

Interest Group Influence in the Administrative, the Parliamentary and the Media Arena

1. Research question and relevance

Interest groups are important players in liberal democracies. Trade unions seek influence on labour market politics, business groups are active in debates on market regulation and environmental groups try to make climate policy a central governmental priority. Studying which groups are successful in influencing policy is a core issue for political science (Christiansen et al. 2004; Dür & De Bièvre 2007; Jordan et al. 2004). Interest groups operate in complex political environments and are active in relation to the bureaucracy, parliament, and the media. While the administrative arena has traditionally played the most central role for interest group influence in European countries, the media and the parliament have in recent decades become increasingly important arenas. Consequently, it is particularly relevant to examine whether these arenas give access to previously low influence groups – or whether the same groups are successful across different arenas.

This project aims to explain the influence of interest groups in the administrative, the parliamentary and the media arena. An explicit focus on the interplay between different arenas will allow us to answer a range of questions not systematically addressed in the existing literature: 1) To what extent is group influence cumulative across arenas? 2) Are different resources relevant for gaining influence in different arenas? 3) How do characteristics of political issues affect group influence in different arenas? 4) What variation exists over time and across countries in the influence of groups in different arenas? Answering these questions is fundamental to enhancing our knowledge about interest group influence.

A central challenge is conceptualizing and measuring group influence. The project contributes to recent efforts (see Baumgartner et al. 2009; Dür & De Bièvre 2007; Mahoney 2009) to tackle the issue of group influence by incorporating three different operationalizations of influence: 1) quantitative indicators of group positions, 2) comparisons of group goals with political outputs, and 3) attributed results. This will allow a more robust measurement than relying on a single measure of influence. In explaining group influence in different arenas, the project draws on resource exchange theory. From this perspective, groups gain influence in exchange for re-

sources valued by bureaucrats, politicians and reporters. Factors expected to affect group influence can be identified at the group level, at the level of the issues that groups seek to influence, and at the system level. The research design includes three countries: Denmark, the UK and Germany selected on the basis of variation at the system level.

The project is innovative in several ways. First, it asks the old question “how influential are interest groups?” in an institutional environment with a changed mix of influence arenas. Second, the project presents a research design that links measures of influence in different arenas with measures of the independent factors expected to affect influence in a common database. This research design allows us to answer questions about the interplay between different arenas that have not been addressed in previous studies.

2. Theoretical outline

Interest group influence is defined as influence over public policy. A group is influential if it achieves policy outputs closer to its preferences than would have been the case if the group did not act (see also Dür and de Bièvre 2007: 2; Mahoney 2009: 185). While this definition does not capture all aspects of influence, it incorporates both success in shaping the political agenda and influencing issues already on the agenda (Dür 2008: 1220).

European interest group research has traditionally focused on group interaction with bureaucrats. In reaction to the increased political importance of the media and the rise in parliamentary power in many countries (Binderkrantz 2003; Damgaard 1994; Kepplinger 2002), it is now common to consider simultaneously group strategies directed towards bureaucrats, parliament and the media. Most groups use strategies targeting all arenas – although it is debated to what extent an insider strategy, where groups approach decision makers, takes priority over an outsider strategy focusing on the media (Baumgartner & Leech 1998; Beyers 2004; Binderkrantz 2008; Eising, 2007a; Grant, 2000; Kriesi et al. 2007; Maloney et al. 1994; Marsh et al. 2009). The prominence of different arenas makes it relevant to study whether different groups are influential in different arenas – or whether the same groups tend to dominate all arenas.

2.1 Explaining group influence

The project takes its theoretical point of departure in a resource exchange perspective (Dür 2008: 1,214; Christiansen et al. 2010; Lehmbruch 1979; Molina and Rhodes 2002; Baccaro and Simoni 2008). Interest groups – defined as membership organizations working to obtain political influence (Jordan et al. 2004: 205-206) – are considered intendedly rational actors in pursuit of political influence. In their interaction with bureaucrats, politicians, and reporters, groups gain influ-

ence in exchange for resources valued by these actors. Three sets of variables are particularly important for understanding which groups are in possession of relevant resources for being influential in different arenas: 1) variables at the group level, 2) variables at the issue level, and 3) variables at the system level.

Group level: At the level of the individual interest group, the general resources and the type of group are relevant. General group resources cover finances, staff, and number of members. Finances and staff allow groups to monitor relevant policy developments and to spend time and money on lobbying tactics targeting different arenas (Binderkrantz 2005a). Many members increase the chance of being heard by politicians, bureaucrats and reporters. Finances, staff and members are consequently expected to increase a group's chance of being influential across all arenas. To the extent that general resources matter – for example because of large resource differentials between groups – they will lead to convergence in group influence in different arenas.

With respect to group type, bureaucrats, politicians and reporters value different types of groups as collaborators. Groups representing so-called sectional interests – i.e. groups in pursuit of the direct interests of their members – in the labour market and in the public sector are valued by bureaucrats because they possess resources and information relevant for policy preparation and implementation (Binderkrantz 2008; Rokkan 1975). Public interest groups – in pursuit of interests that go beyond the members' narrow interests such as human rights groups or environmental groups – are formed simply by “the coming together of like-minded people” (Dunleavy 1991: 55). They advocate causes that typically appeal to broad segments of the population. Supporting such groups may be attractive for politicians in pursuit of electoral support among broad population segments (Binderkrantz 2008; Berry 1977; Gais and Walker 1991: 113-114; Rommetvedt 2005). Also, their causes often correspond well with news criteria and are likely to find resonance among news readers (Waldahl 1999: 123-5). While sectional groups are expected to have an advantage in the administrative arena, public interest groups are therefore expected to stand a better chance in the media and parliamentary arena.

Issue level: Interest groups are involved in many political issues or cases. Characteristics at the issue level may affect group influence (Baumgartner & Leech 1998: 148; Beyers et al. 2008: 7-8). The project includes three aspects of the issue context: First, the salience or level of attention from the general public and the policymaking community; second, the conflict structure defined as the composition and positions of the actors involved; and third, the phase of the policy making process.

The administrative arena will be particularly important when issues are characterized by lack of salience and low levels of conflict, while the parliamentary arena and the media arena will be more relevant when issues attract broader attention and involve many actors and conflict among these (Christiansen & Nørgaard 2003a; Mahoney 2009: 41; Schattschneider 1960). In turn, this affects which groups are most likely to be influential (cf. discussion of sectional vs. public interest groups above).

In the policy making process, issues pass through several phases from being placed on the political agenda, through policy preparation and formulation, and towards implementation. Although actual policy processes seldom occur in such a linear fashion, the importance of different arenas can be expected to vary according to the phase of the policy making process. In the agenda setting phase bureaucrats, politicians and the media may be important for raising issues. This leaves the floor open for different types of groups. In contrast, the bureaucracy plays a crucial role in the drafting of bills and regulation (Blom-Hansen 2001), which may narrow the field of influential groups, and provide groups with resources relevant for the administrative arena with an advantage.

System level: Institutional factors such as country specific patterns of interest intermediation have been incorporated in several studies of group strategies (Eising 2007b; Klüver 2010; Kriesi et al. 2007; Schneider et al. 2007), but few studies systematically examine their effect on group influence (Dür 2008; Mahoney 2009: 6). This project includes cross-country variation in media systems and in the integration of groups into decision making processes. It also incorporates variation over time by comparing the 2010 situation in Denmark with the highpoint of Danish corporatism in 1975.

Concepts such as 'corporatism', 'policy communities' and 'insider status' aim at capturing how some groups are closely integrated into decision making in the administrative arena (Blom-Hansen 2001; Christiansen & Rommetvedt, 1999; Jordan et al. 2004; Kriesi et al. 2006; Rhodes & Marsh 1992; Marsh et al. 2009: 623-624). In a given political system, the degree of integration differs between policy areas and groups (Rhodes & Marsh 1992). The extent to which groups are generally integrated into decision making processes also differs across countries. In systems of strong institutional integration this is expected not only to affect group influence in the official circles of policy making but also to have spill-over effects on other arenas. Integration into public decision making can be seen as a resource enhancing group influence across arenas. For example, the media literature argues that reporters are more likely to pay attention to actors with official positions in the political system (Bennett 1990; Cook 1998). Convergence

in group influence in different arenas is therefore expected in systems with strong institutional integration of groups.

Building on Hallin and Mancini's (2004) discussion of different media systems, the project also distinguishes between systems with differing levels of marketization and media independence. In systems of high media independence, group resources specific to the media arena become more crucial and divergence between groups wielding influence through the media and other arenas is expected. The section on research design discusses the selection of countries for analysis.

2.2 Investigating interest group influence

Few studies explicitly address the question of group influence on public policy, although the last decade has seen renewed interest in the issue (Baumgartner & Leech 1998; Baumgartner et al. 2009; Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008; Christiansen et al. 2004; Dür & De Bièvre 2007; Golden 1998; Klüver 2009; Mahoney 2009). As argued by Dür and De Bièvre (2007: 2) the lack of studies of group influence is mainly: "a result of the notorious difficulty to operationalize the concepts of 'influence' and 'power', to construct reliable indicators, and to measure these empirically". This project adopts a three-faceted operationalization of group influence. First, *group positional resources* are seen as an indicator of influence; second, we measure influence by comparing the *stated goals of groups with actual political outputs*; and third, we use measures of *attributed results*.

A *position approach* equates influence with positional resources. By positional resources we mean presence at different arenas for example through membership of boards and committees. An interest group with a well-established position in the decision making structure is assumed to affect decisions made more than groups with less established positions (Christiansen & Nørgaard 2003b: 177). This logic underpins studies of interest group involvement in corporative arrangements (Rommetvedt et al. 2001; Hermansson et al. 1999; Christiansen et al. 2010) as well as studies of media appearance (Bennett 1990; Binderkrantz 2010; Thrall 2006). While positional resources cannot in any individual case equal influence, on average, it can be assumed that a prominent position in for example boards and committees indicates political influence. The major shortcoming of this type of measure is that positional resources may not always be transformed into actual influence. It is therefore crucial to combine this measure with measures focusing on other aspects of influence.

Control over output: The second measure focuses on the relation between group goals and political outputs, where outputs are parliamentary or administrative decisions. A group that manages to bring outputs closer to its ideal position is influential. This approach has been used

in case studies as well as in quantitative studies of rule making (Christiansen et al. 2004; Golden 1998; McKay & Yackee 2007; Moe 1989; Klüver 2009; Mahoney 2007). The most important deficiencies of the method are: 1) Groups may already take into account the chances of success when formulating their goals and 2) the fact that a decision complies with the wishes of Group X does not necessarily mean that the change was caused by that group's efforts. The project seeks to reduce these problems by utilizing a process tracing approach in linking group goals with political outputs (Dür 2008: 1,223).

Attributed results: The project incorporates a measure of attributed results asking actors to evaluate their influence. Here, we build on survey questions about the results obtained by groups. A major objection to relying on self-reported results is that groups may not be able to judge their own importance and may have incentives to under- or overestimate their influence (Dür 2008: 1,224; Marsh et al. 2009: 625-627). To enhance the validity of the measure we will ask about group results rather than general influence. For example, groups will be asked how often their press statements have led to news coverage and they will be asked about the results obtained by other groups active in the same policy area (Dür 2008: 1,224). Self-evaluations can be compared to a group's reputation among other groups. Measures of attributed influence are not well suited for conclusions about the objective level of influence of any single group, but – in combination with the other indicators – they can reasonably be used for comparisons across arenas and groups (Binderkrantz 2005b: 242).

All measures of group influence can be met with objections. The project contributes to enhancing the operationalization and measurement of group influence by combining different measures of influence across the administrative, the parliamentary and the media arena. Each measure captures different aspects of the multi-faceted concept of influence. It will therefore be necessary to consider explicitly the degree of overlap of the measures and the extent to which the measures provide a uniform picture of group influence.

3. Research design and data collection

The project uses a nested research design involving variation at the group level, the issue level and the system level. Variation at the system level can be found over time and cross-nationally. Both types of variation will be included in the project. The integration of groups in corporatist structures has been in decline in Denmark and in other countries (Blom-Hansen, 2000; 2001, Christiansen et al. 2010; Öberg et al. 2010). The project investigates how this development has affected the influence of interest groups in different arenas by comparing the present-day situation in Denmark with the situation in 1975 at the high point of Danish corporatism.

Cross-nationally, variation is present in media systems and in the degree of integration of groups into decision making processes. The research design includes Denmark and Germany as cases with high levels of institutional integration and Britain as a case with less institutional participation by groups in decision making. Britain is characterized by the most liberalized media system, but Germany and Denmark also exhibit different degrees of media independence and marketization.

The *institutional integration of groups* is one aspect of corporatism – an aspect that is particularly emphasized in the Scandinavian literature on the subject (Christiansen et al. 2010; Öberg et al. 2010). Even though Danish corporatism has been in decline, Denmark still ranks among the most corporatist countries alongside the other Scandinavian countries and countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. In contrast, the United States, Britain and Canada are less characterized by corporatism and thus by less institutional integration of groups into decision making processes (Poppelaars 2009; Siaroff 1999). These countries do, however, exhibit some degree of integration of groups into decision making: the phenomena discussed in, for example, the British network literature display similarities to those discussed in the literature on corporatism (Rhodes & Marsh 1992).

Hallin and Mancini (2004) distinguish *media systems* into three broad categories: 1) the polarized pluralist model, 2) the democratic corporatist model and 3) the liberal model. Of most interest here is the distinction between the latter two models, as this concerns the degree to which the media system is market driven and independent (Curran et al. 2009). While the US is the archetypical example of the liberal model, Canada, Britain and Ireland are also considered liberal in their media systems. By contrast, the Scandinavian countries as well as the Netherlands and Austria are characterized by a democratic corporatist media system with high levels of public service orientation and a history of close linkages between the party system and the press (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 70).

A challenge in selecting countries for comparison is that media systems and degree of institutional integration of groups co-vary empirically. Countries with liberal media systems are characterized by less corporatism than countries belonging to the democratic corporatist media model. However, some variation in the media system can be found within countries with relatively high levels of corporatism. Notably, even though Germany is classified as having a democratic corporatist media system with less commercialization than for example Britain and the US (Esser 1999), it is characterized by fewer public media subsidies and more emphasis on private media ownership than the Scandinavian countries (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 71). Therefore, Denmark and Germany are selected as countries with high levels of institutional integration of

groups into public decision making but differing levels of marketization and independence of the media. Britain is included as a case with less institutional participation of groups in decision making and higher media liberalization.

These countries obviously vary on factors other than media liberalization and institutional integration of interest groups. To some extent it is possible to take this into account in the research design. For example, in selecting case studies in Germany we will ensure that the issue areas in question are of federal responsibility in order to control for differences between Germany's federal system and the unitary (or semi-unitary in the case of Britain) systems of Denmark and Britain. Also, in pair-wise comparisons between Germany and Britain we can hold country size relatively constant, while this may be a disturbing factor in comparing Denmark and the two other countries.

Within each country, the research design incorporates measures of different aspects of group influence as well as independent variables on the issue level and the group level. To meet these demands, three data collection strategies will be pursued:

- 1) *Quantitative indicators* of group positional resources. Positional resources will be measured by counting group participation in boards and committees, responses to administrative hearings, references to interest groups in parliamentary speeches, and appearance in newspapers. For all three countries relevant documents are available in online databases or, in the case of boards and committees, through government web pages and registers. As discussed in WP 2, these measures will be coded both for 2010 and for 1975 in the Danish case.
- 2) *Surveys* of nationwide interest groups will ask groups about their results in different arenas, about their scores on the factors hypothesized to affect influence, and about informal contacts to civil servants and MPs. A crucial challenge is establishing relevant populations of interest groups in the three countries (Berkhout & Lowery 2008). We will rely on identification of groups through the data on quantitative indicators, which has the advantage of providing comparable populations across countries. However, these populations will not include groups that have not succeeded in being heard in any arena. Therefore, the Danish survey will further include groups identified in previous group surveys as well as groups identified in relevant registers. Comparisons across countries will be restricted to groups identified by quantitative indicators. In the Danish case, all groups (an estimated 2,500) will be included because this allows statistical analyses on subsets of groups and the matching of survey responses with the quantitative indicators. In the British and German case, the populations of groups are larger and it may be necessary to survey only a subset of the population. The

surveys will be conducted as combinations of postal surveys and web based surveys in order to ensure sufficiently high response rates.

- 3) *Case studies* of about 30 issues/cases in each country will examine the role of the issue context and the relation between group goals and policy outputs. A case will be defined as a policy issue where an official decision has been made. This encompasses both bills and administrative decisions. The selection of about 30 cases in each country balances the advantages of quantitative and qualitative research designs. The number of cases is not too large to get quite detailed information on each case from document analysis and interviews and not too small to allow for variation in independent variables and control for third variables and even for some statistical analysis (cf. Baumgartner et al. 2009). In cases involving large numbers of actors and much text material, computer assisted text analysis will be used to code the standpoints of actors (Klüver 2009). The selection of cases in each country will ensure variation in type of groups and resources, and in the issue context.

A main innovation of the research design is the linking together of different data sources in a common project database. Previous research has relied on one data source only or on data from several sources without linking these by the individual interest group or policy issue. One exception is a study of Scottish interest groups by Halpin and Binderkrantz (2010) where data on group participation in public hearings is linked with survey information. For a given interest group our database will include survey information on group resources and type and attributed influence as well as external information on for example media appearance and participation in public boards and committees. For groups involved in case studies, the database will also include information on issue context and goal attainment.

4. Description of work packages

To facilitate division of labour and coordination of data collection the project is divided into four work packages (WPs) that focus on different aspects of the overall research question. The WPs draw on all types of data sources included in the project, but it is specified in which WP responsibility for data collection is situated. A postdoc will be recruited as responsible for WP 3.

Work Package 1. Measuring interest group influence (responsible: Anne Skorkjær Binderkrantz)

WP 1 asks whether group influence is cumulative across different arenas. This WP concentrates on developing the three measures of influence. It draws on the case studies (partly collected as a part of WP 3) when it comes to influence defined as control over outputs; the project surveys

include measures of attributed influence, and positional influence will be measured by the following quantitative indicators: 1) For the corporative arena, responses to administrative hearings and representation on boards, 2) for the parliamentary arena, references to interest groups in parliamentary speeches, and 3) for the media arena, group appearances in national newspapers. Based on these measures, the WP investigates whether different measures provide a uniform picture of group influence and to what degree influence is cumulative across different arenas. This WP will be responsible for case studies in Denmark and Britain and will combine these with data collected in the other WPs. Binderkrantz will spend two months in Britain to facilitate data collection.

Work Package 2: Group type, resources and influence (responsible: Anne Skorkjær Binderkrantz & Peter Munk Christiansen)

WP 2 asks whether different group resources are relevant for gaining influence in different arenas. It contrasts the perspective that different resources related to group type are relevant in different arenas with the view that general resources such as finances, staff and number of members lead to convergence in group influence. Answering this question is particularly dependent on connecting measures of influence in different arenas with measures of group type and resources obtained by survey. The surveys will ask groups to report on resources in terms of staff, finances, and number of members. Survey responses and group names will be used to distinguish between different types of groups. These measures of independent variables will be connected to the indicators of group influence. Parallel analyses will be conducted for Denmark, the UK and Germany in order to investigate whether relations between group-related variables and influence depend on system level variation. This WP will draw on data collected in the other three WPs.

Work Package 3: Issue context and influence (responsible: Postdoc)

WP 3 investigates how characteristics at the issue level affect group influence in different arenas. Saliency, conflict structure, and decision making phase are expected to affect group influence. When policy processes take place in relatively narrow circles and when the degree of conflict and saliency is low, the administrative arena is expected to be of particular importance. In contrast, the more general attention an issue attracts and the more conflict between actors, the more the parliamentary and the media arena gain in importance. Systematic differences in the type of groups being influential may depend on which arena is in focus – when the administra-

tive arena is central, sectional groups related to the labour market will for example be at an advantage because bureaucrats value them as collaborators.

Detailed analysis of group goals, the conflict structure and the output of the policy process is required to connect the issue context to group influence. The WP's most important data are the case studies. The selection of cases will secure variation on the relevant aspects of the issue context and control for third variables. Case studies will be carried out in Denmark, the UK and Germany to investigate if the effect of the issue context differs according to the media system and the degree of integration of groups into official decision making. To ensure that the postdoc can pursue a project of his/her own, the postdoc will be responsible for collecting the 30 German cases with assistance from student coders. Binderkrantz and the postdoc will share responsibility for coordinating the postdoc's German cases and the British and Danish cases. The postdoc will spend two months in Germany for data collection.

Work Package 4: System level variables and influence (responsible: Anne Skorkjær Binderkrantz, Peter Munk Christiansen, Darren Halpin & Anne Rasmussen)

WP 4 focuses on variation in group influence across countries and over time. Variations in media systems and in the institutional integration of groups into public decision making are expected to affect group influence. The project compares Denmark, the UK and Germany. It further compares the 2010 situation in Denmark with the situation in 1975 at the high point of Danish corporatism. The WP draws on the measures of group influence described above and supplements these with a more limited set of measures of group influence in 1975. An existing data base with all committees related to the state administration is utilized (Johansen & Kristensen 1978).

The cross-national comparison is particularly demanding in terms of data collection. This WP will be responsible for coding quantitative indicators and conducting surveys in the three countries. Responsibility for data collection will therefore be divided between participants in the research group: Binderkrantz and Christiansen will be responsible for data collection in the Danish case, Halpin for the British case, and Rasmussen for the German case. Binderkrantz will be responsible for coordination of data collection across countries.

5. Project coordination and practical aspects

The project team has prior experience with the types of data collection involved in the project and is therefore well equipped to manage the necessary large-scale data collection. *Binderkrantz* has surveyed interest groups and collected data on group approaches to parliament and media

appearance (Binderkrantz 2003; 2010). *Christiansen* has used different approaches to studying corporative institutions over time (Christiansen & Nørgaard 2003a; Christiansen et al. 2004). *Halpin* has done case studies on groups and has linked data on actual group behaviour with survey material (Halpin & Jordan 2009; Halpin & Binderkrantz 2010). *Rasmussen* has carried out surveys and collected data on group contacts to the administration and parliament in Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK (Rasmussen 2009).

Binderkrantz will be responsible for coordination and management of the project. She has experience with project management from projects on interest group strategies, Greenlandic administration and contract agencies. She also participates in the Policy Agendas project, where large-scale data collection has been conducted (Binderkrantz, 2007; 2010). The present project will provide further options for developing skills in managing large research projects. In continuation of the project it is planned to apply for an ERC Starting Grant in cooperation with other European interest group researchers. The present application includes funding for participation in a European network of interest group scholars. The project will also host a research conference inviting group scholars in Europe and the US. These activities are crucial for the project and in preparing the ground for future projects.

A number of research goals will be pursued in the course of the project. The first three have already been discussed; the latter four sum up the publication strategy:

- Develop skills in project management and coordination
- Build a network of international interest group scholars
- Prepare application for ERC Starting Grant
- Publish book with recognized international publisher
- 5-6 articles published in Danish or Scandinavian journals
- 10-12 articles published in refereed international journals
- of these 2-3 articles published in top-ten international journals

The publication strategy includes publication in top-tier international journals. A precondition for publishing in such journals is not only high quality work but usually also country comparative research. The project is therefore well suited for achieving this research goal.

The project will be conducted in four phases to ensure that data collection is coordinated and that the different types of data can be combined in the project data base. First, existing data sets will be collected and data recoded (2011). Second, quantitative indicators of group positional resources in different arenas will be collected and coded (2011-2013). Third, group surveys will be executed to the groups identified by the quantitative indicators (2012). Fourth, case studies will be carried out (2012-2014).

6. References

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