Democracy and Interest Group Studies in the EU: Towards a Sociological Research Agenda

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Abstract

The question of political participation beyond elections is a recurrent subject in contemporary political life. Citizens, and even more so, economic and public interest groups demand to be heard by political actors, and to participate closely in decision making processes. This demand for participatory democracy has become of interest for the international and the European realm since the beginning of the 1990.

The emergence of a participatory norm has, however, a very important influence on the strategies, the power and the organisational structures of the non-state actors associated at the policy making processes in the name of the participatory democracy. The aim of this contribution is to develop a conceptual and methodological framework based on sociological approaches and thus to propose some avenues for further research. These should allow for a detailed analysis of the influence of the participatory turn on the organisational structures of non-governmental actors and the actors working inside these structures.

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Interest groups studies in the European Union are as old as the European integration process itself. The transference of power to a new venue is the starting point for all studies on interest groups (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). But while the first, detailed study of the European integration process by Ernst Haas was based on sociological arguments stating that non-state actors - in this case interest groups - rather than state actors, trigger a so-called "spill-over effect", the analysis of interest groups launched during the 1990 was more interested in power relations and influence the groups exert at the European level as well as typologies of relationships between groups and institutions. Taken together these studies have concentrated on actors and their relationship with institutions, power structures as well as the emergence of interest groups and the EU incentive structures in this context. As Richardson (2006, 232) recently underlined: "Interest groups are a superb weather vane of power and tend to concentrate resources where decisions that might affect them directly are made, i.e. they tend to act rationally when allocating lobbying resources". While these approaches led to an indepth and detailed understanding of day to day politics and policy processes in the European Union, the recent accent in political and academic work on the EU's legitimacy deficit has led to new problems for interest group research. This development mirrors a turn in comparative political studies more generally where one of the main questions is whether groups – both public and private - improve the democratic character of a political system, or, on the contrary, whether they hinder its development? In order to look at this question from an analytical point of view one needs to understand the link between citizens and groups. It is here where a sociological approach is needed.

From the point of view of European institutions, linking 'civil society organizations' to EU decision-making procedures aims at linking European citizen closer to the Union. Since they claim an associative, non-profit status 'civil society organizations' are almost automatically identified with the development of a 'European public space'. Yet, taking ideals as the sole factor underlying this process runs the risk of overlooking other imperatives driving the participation of the 'European civil society' in the decision making processes. But precisely what are the effects of this discourse and these institutional changes at the 'European civil society' aimed at linking it closer to does this function?

The aim of this paper is to identify the approaches and methods that allow for studying this central question with regard to interest group activities. While research on power relations and

influence remains a central issue, as shown by Dür's, Beyers or Baumgartner and Mahoney's analyses, to name but a few, work on the link between democratic deficit and interest group need a sociological approach as it allows for opening up the black box of interest groups, necessary to understand the nature of the actor itself. As a number of authors underline (Guiraudon 2000, 2006, Rumford 2002, Smith 2004, Manners 2007, Favell 2007), sociological approaches of European integration take as point of departure for their analysis the attitudes or individuals in interaction, their exchanges, their coordination mechanisms, questions of group formation as well as norm construction. They thus concentrate less on formal institutional structures and more on dynamic transformations of sociopolitical arenas.

The main question in respect to the democratic deficit literature and the 'European civil society organizations" refers to the link between the citizen and the decision-making organizations. This means that we have to question the automatic links we draw between civil society representation and democracy. The better informed and organised a group, the greater its chances are to gain access to the European institutions. Expertise and perceived efficiency are central access goods for civil society. However, this may lead to an expertise-representation gap (March and Olson 1998): the better structured and organised a group is, and the more it is therefore able to offer necessary expertise, the less its members feel represented.

In this respect, the research becomes similar to that conducted on political parties, their institutionalization and professionalisation. However, while arguing that the question on the link between interest groups and democracy at the European Union is best approached by sociological arguments and methods, political science questions looking at the degree of influence in a more institutionalised setting are indispensable to understand the whole picture. The paper is divided in three parts. The first part aims to identify the conceptual and methodological problems attached to interest groups studies in a framework of "legitimacy deficit" studies in the European Union. A second part will then look more precisely on the possible methodological solutions, based on an analysis of work conducted in fields such as internal party politics, national associations or business associations. A third and last part will then aim for a research agenda linking specifically sociological approaches and methods developed in part two.

1. What's the problem (probably): the democratic turn in European Studies

Societal national interest groups demand increasing political integration in order to represent their interests outside the national realm. At the same time, European institutions and in particular the Commission searched for broader powers to increase its influence on political outcomes and public policy processes. The substantial capacity of supranational institutions to find solutions to problems was considered to be the reason why societal actors have transferred their expectations, political practices and allegiances to the European level.

While, since the beginning of the 1990s, one of the major objectives of interest group research at the EU level concentrated on influence and power relations, recently, the academic literature has started to question de democratic character of interest group participation in the European Union. Until the mid-1990s, research on interest group participation in the decision making processes of the EU eluded the question of democracy. Since then, however, the debate on the EU's democratic deficit, and the question what role citizen participation should play in the political process gave way to a more normative body of literature on the role of the 'organized civil society'[1] in the EU. The specificity of these studies lay in the fact that they relied heavily on concepts developed by political philosophers in the national realm. In this context, the debate centred on the question of who was to participate in political representation. Should citizens participate directly in the policy-making processes, through elected or appointed representatives or through associations and social movements?

While the debate at the European level concentrated initially on the poor representative character of the European Parliament, leading, according to the majority of scholars, to a severe democratic, or better, legitimacy deficit of the EU, political and academic discourse has started, at the end of the 1990s to analyse the representative role of so-called 'civil society' actors in legitimate European governance. This particular debate has a more narrow focus on the representative character of these actors than the larger debate on the 'democratic deficit' of the EU. Ever since Tocqueville, associations and interest groups have been considered to be crucial actors in truly democratic systems. After some forty years of relative silence on this matter, we witness in contemporary debates, as Rossteutscher (2006) put it, "a shift in the urge for associative help comparable to the pluralist turn in the 1940s and 1950s" (Rossteutscher 2006,4). The European Union is no exception to this "associative imperative".

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[1] When referring to 'organized civil society' the paper uses the term as defined by the European Union. It includes economic as well as diffuse interests. Despite the heterogeneity of this definition, the article does not enter in a debate on the problematic definition of civil society which is done with great care by, amongst others Armstrong 2002. I rather concentrate on the very claim that is made for 'civil society' organized collectively as opposed to the individual citizen in the legitimation process of both governance and government.

Theoretical work on the link between the organized and European "civil society" and the democratic system of the European Union occupies a central place in the literature on the EU's `democratic deficit'. Particularly since the publication of the White Paper on governance in 2001, one notes that academic work on « European civil society » becomes increasingly numerous. Furthermore, it is in the context of research conducted by groups and networks of social science scholars in the Framework Programmes on Research and Development of the European Union (PCRD) that appear a large quantity of working papers and scholarly articles at international conferences on the subject of 'civil society' and European governance.[2] This research can be found again inside the different forums that take place under the auspices of the European Union. Thus, the emergence of the idea that links civil society and participatory democracy in order to decrease the EU's democratic deficit is both developed in scholarly and official circles interested in EU governance.

Empirical evidence

Based on theoretical reflections, three groups of empirical work have emerged on the link between the so called 'European civil society' and the legitimacy deficit of the European political system: regulation of interest group access to political institutions, financial and social resources, grassroots civil society mobilisation, as well as protest movements.[3]

(a) Access regulation

Access regulation studies have a long history in the European Union (Greenwood 1997, 2003, 2007). They show that confronted with an increasing number of interest groups, institutions tried to establish a more stable and less complex environment for the elaboration of their policies. Whereas the Economic and Social Committee of the European Union is considered to be the main access for divers interest groups, as Smismans has shown in his work on legitimacy and civil society in the European Union (Smismans, 2003, 2004, 2006), both the European Parliament and the Commission aimed and still aim to clarify, to stabilize and to legitimize their relations with interest groups. According to EU institutions the legitimacy of interest group participation flows from the fact that the decision takes into account the views of all stakeholders, as well as from the fact that information gathered prior to the adoption of the decision is impartial as it represents all interests as well as all expertise. Thus, group

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[2] Among the most prominent ones we find NEWGOV and CONNEX, respectively organised by the European University Institute in Florence and by the University of Mannheim.
[3] For a more indepth analysis see Saurugger 2005

participation in decision making processes increases both the European institutions' and in particular the Commissions bargaining power and its legitimacy. A number of authors show that while these arguments are questionable as such (Kohler-Koch and Eising 1998, Armstrong 2002), the central element of linking civil society to decision-making processes is the increasing legitimacy of the institutional position itself: when the Parliament or the Commission argue that their position is based on a wide consultation of civil society, they gain in bargaining power and thus gather arguments to justify their position 'democratically', compared to the Council. However, despite recent attempts by the European Commission, no binding access rules have been established until now. In absence of an access regulation for the organised civil society, the action repertoires and strategies providing for efficient interests representation at the European level remain the key elements for exercising influence at the European level. This absence of regulation seems to reinforce a situation in which groups possessing financial and social resources are privileged whereas small associations, may they be civic or small business groups, are not heard in the consultation process. It is therefore again only a part of the organised civil society which takes part in the policy-making process.

(b) Resources

The concept of participatory as well as associative democracy calls upon the State to provide for equal access for all groups regardless of their financial, social and societal resources[4]. When confronted with inequality, the lawmaker has to ensure affirmative actions vis-à-vis less resourceful groups. The literature stresses generally that within the European Union, economic interests are particularly privileged (amongst others Mazey and Richardson 1992, 2006; Aspinwall and Greenwood 1998; Eising 2001, Hosli et al 2004a, Eising 2007, Michalowitz 2007). Based initially on economic integration, most of the European associations are economic interest groups, that is trade associations or firms, even if the strengthened social regulation has entailed an increase of associations representing 'diffuse' interests. Even if one can observe considerable differences among the various economic interest groups, they do not only differ by number from groups representing civil interests. Their strong presence shows that they possess a greater organizational potential. Generally, they are financially stronger, employ more staff and possess more access points to the

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[4] Under social resources we understand the social networks interest group representatives have created with the most issue relevant politicians and civil servants both in the European institutions and at the national level. Societal resources refer to the degree citizens accept and support interest group revendications, support that enlarges the group representativeness and subsequently its claims for democratic legitimacy.

Commission than to the European Parliament. They also enjoy more ample access to litigation strategies through the European Court of Justice (Harlow 2006, de Schutter 2006, Bouwen and McCrown 2007). A final and important characteristic is their strong economic legitimacy. Legitimacy of producer groups is thus linked to their properties as representative organizations as well as their ability to aggregate member opinions (Bouwen 2006). As the member companies of the European associations perform indispensable functions in the EU market economy, European institutions must take into account possible fatal effects on companies stemming from European regulation. Greenwood (2007, 344-347), based on Commission's figures, shows that diffuse interest groups such as the European Network Against Racism and the European Social Platform receive 80-90 per cent of their funding from the EU political institutions. This allows so called outsider groups critical of EU politics and policies to be drawn into the decision-making process. Thus, as Mahoney empirically shows, political institutions can wield strong influence through direct subsidies, payments, grants and other financial incentives (Mahoney 2004). Smismans (2002) and Schmitter (2000) are among those who most strongly call upon the establishment of a semipublic status for European associations. They advocate furthermore the financing of these associations through both public and private resources.

However, despite the strong empirical evidence that economic interests, mainly through financial and social resources enjoy greater access to EU decision making processes which created an important bias for associative democracy as well as neopluralist approaches, recent research has shown that institutional opportunities and resource dependencies must be taken into account. This leads then to the result of important variations both across the EU institutions and among the working level (Pollack 1997, Beyers 2004, Beyers and Kerremans 2004). The European Union offers thus important institutional opportunities for diffuse interests that aim at expanding the scope of political conflict.

(c). Grassroots civil society mobilisation
A third group of studies question the capacities of European interest groups to stimulate grass roots participation of citizens in decision making processes. While it is easy to motivate professional interest representatives as well as lobbyists (Lahusen 2003) to participate in EU politics, mobilizing the interested and concerned lay citizens collectively is much more difficult. As all citizens might benefit from the activism of a few (Magnette 2003), the European institutions and particularly the Commission stresses discursively at least for a greater citizen involvement in decision making. Empirical evidence shows that grassroots

civil society organisations and social movements become increasingly numerous in the European Union and participate more strongly at different decision-making processes (Weisbein 2002). However, while many actors, like workers, antigenetic food activists, the very influential European Women Lobby or migrant groups (Guiraudon 2001) increasingly aim their protests at the European Union, empirical evidence identifies a predominantly 'domesticated' mode of reaction to European grievances. Imig and Tarrow (2001) found little evidence of a major shift from national to transnationally based contention – Europeans do not seem to have learned to cooperate contentiously across Europe's internal boundaries. Based on a computerized analysis of online international press agency dispatches, the authors show that the Europeanization of protest is a marginal phenomenon, which only represents 490 out of 9,872 protest activities : "From the perspective of transnational social movement mobilization, this finding alone is a healthy corrective to the notion that the nation-state is withering rapidly as a focus of citizens' claims and that Western Europe will become a transnational polity in short order" (Imig and Tarrow 2001, 32). While business associations have found it relatively easy to influence European decision-making in Brussels, weaker social actors continue to face imposing transaction costs when they attempt to organize across borders. Thus, despite the fact that the Commission finances a certain number of civic actors active in Brussels, not all new civil society actors at the EU level can participate in the decision-making process. With regard to the claim of European institutions to allow grassroots movements to participate in the EU decision-making process in order to democratise the European political system, a number of authors (Warleigh 2001, Saurugger 2006, Maloney 2007) show that civil society organisations are unable to act as catalysts for the participation of citizens, since their internal governance structures are insufficiently democratic. Warleigh stresses furthermore that in particular NGOs are unsuited to create a sense of European identity among their members thanks to their inability to promote the political socialisation of their supporters. Interests are represented in participative processes by key officers or organisational elites with very little supporter input.

In conclusion, three main elements can be drawn from these studies: Firstly, that European institutions, and in particular the Commission, are largely protected from protest movements, secondly that the movements and groups present in Brussels are largely cut off from their grass-roots basis and finally, that members states and national governments do not see their role diminished but largely transformed, referring national discontent to the European level, also analyzed as 'blame-avoidance strategies'.

The literature review of the three groups of research underlines that the process searching to link 'civil society organizations' tighter to EU decision-making processes shows important drawbacks, in particular with regard to grassroots level citizen participation. The evolution at the EU level is 'top-down': active bureaucracy attempts to address asymmetries of power and resources between different groups in creating and supporting citizen interest groups to act as checks and balances to each other as well as European institutions (Greenwood 2007, 356).

While comparative empirical research increasingly questions the implications interest group participation have for the democratic character of domestic political systems (Norris 2002, Skocpol 2003), this agenda is treated mainly theoretically in EU interest group research. There seems to be a clear distinction between analytical governance approaches on the one hand and normative reflections focusing on democracy on the other, without attempting to elaborate research question as scholars do in the field of political sociology and sociology more generally.

It is in this particular field that studies on associations and democracy at the EU level must be developed, based on sound empirical underpinnings, and less on a small number of case studies. Research on professionalisation offers promising research questions. This refers on the one hand to the large scale analysis of internal organization structures of interest groups, as presented by Weber, Ostrogorski and Michels on political parties, in order to answer the question of the transformation of their role in a democratic system. On the other hand the link between parties and interest groups should be analysed more empirically to understand the different roles representation plays today in democratic systems. This would help us to get a new understanding of political cleavages, not only based on party politics – generally difficult at the EU level – but also on interest groups and social movements. These studies would usefully complement the important theoretical and normative studies published so far.

2. What needs to be done (perhaps)?

Given that the "European civil society" has become a crucial element to enhance the EU's democratic credentials, we could actually suspect the democratic deficit literature to provide some insights as to how precisely "civil society" should decrease this democratic deficit. While this has been done with regard to the study of participatory structures the European institutions have created, and a number of important normative work on what forms of

participatory structures should be established[5], very little work has been done, as we have shown, relating to the question of who participates and who represents this civil society in civil society organizations.

It is in this context that the seminal works of political sociologists as well as more recent applications are of help to structure the question and to operationalize research.

When looking at 'civil society organizations' at the EU level, one observes a rather institutionalized and well organized environment. Demands are formulated by professional advocacy. McCarthy and Zald (1994, 375) define professionalized associations – or non-state actors more generally as entities characterized by (a) a leadership that devotes full time to the association with a large proportion of resources originating outside the constituency the group claims to represent, (b) a very small or nonexistent membership base or paper membership where membership implies little more than allowing the use of one's name upon membership rolls, (c) an attempt to represent or to speak in the name of a potential constituency and (d) attemps to influence policy toward that same constituency. Scholars have studied group professionalisation issues many times, tracing individual cases using either quantitative or qualitative approaches, but on the European Union larger scale projects have been rare.[6] It is important to note, that the work done on the professionalisation process of the groups is very similar to that undertaken on parties at the beginning of the XXe century.

Political parties

As has been shown, the phenomenon of the professionalisation of representation is an old one.[7] From the moment a truly political activity appeared, scholars started to be interested in political staff as research object and to look for a truly political and not economical explanation. Max Weber's, Moisei Ostrogorski's and Roberto Michel's work can be established as starting points to understand the professionalization of political representation. According to Weber (Weber 1963, 109-110; 1971, 298), the appearance of " a new sort of professional politicians " is correlative of the development of the modern State. In the feudal society, every lord had to face his own expenses regarding administration, justice and war and thus possessed the instruments of political domination. Besides his political activities, the

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[5] See the impressive work undertaken by the CONNEX network http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/connex/
[6] For a rather heterogenous case-study collection see Michel (2005).
[7] Angelo Panebianco's book on *Political Parties. Organization and Power* (Cambridge University Press 1988) shows both the usefulness and the limits linked to the transfer of the sociology of organisations to the study of political parties.

feudal lord had to exercise simultaneously the judicial, economic, and military management of his activities. The monarchy finally managed to expropriate the aristocracy of these means of domination and to assure itself the monopoly of legitimate physical violence. The centralization by the monarchy of the means of political domination as attributes of state power is linked to the disappearance of a type of organization in which all the managerial functions of society were simultaneously exercised by the same individuals. Their replacement leads to the bureaucratic state in which the functions are specialized and exercised by employees. Cut off from the means of management and engaged in a more and more specialized activity, politicians are increasingly obliged to make a living of their activities, to live not only 'for' politics but also 'on' politics and to become professional politicians. The appearance of professionals as politicians also implies the appearance of competition for the conquest and the exercise of political power.

Moisei Ostrogorski (1993 (1912)) reserves the qualification of politician in his seminal work to professional politicians, more specifically for leaders of local party machines. He shows that political professionalisation leads to a distinction between professionals and laypeople and the development of new attitudes, beliefs, references and career interest.[8] Roberto Michels' work (1959 [1914]) presents similar arguments. Michels argues that work divison has created specialisation insofar as political actors had to develop specific competencies (social and communications skills). Laypeople in comparison are considered incompetent which legitimates in return the competence of political actors.

Furthermore, in the same way an economic company gives a "brandname" to its products to ensure the monopoly of a clientele and to dominate the market, the political principles, doctrines and programs are, as underlines Schumpeter (1942), the brandnames which allow the professional politician to distance himself from competition, to establish and manipulate a clientele and to secure a dominant position in the competitive fight for political power. This is linked to the principle of political representation: the incapacity of the masses to manage their own interests makes the existence of professionals necessary who take them in charge. However, in the context of interest representation, it is important to ask of which nature is the relation between represented and representatives. Is the professionalisation of interest representation only one step further to efficient policy making?

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[8] His proposal to replace parties by ad hoc movements is a rather early normative demand of what some of the most radical associative democracy philosophers request today.

The political division of labour can also be observed in the context of interest representation. The studies on unions and their professionalization at the national level shows evidence of a similar phenomenon - struggles of power and a greater labour division. The empirical research on the professionalisation of interest representation at the European level should concentrate in particular on this aspect.

This however, is not seen as normatively problematic by some observers. As Manin (1995) underlines, it is certainly true that the personnel that tends to dominate contemporary public and political scenes is not a reflection of the society's social structures. The political personnel is an elite possessing characteristics of which the majority of the population is devoid.

Social movements and NGOs

A number of studies on "new social movements" (Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Imig and Tarrow 2001) have addressed a similar question. Social movements can be defined as collective challenges to existing arrangements of power and distribution by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities. David Meyer and Sidney Tarrow underline in their study (1998) that professionalisation and institutionalization may be changing the major vehicle of contentious claims – the social movements- into an instrument within the realm of conventional politics. Rather than putting forward utopian visions as demands or calling for comprehensive reforms in the ways political decisions are made, bringing "participatory democracy", "power to the people", or "grassroots democracy", these professionalised social movements are less interested in changing the rules of institutional politics than in exercising greater influence within it – they wish to represent their interests.

Simultaneously, this phenomenon leads to a reorganization of organizational structures. Increasingly, core activists today support themselves through social change efforts, as organization becomes a career option and social movements related organizations differentiate. Hereby we observe a similar transformation to political representation. Activists may move from movement to movement for both political action and employment. Professionalisation in this context is also about drawing boundaries between accredited persons and others (Moore 1996).

When looking at the political consequences of this professionalisation, Meyer and Tarrow observe a similar phenomenon as do March and Olson (1998). Although the fuzzy boundaries between professional activists and their constituencies may support the ethos of democracy,

they may also undermine the prospects of sustained and effective mobilization. Ironically, a movement organization concerned with effecting democratic reforms in the polity may be most effective by abandoning certain democratic and amateurish political practices (see also McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1987). Different studies on the professionalisation of social movements however show that the professionalisation of these movements must be understood as a larger phenomenon than solely the bureaucratisation of the group. Linked to the formula of the network, professionalisation also means the establishment of different networks at different times. They have greater discretionary resources, enjoy easier access to the media and have cheaper and faster geographic mobility and cultural interaction. These features have made permanent, centralized, and bureaucratic organizations less important than they once were in attempts to advance effective challenges to elites or authorities (Kriesi et al. 1995).

These network structures are managed by professionals; a long experience in organizing events, demonstrations or connections to the media are required in order to gain access to the highest positions. In a study on humanitarian aid, Johanna Siméant and Pascal Dauvin (Siméant and Dauvin 2002; Siméant 2005) argue that the growing competition between NGOs encourages them to turn global in order to adapt and expand their abilities to obtenain financial and human resources. The internationalization of NGOs began in the 1980 and was hastened by the founding of the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) as well as the transfer of important financial means from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund towards humanitarian NGOs. This lead to a situation where the competition for obtaining these funds increased, which lead to a rather sudden rationalization of the sector. This rationalization entailed the professionalization of NGOs and the adaptation of the internationalized agency model perceived as capable of acting on a large scale (Siméant 2005, 855).

Associations

In her seminal sociohistorical study, Theda Skocpol (2003), analysis the transformation of American Civic life. Americans have long been pre-eminent organizers and joiners of volutary associations that shape and supplement the activities of government. But late-twentieth century Americans have ceased to be such avid joiners (Putnam 2000). Skocpol shows that today, nationally ambitious civic entrepreneurs do not recruit activists and members in every state and across many towns and cities as possible, but turn to private foundations for funding and then recruit an expert staff of researchers and lobbyists. She also

shows the influence of the political and administrative environment on the transformation of group structure. Ever since the Ford Foundation launched the trend in the late 1950s, foundation grants have been especially important to the funding of US public interest associations, encouraging their professionalization and allowing many of them to avoid reliance on membership dues. But not only the emergence of private funding structures have changed the internal functioning of groups and associations,. Changes in the structures and activities of the federal government also encouraged the professionalization of associations. Thus, the openness of the federal courts to class action suits encouraged the formation of public law firms and stimulated many other advocacy groups to add lawyers to their staff.

As a consequence, avenues for citizen's participation have become more constricted. The social capital argument is central in this respect: individuals from privileged families have advantages of income and education.

While Skocpol's work shows that the times of learning through associational participation are over and millions of Americans are not longer cycled through official responsibilities where they were taught how to run meetings, handle money, keep records and participate in group discussions, this account of public life never applied to the European Union level. Here, the main idea was to associate groups – public as well as private to decision making processes first with the idea to improve the efficiency of decision making, and then, from the beginning of the 1990 onwards to decrease the legitimacy deficit by improved association what was now called 'civil society organizations'.

Public and private interest groups

At the European level, Gary Marks and Doug McAdam reason that when they encounter the institutions of the European Union, European public and private interest groups model their behavior around the techniques of interest representation that are accepted by European officials – they lobby them instead of engaging in more contentious behavior (1996), or at least they must use these action repertoires in order to gain influence. Brussels based groups represent their interests through lobbying, organize conferences and carry out expert studies for the Commission, while country-based groups rather engage in more contentious forms of politics (Guiraudon 2001).

The collective action of non-state actors can therefore be qualified as professionalisation. In studying NGOs in the development policy domain at the EU level, Alex Warleigh found (2001, 623) that the secretariats of these organizations dominated the agenda setting

processes. They made "little or no efforts to educate their supporters about the need for engagement with EU decision makers". This is a contradiction of social capital claims and more particularly the fact that the participation of the "civil society organizations" would lead to an increase of democratic legitimacy of the decision-making processes. The social capital expectation is that groups should be open with transparent decision making processes and an accountable and responsive leadership in order to promote democracy itself. In the British context, Maloney (2007, 80), referring to Berry's analysis in the 1970 (Berry 1977) notes that "the most interesting aspect about many public interest groups is not that they are oligarchic in nature, but that there are not even symbolic concessions to a democratic structure". William Maloney (Maloney 2007, Jordan and Maloney 1997, 2007), has underlined the fact that the professionalization of representations leads to biased participation. As Skocpol (1999) in the American case, Maloney and Jordan have show for Great Britain that professionalized and bureaucratized interest groups staffed by communications experts, lawyers and lobbyists are increasingly supported by sophisticated fund-raising departments and management structures. Grass roots members in public interest groups, or the so-called 'civil society organisations' have become check-book participants. The number of members has also increased dramatically over the last 20 years, and it is these numbers which are used by professional groups in their argumentation about participation. These numbers are used to compare the number of members of political parties and those of large 'civil society organization', leading to the idea of the decline of the party and the creation of alternative modes of participation. Maloney (2007, 77) rightly states that while democratic jurists judge participation by the degree of personal involvement, much group participation is chosen because it is undemanding in terms of personal effort.

Finally, the subject of professionalisation is touched upon by a number of publications centered on business interests in globalized politics and the European Union. The many similarities between public and private interest organizations make the analogies between public and private interest groups, business interest and NGOs, tempting, as these private organizations have a number of points in common at the international level (Streeck and Schmitter 1981, 1999; Ronit and Schneider 2000, Streeck et al. 2006). In the work of these authors, implicitly or explicitly (Streeck et al.) centred on the 'two logics' concept of Schmitter and Streeck who theorize the intermediary position of interest associations between membership and influence environments, the accent is put on the transformation of national systems of interest associations. The profound social change triggered in past decades by

economic and political internationalization raises the question of how interest associations cope with an increasingly complex environment, in terms both of membership and political decision-making institutions. Justin Greenwood (2002) also based his research on the Schmitter and Streeck two logics model, and more precisely questioned the degree of governability of EU associations appreciating the influences exerted by the institutional environment they act. With regard to our research question, i.e. the link between members and their representatives, Greenwood comes to the conclusion that associations need to have autonomy from its members in order to bring value to them. Those that are too closely controlled by their members become a mouthpiece for their short-term demands, while those who have acquired some autonomy from their members' demands have the flexibility to participate n policy-making with EU institutions. However, these studies have concentrated rather on the institutional environments and less on the individual backgrounds of the people representing the members' interest at the EU level.

With regard to European institutions and their desire to link the 'European civil society' to decision-making processes, however, the fundamental assumption is that it matters who participates. For this reason, it is central to understand who represents the actors includes in the civil society definition given by the European institutions. And it is here where sociological assumptions and methods must interact with frameworks developed by political science and normative political theory.

3. Towards a research agenda

The pertinent question now is how and to what extent the discourse and the institutional arrangements of the European institutions influence the internal organizational structures of the 'organized European society'? Sociological approaches allow for opening up the black boxes that are 'European civil society organizations". Classical and contemporary sociological research on parties, social movements and social movement organizations as well as business interest groups put the accent on two parameters: the organizational structure on the one hand, and the sociographical structure of groups on the other to understand the tension between democratic polity and decision-making processes.

The central hypothesis is that the more efficient groups are at representing their interests in a constructive, precise and coherent manner, the more influence they exert. These activities,

however, require major expertise on the group's and movement's side which contributes to modeling the style of militancy and leads to greater internal professionalization. Thus the organizational structures of civil society have reformed to mach better the perceived access structure of the European political system. … Organized civil society – organized as groups or social movements – has a tendency to become increasingly professionalized to represent the interests of their constituency in an efficient way (Saurugger 2007).

The sociological approach advocated in this context refers less to the analysis of the economic and social structure of the European society, more precisely the European public opinions, classes and occupations or values across the continent, but concentrates more precisely at the sociology of EU politics through the application of concepts stemming from organizational sociology. These concepts should help us to understand elite social power and behavioral convergence in 'European civil society organizations'. In this context we will analyze the EU political spaces as "political sites of contestation, in which actors are strategically constructing bounded fields of social power in their own right, at the same time as building successful remunerative careers in these emergent professions" (Favell 2007, 127).

Organizational structure

The aim of this question is to analyze the day to day working of European civil society actors. In this respect, information about decision-making structures can be found at the websites of the selected civil society organizations, NGOs or interest groups more generally. While this information is central, it is only the first step in a sociological approach. What interests us here is to what degree these organizational structures are staffed with professionals and/or activists. From preliminary and small scale research projects, it stems that there is less staff coming from the grassroots level than being employed after training in law or communication.

In order to analyse the organisational structure of groups, two parameters have to be taken into account: on the one hand the power relations between elected members or grassroots activists and the secretariat, and on the other the influence of institutional environment.

(a) Power relations between elected members or grassroots activists and the secretariat

At the organizational level, professionalisation leads to an internal adpatation problem. On the one hand, within the organization this leads to a potential conflict between the

headquarter (strategic level) and the field. On the other, professionalization entails a potential conflict among the professionals and the militants/membership leading to the professionalization paradox. This means that in order to be efficient and successful on the market going hand in hand with the ambition to participate and influence the political decision-maing process this may lead to the increasing distance between the members/militants and the professionals within the organization. The process of professionalisation implies a « conversion process » where groups adapt increasingly to organizational strategies and action repertoires of classical interest groups where the for-profit and nonprofit distinction becomes increasingly secondary. [9]

It is here where large scale empirical research must be conducted on the basis of the preliminary analysis realised (Cavaille 2005, Wagner 2005, Saurugger 2006). In the majority of European interest groups working in European electricity and Farmers' federations, less grassroots personnel, coming from a national background with training in either agronomics or engineering is recruited, whereas more communication and law professionals (coming i.e. from the College de Bruges or European management schools) can be found in strategic expertise jobs. Thus, the DBV (*Deutscher Bauernverband* – German Farmers' Union) has recruited an Austrian graduate from the College de Bruges. Their French counterpart, the FNSEA's representative in Brussels has studied at the IEP Paris, as has the FNSEA's specialist for European affairs in Paris. Both are specialists in communication and have participated in a large number of simulation games on EU negotiations. All staff members of COPA (Comité des organizations profesionnelles agricoles de l'UE) responsible for lobbying the EU have a university degree. They have never worked for any of the national Farmer's Unions before or had a career in the farming sector (Hrabanski 2005).

Regarding the electricity sector, the staff of the Brussels' offices of the main electricity firms have increasingly often received commercial or communication training. This situation leads the engineers deploring that their Brussels' colleagues follow the commercial rather than the security strategies in representing the interests of the electricity producers. Technical expertise must be reformulated by professional lobbyists before being represented in negotiations.

This replacement of activists by communication professionals can also be found in other policy areas. The recruitment logic of associations at the European level corresponds more to a career logic than to an activist one. The example of the European Women Lobby shows

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[9] See also research project on Transnational non-state actors and Democracy conducted by Wolf Eberwein and Sabine Saurugger, PACTE, IEP Grenoble.

after the gradual retreat of the founding mothers the emergence of a frontier between elected representatives and staff members. This frontier results of the establishment of a meritocratic recruitment procedure. Associational 'civil servants' seem to emerge (Cavaille 2005).

In the field of trade unions, this institutional professionalisation is at the origin of important critiques regarding the 'high level unionism' or the 'elite and expert unionism' (Gobin 1997, Pernot 1998). The European trade unionists are considered to be the new elite, integrated in the universe of European high-ranking civil servants and other professionals. Here we observe clearly a competition between different modes of trade unionism which puts into question the legitimate basis of unionism (Wagner 2005).

It is however important to note that the career logic does not systematically replace the activist logic in the organized civil society structures at the EU level. In three of the four groups – farmers, the European Women Lobby and Trade unions - activists still represent the majority amongst the elected representatives. It is in the secretariats that we see a professionalisation of the association, where individuals move from association to association in order to pursue their career path. This phenomenon is, however, growing in importance.

With regard to research on business interests, Greenwood (2002, 18) stated: "The formal decision making structures of EU Business associations have a ring of predictability about them. The 'engine houses' of building policy positions are the specialist working groups, usually operating by the authority of a number of functional policy committees – such as social affairs environmental affairs, and so on. Typically these then report to a further tier of authority, with someone – usually the general Secretary – entrusted with deciding whether positions can be issued straight away, or need to be discussed further in some other for a. Where referral is made, perhaps to an executive Committee, that committee may, in turn, pass it to the highest decision-making body of the organization for decision, perhaps because the members of the Executive are divided on the proposal".

(b) Influence of Funding

The EU has provided significant levels of funding to many civil society organizations. In her PhD, Sanchez-Salgado has analysed the influence of European funding to NGOs' accounting structures. (Sanchez-Salgado 2007). Here the question is to what extent external funding structures, in particular those of the European Commission transform the internal structures and make them more professionalized. With regard to public interest groups, or NGOs, the European Commission, in particular after the 1999 step-down of the Santer Commission due

to internal fraud, requires specific managerial and organizational abilities of groups it is funding. Thus funded groups had to adapt rapidly based on functional requirements. These transformations are, however, value loaded. New instruments carry new normative contents, as Lascoumes and Le Galès (2007) have shown, and lead to the recruitment of new professionals into the organizational structure. An indepth research must allow to appreciate the percentage of these newly recruited professionals compared to former staff. What precisely does this transformation mean for the link between the representatives and the constituency?

While research on public interest groups (or NGOs) has been conducted in some sectors, a comparison between public and private interest groups is still absent in this respect. This comparison, however, would help us to avoid generalizations such as poor public interest groups compared to rich and influential business groups, or even democracy-enhancing public interest groups versus democracy-diminishing business interest groups.

Sociographical analysis of social actors.

The analysis of career patterns reflects an other aspect of the professionalisation of interest representation in the European Union. Organizations that rely heavily on public funds may not require grassroots membership. McCarthy and Zald (1987) establish a significant correlation between institutional and financial support for social movement organizations and the emergence of life careers in movements. As a result of the massive growth in funding it has become possible for a larger number of professionals to earn a respectable income committing themselves full time to activities related to social movements. Outside financial support means that a membership in the classical sense is almost dispensible as it allows a leadership to replace volunteer manpower drawn from the base with paid staff members chosen upon criteria of skills and experience. The authors show that in the US American case program professionals have been able to pursue successfully such careers for some time, moving in and out of governmental agencies, private agencies, community organizations, foundations and universities. However, they argue that these new professionals in social movement organizations are distinguished from their colleagues in the classical professions such as public relations directors, membership and development specialists, lawyers and engineers by their rejection of traditional institutional roles, careers and reward structures. They define their opportunities less in terms of the use of professional skills and more in terms of social change objectives. While both, in the US and the European Union,

professional competence rather than broad citizen action seems to characterize these organizations, the heavy use of the media as a lever for social change prominent in the US is absent in the EU given its poorly developed public space.

Thus, information about gender, age, geographical or national origin, social origin as well as the level and type of diploma the individuals have earned allow to study the European interest representation as a market place. Variables such as the type of employment and patterns of recruitment can be decisive. Do volunteers or activists and delegated personnel identify more or less with the group than permanent full time staff who has chosen the workplace as a career move (Kohler-Koch et al 2008)?

Two hypotheses are possible. On the one hand, volunteers or activist working at the Brussels bureau can establish a tighter link between the constituency and the representation in Brussels (or Strasbourg). Or, on the opposite, the fact that volunteers or activists without precise knowledge of the interest representation business represent the interest of the constituency can lead to a decrease in its efficiency. As a consequence, the constituency feels less well represented.

The question remains of course, how precisely to differentiate between activists and professionals. The possibility exists that activists are also professionals.

The aim here would be not to distinguish clearly and extensively between these two groups but to show, on the basis of statistical material and interviews the continuum on which these distinctions are based. Court action: Is their correlation between recruitment of lawyers amongst their structure and court action?

The problem here is that longitudinal analysis is not possible. Data sets must be established on the bases of current research – no historical comparison is possible.

Conclusion

Why is a sociological approach a necessary complement to analyse non-state actors in the EU's democratic structures? This paper has attempted to show that in order to rethink democratic representation, it is central to understand empirically who is represented and who represents. While we agree theoretically that "representation invokes a principal-agent relationship" where the representatives stand for and act in behalf of the represented, and that "representation identifies a place for political power to be exercised responsibly and with a degree of accountability" (Castiglione and Warren 2006, 1), we need to understand who is

represented by whom in social terms through non-state actors, or the 'organized civil society' in the European Union. While theoretical normative approaches are central to understand the question as such which has led in democratic theory to a remarkable consensus around Tocqueville's view that the virtues and viability of a democracy depend on the robustness of its associational life (Warren 2001), a sociological approach centered on individuals working in these associations as well as their power relations is necessary to understand the whole picture when referring to the EU as a democratic polity.

I believe that the two strands of literature on professionalization, on the one hand on political parties, on the other on social movements and NGOs, can be integrated. As Baumgartner and Mahoney (2007) have recently underlined: "Typically we conduct too few interviews, focus them only in a single policy area, pick a small number of cases in a non-random manner, work as individuals and not in teams, and design our interviews to be unique rather than directly comparable with other high quality work being done by colleagues."

The result of this research may well be a rather weberian conclusion insofar as the attempts to democratize the supranational political system of the EU through associative and participatory democratic inventions lead to a more professionalized 'organised civil society' and thus mirrors the development we have witnessed in political parties which develop from mass organizations to highly professionalized and efficient political enterprises.

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