3 The Pearson correlation between the transformed variables for group income and number of political employees is 0.573 and significant at the 0.001 level.
whether access to one arena spills over to other arenas. As argued above, a core argument in the media literature is the overrepresentation of actors and views from official decision-making circles (Bennett 1990; Cook 1998). Similarly, it may be speculated that officials pay attention to media appearances by groups and are thus more likely to give access to groups that regularly appear in the media. We consequently face a problem of endogeneity in testing the presence of spillover effects. Rather than including access to other arenas in the multivariate models, we have therefore tested the partial correlations between the measures of arena access, controlling for the other independent variables included in the models above. All measures of access turn out to be significantly correlated (at the 0.001 level). Even when we control for resources and group type, there is evidence that access to one arena affects access to the others. The highest correlation is found between levels of access to the bureaucracy and to the media, which lends support to the argument that the media tends to give more attention to insider actors. Still, as discussed, the opposite effect could also be present: bureaucrats incorporating actors with high media presence in decision-making processes.

In relation to the two theoretical perspectives discussed in this article, there is ample evidence to support the logic of cumulativity. Access to one arena is correlated to accessing others, and general group resources such as professional secretariats are important determinants of access across all three arenas. We also find very clear support for the alternative view – that different logics of resource exchange are present in different arenas, leading to different patterns of group access. Groups with insider resources are overrepresented in the bureaucracy, at the expense of identity and public interest groups. However, these groups are more likely to find their way into the political process through parliament and the media.

**Conclusion**
Interest groups are active in multiple venues. While previous research (Bouwen 2004; Halpin et al. 2012; Salisbury 1984: 74-75) has found evidence of diverging patterns of access to different arenas, this article has provided the first systematic test of the relative importance of group type and resources in explaining access to the bureaucracy, parliament and the media. The analysis gives a mixed answer to the question of whether these venues provide different groups with opportunities to be heard or, on the contrary, serve as multiple arenas for the same groups to draw attention to their interests. On the one hand, many groups are present in one arena only. The existence of multiple arenas thus provides more groups with the opportunity to appear in a politically relevant context. On the other hand, a relatively small number of groups get the lion’s share of access across all arenas, and money and professional staff make groups more successful in gaining access across arenas.

The bureaucracy is home to a particularly high number of business groups. An impressive 42 percent of all seats on public boards and committees in Denmark are occupied by business representatives. The media and parliament provide better approximations of the diversity within the interest group population. Here, groups representing broad public interests and different non-vocational constituents are more likely to appear. The composition of the subpopulation of unique groups appearing in the media is closest to the pattern in the overall population of groups, whereas the composition of total access is most representative in parliament. The multivariate analyses lend further support to the divergent patterns of group access in different arenas, and thus to the idea that different resource exchange logics lie behind the involvement of groups in different arenas. At the same time, general resources such as money and staff are important across all arenas, indicating that a logic of cumulativity exists alongside the logics of exchange.

To what extent can we expect the pattern of arena access found here to be repeated in other contexts? The specific content of the resource exchange in different arenas is likely to depend on
the balance between arenas in a specific political system and on their institutional organization. For example, parliaments with more say in decision making are likely to attract more groups with insider resources. Also, the Danish corporatist heritage may increase the overlap between the administrative and the media arena. While the specifics may differ, we expect the general theory of arena-specific resource exchanges to be generalizable beyond the Danish context. The conclusion that more diversity is present in the composition of group appearances than in the composition of all attention given to groups is also likely to be mirrored in other systems (Danielian and Page 1994: 1067-1068). Nevertheless, country-comparative studies would be instrumental in further mapping the factors affecting access to political arenas.

The provision of access to different types of groups through the presence of different political arenas can be seen as a pluralist trait. As Dahl (1961) argued, different resources are politically relevant and many groups therefore have a chance to affect politics. In our study, different arenas provide different opportunities, so that losers in one arena may find another in which to express their views. On the other hand, including more political arenas in an analysis of interest representation does not bring us to pluralist utopia. Resources matter for accessing all arenas, and an elite corps of groups has a particularly privileged position across political arenas. The best description of the system of group representation may thus be privileged pluralism. Different arenas do offer options for different groups – and types of groups – to access politics, but when it comes to the major players the pattern is one of cumulativity (see also Eising 2007b). Resources are paramount. Resources are found not only among the major business groups and unions, but also among institutional groups and public interest groups, of which a few large groups are allowed to speak on behalf of the general public interest.
References


A political arena is a broader concept than the concept of policy venues used by Baumgartner and Jones (1993). A policy venue is a group or an institution in society that has authority to make decisions concerning an issue. This concept is used in relation to policy decisions. Decision-making capacity is not a defining characteristic of a political arena and this concept also covers institutions important to the political agenda such as the media.

The relevant unit of analysis is debated in interest group literature. If the main research purpose is to explain policy change it makes good sense to use functional definitions and include all policy advocates including companies and institutions. However, if the main purpose is to explain and understand representation of citizens through the channel of interest groups, membership is a highly important characteristic. For an elaborate discussion see Jordan et al. 2004. We use business groups as reference category to be able to show differences between business and all other types of interest groups in the model. We have also run the analyses using the least political active groups – the leisure groups – as reference category. Business groups are significantly different from this group type across all arenas, but the coefficient is almost twice as large in the administration compared to the two other arenas.