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Beate Kohler-Koch
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ABSTRACT

The involvement of civil society in EU governance is widely interpreted as a right step in the direction of participatory democracy. Civil society associations are expected to communicate the concerns of citizens to Brussels, to engage in public deliberation with EU decision makers and stakeholders alike and thus to contribute to the emergence of a transnational public sphere. The paper puts these high hopes under empirical scrutiny. As effective participation calls for professionalisation, public interest associations have adapted their organisational structures. Our data suggest that by doing so public interest associations face a dilemma: The more they succeed in having their voice heard, the less they function as democratic transmission belts.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die aktive Einbindung der Zivilgesellschaft in die europäische Politik wird weithin mit großen Erwartungen verknüpft. Sie wird als Beitrag zur Stärkung der demokratischen Legitimität der EU gesehen, weil auf diesem Weg die Anliegen der Bürger direkt zu Gehör gebracht, die Vielfalt der Interessen und Positionen in einem offenen Meinungsbildungsprozess erwogen und so schrittweise eine europäische Öffentlichkeit geschaffen werde. Dieser Beitrag prüft kritisch die Berechtigung dieser Annahmen. Schließlich müssen sich auch die gemeinwohlorientierten Interessengruppen dem Zwang der Professionalisierung unterwerfen, wenn sie in Brüssel nicht in eine Randexistenz gedrängt werden wollen. Unsere Untersuchungen der Organisationsstrukturen und Kooperationsstrategien zeigen, dass sie vor einem Dilemma stehen: Je effizienter sie auf europäischer Ebene kooperieren, desto mehr verlieren sie ihre Basisnähe.

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1. CIVIL SOCIETY AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS: FROM MYTH TO PARTNERS IN GOVERNANCE

Civil society ranks high in political discourse. It has become the epitome for political emancipation, and the strengthening of civil society is habitually considered as a means of securing political and social self-determination. The concept of civil society is loaded with positive normative connotations even though there is little agreement concerning the question what constitutes civil society. The role and functions attributed to civil society vary over time and across countries and often it is more a myth than a reality (Jobert 2008). Despite all these dissimilarities, the discourse on civil society usually flares up in times of (perceived) legitimacy crisis and this is also how it came on stage in the European Union. The incantation of civil society was a response to the (alleged) democratic deficit of the Union and it was embedded in reflections on how to make EU governance both more democratically legitimate and efficient (Greenwood 2007; Michel 2008).

The dual interest in civil society and civil society organisations

In the EU context civil society has two images. Firstly, it is the emergent political community of the Union, an imaginary “European people” which constitutes the polity and simultaneously is the source of demands on and support to the political system of the EU. The European civil society is an attractive vision for European integrationists since it holds the promise to be the breeding ground for a European demos or at least to become its substitute. Civil society as such has no actor quality.[1] This comes with the second image, namely civil society as *organised* civil society. Civil society organisations (CSO) form and transform civil society through discourse and interaction in the public sphere; they make civil society visible and give societal interests a voice. Organised civil society is said to compensate for the deficiencies of representative democracies by animating citizens’ participation, by reaching out from the grassroots to far away Brussels and by bringing Europe closer to the people.

Organised civil society is also attractive as a partner in governance. It is expected to voice the diversity of interests and views and to bring the knowledge and down-to-earth experience of citizens into the policy-making process. Thus, civil society organisations

[1] Trenz (2007: 17; 2005) proposes the notion of “civil society as a discursive formation within the public sphere”.

are invited to give advice and to participate formally and actively in the collective decision-making process in order to improve the quality of EU governance.[2]

EU institutions, just as national and local governments, appreciate the contributions of civil society organisations to input and to output legitimacy. In recent years, they have been increasingly open to civil society actors and even more, they have taken an interest to activate political participation. “Participatory engineering” (Zittel 2008) ranges high on the Union’s agenda. The obvious reason is that a European, transnational civil society is still only far away on the horizon and the support of and collaboration with civil society associations is considered to have the potential to make it come true.

To put it short: The European Union is interested in strengthening both, civil society and civil society associations. Civil society associations are important in themselves and they have an instrumental value. They (partly) constitute the emergent European civil society and contribute to its on-going formation. They also provide input and output legitimacy by linking citizens to the public sphere and to government, either through exerting influence on government or by being a partner in governance. These multifunctional expectations concerning civil society are well documented in the statements of EU institutions – though mostly only implicitly and not in a systematic way.[3]

2. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS – EXTRA-ORDINARY MEMBERS IN THE FAMILY OF INTEREST GROUPS?

Can civil society organisations contribute to enhance EU democracy in such a multifunctional way and thus claim to have a privileged place in the EU system? Which of the many associations active in Brussels qualify as CSO? The vast majority of voluntary, non-state and not-for-profit EU associations claim that they are representing Europe’s civil society. Can we accept this representation claim indiscriminately or should we limit the quality label of CSO to public interest groups? When we do so, can we expect that good intentions and sincere efforts are sufficient to make these associations a special brand? Or do we have to expect that effects of institutional constraints

[2] Even when civil society is related to governance, the concept of civil society is used in different ways. Based on a comparative empirical analysis across policy sectors Carlo Ruzza can demonstrate that different actors use the concept for different purposes (Ruzza 2007).

[3] See above all the conclusions of the Presidency of the European Council, Turin 1996 in connection with the implementation of the Lisbon strategy 2000 and the White Paper on European Governance by the European Commission (2001). Furthermore, the EESC has been very dedicated to upgrade civil society; it organised several conferences with the participation of civil society (conferences in 1999, 2001 and 2004) and issued several opinions.

and political conditions will push their professionalisation and make them a lobby group like any other? According to our hypothesis - which we will explicate in chapter 4 – also civil society organisations advocating general interests will adapt their behaviour according to the ‘logic of influence’ and the ‘logic of membership’ like any other interest group.[4] It is up to empirical research to test if this will change their characteristic features in a way which makes it doubtful that all their activities can be equated with an active contribution to EU democracy. Before we turn to our investigation and empirical findings, we have to lay out quite clearly what we consider to be the relevant characteristics of a civil society organisation and a public interest association respectively.

Defining civil society organisations: Differentiated images

CSO - in the perception of the European Commission

In a first approach we may recall the definitions suggested by the European Commission and the Economic and Social Committee. Both started with an encompassing enumeration of non-state actors[5] which share some common features: They are *voluntary* associations, *independent*, i. e. not bound by instructions from outside bodies, and they are *not-for-profit*. Furthermore, civil society organisations are expected to *act in public.*[6] When the Commission opened a first (voluntary) online register for “European-level civil society organisations” it introduced the category of ‘non-governmental organisations’. NGOs were defined more narrowly; in addition to the criteria mentioned above, they were to serve the *public good*, be dedicated to the interests of a particular group of

[4] The concepts “logic of influence” and “logic of membership” (Schmitter/Streeck 1999) respectively refer to the institutional structures and prevailing processes within the relevant political arena, to which organisations/associations need to adapt if they want to represent their members’ interests successfully, and the need for these organisations to respond to membership demand in order to avoid the loss of members and necessary resources.

[5] See the Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on “The role and contribution of civil society organisations in the building of Europe” (Economic and Social Committee 1999: 30); it was intensely discussed in the Working Group 2a (Consultation and Participation of Civil Society) preparing the Commission’s White Paper on Governance and then adopted: “Civil society includes the following: trade unions and employers’ organisations (‘social partners’); nongovernmental organisations; professional associations; charities; grassroots organisations; organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life with a particular contribution from churches and religious communities.“ (Commission 2001: 15)

[6] The research project B5 of the Bremen CRC, “Legitimation and Participation in International Organizations“, is based on this broad understanding of civil society (Steffek/Nanz 2008: 28).

persons or of *society as such* and not to act in favour of the economic or professional interests of their members, i. e. act *in the interest of the 'other'*.[7]

CSO – self-perception

This categorisation of NGOs comes close to the self-image of those organisations which have joined together in the Civil Society Contact Group (CSCG). They characterise themselves as 'rights and value based NGO'[8], representing public interests. Their mission is to represent issues – whether environmental, social, developmental or humanitarian – and to represent segments of society who do not have a voice – e.g. victims of human rights abuses, people experiencing extreme poverty, or minorities who are not in a position to speak for themselves (Platform of European Social NGOs 2001).[9]

CSO - in the perception of the scientific community

Though civil society entered the debate on EU governance and democracy late (Finke 2007: 4), in the meantime we are confronted with a burgeoning literature and with contrasting images of civil society. Scholars doing research on EU civil society strongly disagree about which associations to subsume under the label of CSO. An online-survey (Kohler-Koch/Quittkat 2009) has revealed that the research community is split over the question which of the many kinds of associations that participate in the Commission's "consultation with civil society" qualifies as CSO. Whereas about half of the respondents (53,96 percent) identify trade unions and professional associations as part of organised civil society, only a minority (37,01 percent of the respondents) is of the opinion that business interest groups do qualify as CSO. Only public interest associations gain close to unanimous support; an overwhelming majority of the participating scholars (84,75 percent) qualifies the NGOs which adhere to the Civil Society Contact Group as 'civil society organisations'.

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[7] See the information on the CONECCS database, the voluntary listing of "European-level civil society organisations", which was closed down in 2007. It has been substituted by the Register of Interest Groups: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/transparency/regrin/welcome.do?locale=en#en which was launched in June 2008.

[8] See, for example, on the CSCG homepage: "The EU Civil Society Contact Group brings together eight large rights and value based NGO sectors - culture, environment, education, development, human rights, public health, social and women." http://www.act4europe.org/code/en/default.asp

[9] Another telling document is the presentation of Beger 2004.

3. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AS PROMOTER OF EU DEMOCRACY

Relevant characteristics

We are interested whether or not the associations claiming to act in the public interest and, consequently, to be “true” representatives of Europe’s civil society, suffer from the pressure of professionalisation in a way that they may turn into ordinary lobby groups. Therefore, we concentrate our research on those associations which, by their own definition, are public interest associations (PIA)[10] and are predominantly seen as (potential) promoters of EU democracy. They have some characteristic features which distinguish them from all the other voluntary, non-state and not-for-profit organisations:

(1) They are firmly established in civil society (linking to citizens),

(2) they represent public interests, and

(3) they give voice to weak interests.

These three features correspond with the expectation that their activities will

(1) advance the formation of Europe’s civil society by setting off and feeding into a trans-national discourse,

(2) counter the fragmentation and particularistic bias of policy making by bringing in cross-cutting issues and raising awareness for the public good,

(3) uphold minority rights and promote solidarity.

PIAs can only accomplish these tasks when they remain close to civil society. The key to success rests with intensive communication involving grass roots members, supporters and citizens at large. Communication ought to be in public, be not just top-down but also bottom-up, and be open to the broad diversity of views of a large sector of society (or society as such). Positions ought to be arrived at by rational communication and deliberations framed by universal rights and values and should always be open to revision. This implies a process of reiteration and, consequently, a high level of extended and intense communication. It is plausible to assume that member based organisations will employ different ways and means of communication than organisations with a fluid constituency of supporters.

Functional transformation through the backdoor

The discursive potential of civil society organisations is constrained by resources, bounded by the institutional and social environment. When communicating, European civil society associations have to fight with the well-known obstacles of multi-level systems, the distance to Brussels not just in geographic terms but also in terms of political

[10] Another often used term is ‘general interest association’ (GIA).

culture, also including the varying duration of EU membership and consequently varying experiences with the EU, different cultures of associational life, the varying experience with interest representation itself depending on the age of the democratic system, language barriers, and nationally segmented public spheres. To make matters worse, civil society associations may be trapped by the need to adapt to the ‘logic of influence’ prevailing in Brussels.

They have to get organised in a way to meet the functional requirements of ‘effective participation’. The moment PIAs enter the policy-making sphere they play the same role as any other interest group: Their task is to represent interests, to lobby decision- makers in order to have an impact on outcome, to mobilize followers and the media to convince decision-makers that they have a case and the support of a wider public. The objective is effective participation, which serves two aims: The realization of preferred political ends and the long-term survival of the organisation. Only success averts the exit of members or supporters and the loss of resources.

However, organising effective participation may come at the prize of turning any civil society organisations into a lobby group like all the others, i.e. concentrating on particular interests and being – at best – a transmission-belt of established interests, instead of providing a space for reasoning and deliberation. The dangers are twofold: Efficiency calls for *elitism* and effectiveness suggests *specificity*. For the sake of efficiency positions will be defined in the inner circles of Brussels. Efficiency is a matter of timing, of commanding knowledge and resources.

Our **hypothesis** is that organisational characteristics channel the propensity either to concentrate communication at Brussels or to extend it to the wider sphere of European civil society. Effectiveness in terms of impact on outcome is constraint by the structural characteristics of the decision-making process, the choice of issues and by power constellations. All these conditions feed back into the strategies of actors involved. Public interest associations - like any other interest group - will see to it that they increase their bargaining power, last but not least by forming alliances. In other words: The conditions for effective participation channel options of organisation.

To sum up: We are interested in the democratic added value which public interest associations can bring to the EU and we propose that the democratic added value depends on the communicative capacity of such organisations. Before we explore the communicative behaviour of public interest associations and how it resonates in the public, we want to check in a systematic way the conditions and constraints under which all civil society organisations operate. The hypothesis, enlightened by organisational theory, is that distinct organisational features make a difference.

Constraining factors

There always exists a tense relationship between horizontal and vertical communication. Resources and, as mentioned above, the characteristics of the institutional system of the EU and of the membership and/or constituency of the European public interest associations are obviously constraining factors. Policies may also make a difference. In addition, communication behaviour is always influenced by the identity and role perceptions of actors involved and these, in turn, are dependent on the organisational context. From the perspective of organisation theory four characteristics have to be taken as key factors: Organisational structure, organisational demography, organisational locus, and institutionalisation (Egeberg 2006).[11]

The ***organisational structure*** of an organisation (be it an association or a network) settles the *status* of its components; the organisational structure embodies *regimes* defining appropriate role behaviour, the *specialisation* of tasks, and the *allocation of resources*. The *regime* contains principles, norms, rules and procedures that impose “codified expectations as regards the decision behaviour of the various role incumbents. The logic of appropriateness, incentives and bounded rationality are the mechanisms that are supposed to connect role expectations and actual behaviour” (Egeberg 2006: 3). Such regimes are often formalised in statutes and internal proceedings but mostly they are informal, emerge from routines, and reflect what is considered to be appropriate in the respective environment. The degree of *specialisation* within an association mainly comes with size. Specialisation diverts attention from the whole to the parts, and depending on the degree and the mode of coordination (negative or positive coordination) the loyalty of actors will be with their own portfolio. Specialisation may be organised in different ways dividing tasks according to either functional or territorial aspects. As a consequence divergent types of interest – either originating from functional sectors or from national or regional origin - may become represented more prominently. The allocation of *resources* within an organisation determines career patterns (permanent or temporary employment; part-time or full employment; flat or steep hierarchy; patterns of recruitment, etc.) and thus influences inward or outward looking behaviour.

‘***Organisational demography***’ is distinguished by the usual characteristics of social differentiation such as gender, age, education, nationality. More relevant in our context are the background and career prospects of the members of the organisation. Especially when employment is short and/or part-time, it makes a difference where a person is coming from and where she or he is likely to have a new appointment.

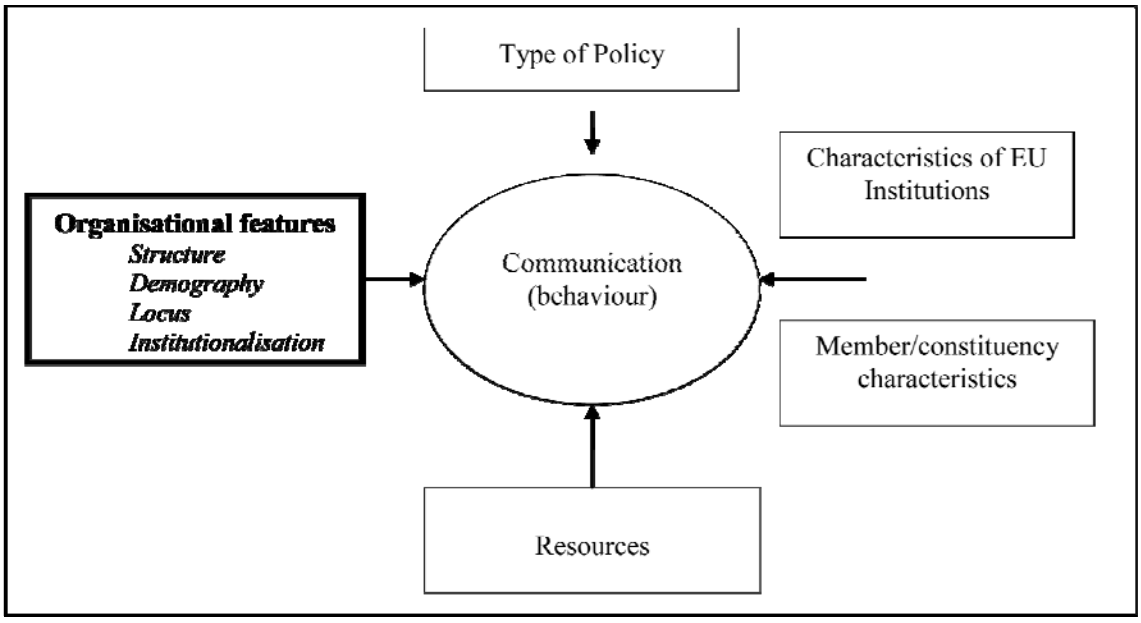
[11] We use here the model applied by Morten Egeberg (2006) for his analysis of the college of European Commissioners.

The physical location, that is the ***‘organisational locus’*** is important for both, internal and external communication. It has an impact on the easiness of establishing personal contacts and thus influences contact patterns and consequently coordination behaviour. “The number of unplanned meetings among decision-makers is particularly sensitive to how the physical setting is arranged. Thus, for example, the amount of attention that leaders pay to the concerns of their respective portfolios versus the organisation as a whole may be partly affected by whether they are located on the premises of their departments or situated together as a leadership group.” (Egeberg 2005: 4)

The ***institutionalisation*** of an organisation is not completed with its establishment but will grow over time, mainly by adding informal norms and practices. These may support or challenge the original objective of a given organisation. Mostly, the growing complexity and consolidation of informal norms and practices promotes a process of “autonomisation”, that is “an organisation’s transition from being a pure instrument for somebody else to becoming a principal in itself” (Egeberg 2005: 4). Permanent instead of delegated and revolving personnel is reinforcing such a trend.

The type of policy may accentuate organisational factors in one way or another. If items on the agenda are more specific than cross-cutting, they may accentuate the portfolio orientation within an organisation. Regulatory policies are more likely to support the functional specialisation whereas distributive and re-distributive policies often have a territorial impact and consequently favour giving attention to national interests. Furthermore, particular salient and controversial issues may call for communicating with the membership/constituency and thus underscore the issue of representation.

Figure 1: Concept of Analysis



The pertinent question now is: In which way does the variation in organisational characteristics impact on the communicative behaviour of civil society organisations? When will an organisation tend to become more *elitist* and more *specific* in its orientation? In our empirical research we have been guided by the following hypotheses:

(1) Civil society networks (o*rganisational structure*, *status of components*) will mainly rest on an informal *regime* so that expectations in role behaviour are unsettled and demand greater investments in communication. Job hopping between EU level associations (*organisational demography*), sharing buildings or even offices (*organisational locus)* and sitting in the same EU advisory committees may compensate for the distance that come from the autonomy of the network's members.

(2) Functional *specialisation* ordinarily puts a high premium on expert knowledge, whereas territorial specialisation gives impetus to pay more attention to members and constituencies. From this perspective it is plausible to assume that functional specialisation goes together with a tendency to concentrate communication in the centre whereas territorial specialisation gives prominence to the periphery[12]. In the case of EU level networks and associations which are composed of a multi-layered system of organisations, the 'periphery' may be distant and difficult to reach. Particularly in this case the *regime* properties make a difference: Formal and informal norms, rules and procedures may ease efficient and effective communication and thus induce the Brussels association to pay more attention to vertical communication.

(3) Career patterns (*organisational demography)* reflect the dynamic growth of the civil society sector. Most of the networks and even of the PIAs are only of recent origin. Role perception, and consequently communicative behaviour, will be different depending on the personal background and future prospects of a person. If those who have responsibility at the EU level are coming from the Brussels circuit and expect to be part of it also in the future, their focus will be different from those who came in as officials or volunteers from grassroots associations with the perspective to return. Variables of the *organisational structure* such as the type of employment and patterns of recruitment are decisive:

[12] A contrasting hypothesis would claim that many times the local associations have the specific expertise and, therefore, sectoral specialisation also demands intensive vertical communication. In this case, however, the essence of communication would accrue to mobilising expert knowledge and not to engage in political deliberation.

Volunteers, delegated personnel, part-time and temporary employees will hardly ever identify as much with the centre as a permanent full-time staff. Consequently their background has to be explored.

(4) The *organisational locus* is important for contact patterns within the organisation but also extending to the periphery of an organisation. EU associations have member associations at the national and sub-national (regional and sometimes local) level. Even in times of e-communication their geographical distance makes a difference. Still more important is that associations located in Brussels are ‘where the action is’. They have the advantage of immediate access and are on stage when crucial events take place. The flip side of the coin is that they may become entrenched in a policy-making process which they cannot control but which absorbs all their attention capacities.

(5) *Institutionalisation* is not just a matter of time but also of context conditions which might make consolidation easier or more difficult. Networks, umbrella associations and individual public interest associations are not only of rather recent origin, they also have developed in parallel. This makes for a fluid situation and attracts attention of the associations’ personnel to what happens in Brussels. Therefore, the degree of ‘autonomisation’ may not be highly advanced but nevertheless the tendency to focus on the EU level may be greater than expected.

4. ACTING IN EUROPE: PUBLIC INTEREST ASSOCIATIONS IN THE BRUSSELS AMBIT

The Civil Society Contact Group (CSCG) has been set up to represent the common interest of EU public interest associations in relation to EU institutions and the public. Since its members are privileged spoke-persons in EU affairs and since its members are networks and platforms which incorporate the more specialised European PIAs, the CSCG is an ideal starting point for our analysis.

Table 1: The family of the CSCG direct and indirect members

First organisational level	*Second organisational level*	*Third organisational level*[13]			*Fourth organisational level**	*Etc.*
		Int	*Eu*	*Nat*		
CSCG	**Social Platform**		**36**		**1340**	
		3	**33**	**0**		
	Culture Action Europe		**81**		**2655**	
		7	**26**	**48**		
	European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)		**48**		**1182**	
		2	**19**	**27**		
	Human Rights & Democracy Network (HRDN)		**38**		**917**	
		26	**10**	**2**		
	The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL)		**19**		**428**	
		3	**16**	**0**		
	The European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD)		**40**		**352**	
		10	**8**	**22**		
	The European Women’s Lobby (EWL)		**54**		**254**	
		8	**13**	**33**		
	Green 10		**10**		**538**	
		3	**7**	**0**		
Total	**8**		**326**		**7666**	

*This includes only the member organisations of international and EU organisations at the third level.

The name already indicates that the CSCG claims to represent European civil society and, indeed, it brings together a wide range of interests (see Table 1): “The EU Civil Society Contact Group brings together eight large rights and value based NGO sectors - culture, environment, education, development, human rights, public health, social and

[13] The third organisational level documents the mixed composition of the networks: Whereas *Human Rights* has more international members and *Culture Action Europe* has mostly national members, the *Social Platform* is composed predominantly of European associations.

women.”[14]. Thus we think that we are on the safe side when we focus our research on the CSCG and its members and, in addition, on the members of its members (see Table 1). Nevertheless, as we proceed we will always check if the associations in question qualify as public interest associations (PIA) or rather belong to the category of business (BIA) or of trade unions/professionals (TU/PROF).

For our analysis we will concentrate on the CSCG and on the EU associations which belong to the second and third organisational level of the CSCG, except when indicated otherwise. In other words, we excluded member associations from individual countries. Among the associations listed at the third organisational level of the CSCG less than half are EU-level organisations. The overwhelming majority belongs to the category of PIA; only a minority can be classified as business interest groups and an even smaller group as trade unions or professional organisations.

Institutionalisation

Looking at the founding dates of the PIAs, we can discern an uneven growth (see Figure 2). For a long time, PIAs have just emerged sporadically. Only when the Commission became more persistent in pursuing the Social Dialogue and started to promote the principle of ‘partnership’ in EU policies in the mid-1980s, the European associational landscape changed.[15] Another wave of setting up PIAs is related to the failure and near-failure of the Maastricht Referendum in Denmark and France, respectively, which induced the Commission not to focus any longer exclusively on the quality of its policy proposals but to become concerned with a broader popular support in the member states. This concern was reflected by the opening of the dialogue for public interest representatives and the implementation of funding programmes for PIAs. A third wave of PIA formation is linked to the introduction of a ‘Civil Dialogue’ in the field of employment and social affairs in 1996. Further, in order to establish representative partners for consultation and to advance transparency, the Commission encouraged networking amongst PIAs and supported the establishment of forums and networks (see Finke/Jung/Kohler-Koch 2003 and Smismans 2003).

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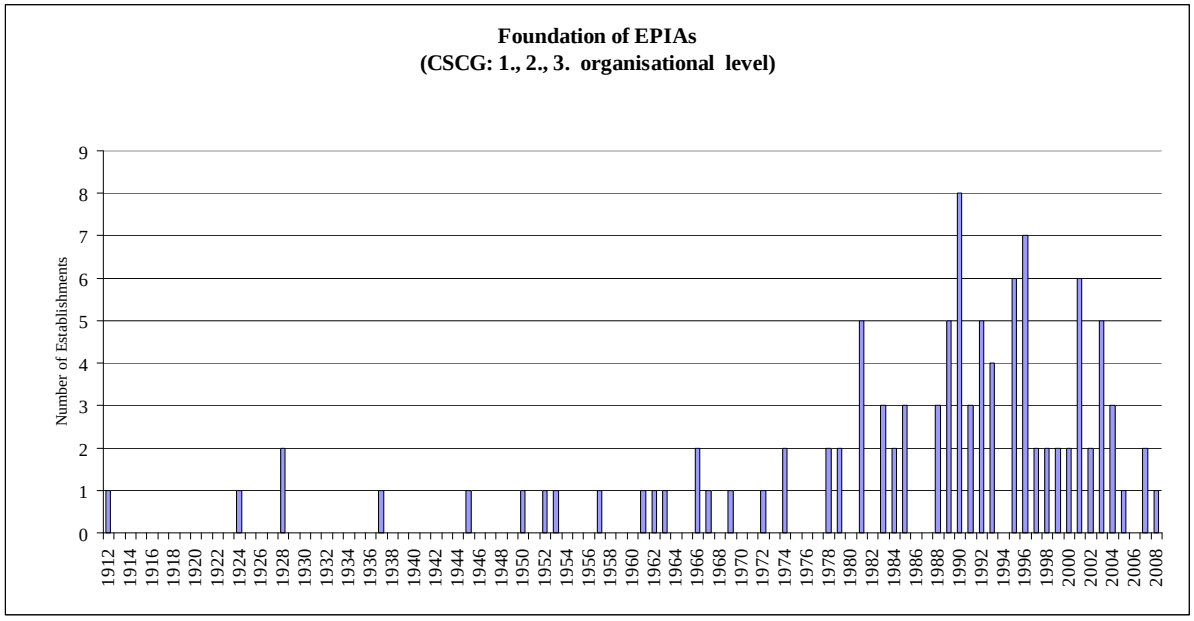
[14] The ETUC, representing European Union workers is not a member but an observer to the group. See http://www.act4europe.org/code/en/civi.asp?Page=2&menuPage=2.

[15] The idea to establish a dialogue with the European social partners was vitalized by the Delors Commission in 1985, when it organised the ‘Val Duchesse Meeting’ with European social partners to discuss the social dimension of the internal market. One of the results was an official mandate to develop and institutionalize a European Social Dialogue, which was included in the Single European Act in 1987 and officially introduced in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (Quittkat/Finke 2008).

Even though quite a number of PIAs originated already from earlier times, many of the EU-level PIAs, and above all the networks and platforms of public interest associations are still very young. Only half of the individual PIAs were established before 1991 and about a third of the PIAs only exist for the last decade or only for a few years. Ten years are a short time for organisations to develop informal norms and practices, especially if uncertainty about financial resources – resulting from strong dependency on public sector funding (Fazi/Smith 2006) - does not allow for long-time planning and puts pressure on staff to concentrate on fund raising and the securing of their own jobs, deviating considerable time and resources from the substantial work and issues of the PIA.

Figure 2: The age of EU-level PIAs



Listed are EU level public interest associations which are CSCG members at second and third organisational level

Organisational structure

In order to explore the organisational structure we focus on:

- The functional and territorial specialisation, and
- the length of membership-chains reaching down from the CSCG to the grass-roots members or constituencies.

Functional and territorial specialisation

Whereas the CSCG is an all-inclusive organisation of EU-level PIAs the eight member organisations are distinguished by functional specialisation. All of them are EU-level networks with varying degrees of organisational density.

They cover the above mentioned sectors culture, environment, education, development, human rights, public health, social and women. This specialisation is well reflected in the name of each network:

- The Platform of European *Social* NGOs (Social Platform)
- The European Forum for the Arts and Heritage (*Culture* Action Europe),
- European *Public Health* Alliance (EPHA),
- *Human Rights* Development Network (HRDN),
- The European Civil Society Platform on *Lifelong Learning* (EUCIS-LLL),
- The European NGO confederation for *Relief and Development* (CONCORD),
- The European *Women*'s Lobby (EWL),
- *Green* 10.

The organisational structure of the EU-level public interest associations will be demonstrated by exploring the vertical composition of the Green 10. We choose two of these ten top organisations, namely 'Friends of the Earth Europe' (FoEE) and 'Climate Action Network Europe' (CAN-E). For both EU-level organisations we explored the array of organisations at lower territorial levels. For the sake of transparency we present here only data from France and Germany. Both tables illustrate the broad range and the complexity of the European associational life. Furthermore, we can see that the aggregation within one policy field does not follow a linear pattern.

Table 2: Example CSCG - Green 10 - Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE)

First organisational level	Second organisational level	Third organisational level	Fourth organisational level		Fifth organisational level	Sixth organisational level	Seventh organisational level	Eighth --
CSCG **(8 members)**	**GREEN 10** ***(10 Members:*** **Birdlife International** **Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE)** **CEE Bankwatch Network** **Climate Action Network Europe (CAN-E)** **European Environment Bureau (EEB)** **European Federation for Transport and Environment (T&E)** **Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) (formerly EPHA)** **Environment Network (EEN))** **Greenpeace International** **Friends of Nature (IFN)** **WWF European Policy Office (WWF-EPO))**	**FRIENDS OF THE EARTH EUROPE (FoEE)** **(30 members, one by country)**	GERMANY	**BUND** (FoE Germany)	BUND was founded in 1975 as confederation of pre-existing regional groups, reflecting the German federal structure. There are **16 regional branches**, for example: ... **BUND Baden-Württemberg** BUND Bayern BUND Hessen ...	There are **12 regional associations (Regionalverbände)** in the BUND Baden-Württemberg (with full-time employees), for example: .. Heilbronn Stuttgart Heidelberg Karlsruhe ...	There are **300 city groups (Ortsgruppen) and administrative district/county groups (Kreisgruppen)**, for example: ... BUND Mannheim (Kreisgeschäftsstelle) BUND Heidelberg (Kreisgeschäftsstelle)* BUND Heidelberg (Ortsgeschäftsstelle)* ... *Different offices at different parts of the city. At this level, individual citizens participate.	
			FRANCE	***LES AMIS DES LA TERRE*** (FoE France)	Les Amis de la Terre, created in 1970, is a grassroots organization with about **1500 individual members organised into 21 territorial groups** (2 regional, 20 departmental, 9 local groups), for example:	Limousin (regional) Bas-Rhin (departmental) Gers (departmental) Paris (local)		

Table 3: Example CSCG - Green 10 - CAN-E

First ganisational level	Second organisational level	Third organisational level	Fourth organisational level		Fifth organisational level		Sixth…
CSCG nembers)	**GREEN 10** ***(10 Members:*** **Birdlife International** **Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE)** **CEE Bankwatch Network** **Climate Action Network Europe (CAN-E)** **European Environment Bureau (EEB)** **European Federation for Transport and Environment (T&E)** **Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) (formerly EPHA Environment Network (EEN))** **Greenpeace** **International Friends of Nature (IFN)** **WWF European Policy Office (WWF-EPO))**	**CLIMATE ACTION NETWORK EUROPE (CAN-E)** **(98 full members from 24 countries, 12 observer members from 4 countries)**	GERMANY	- Forum Umwelt und Entwicklung - Women in Europe for a Common Future - Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland – BUND/FoE Germany - **Deutscher Naturschutzring (DNR)/ German League for Nature and Environment** (100 members) - Germanwatch - Klima - Bündnis LIFE - Frauen entwickeln Ökotechnik - Naturschutzbund – NABU (Birdlife) - WWF Deutschland - Weltwirtschaft, Ökologie and Entwicklung e.V. - Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst e.V. -	GERMANY	Members of DNR: - OTTER-ZENTRUM - Aktionsgemeinschaft Artenschutz e. V. - Arbeitsgemeinschaft kontrolliert deklarierte Rohstoffe - Bayerische Botanische Gesellschaft zur Erforschung der heimischen Flora - Berliner Artenschutz Team (BAT) - Bioland, Verband für organisch-biologischen Landbau e. V. - Bund Deutscher Landschafts-Architekten - Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland – BUND/FoE Germany - Bund gegen den Mißbrauch der Tiere Demeter - Deutscher Alpenverein e. V. , (DAV) - Deutscher Schlittenhundesport-Verband e. V., (DSSV) - Deutscher Verband für Landschaftspflege e. V. - Germanwatch - Gesellschaft Deutscher Tierfotografen e.V. - Green Cross Deutschland e. V. - Global Nature Fund, (GNF) - Verband Deutscher Sporttaucher e. V. - Zukunfts-Zentrum Barsinghausen	…
			FRANCE	- Helio International - Réseau Action Climat France - Association 4D - Association Détente - Agir pour l'Environnement - France Nature Environnement - FNE - ***Les Amis de la Terre – AT France*** Fédération Nationale des Associations d'Usagers des Transports (FNAUT) - Greenpeace France - WWF FRANCE - Comité de Liaison Énergies Renouvelables (CLER) - HESPUL - Energies et territoires - Réseau “sortir du Nucléaire”			

When analysing the membership of the EU networks and platforms (the third organisational level), we find that they share some members. Thus, the seeming functional specialisation of the eight members of the CSCG is not sustained at the lower level. Most of these highly aggregated public interest associations at EU level cover a wider and more differentiated range of functional specialisations. The Social Platform, for example, covers a range of issue areas, such as older people, autism, social development, homosexuality and women. The European Network against Racism, member of the Social Platform, engages in areas such as human rights, migration, poverty relief, Roma, Muslims and intercultural cooperation.

Furthermore, when comparing the member organisations of the Green 10 they do not just differ in terms of functional specialisation but also in terms of organisational structure. Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE) and the Climate Action Network Europe (CAN-E) have quite different organisational designs.

Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE) (see Table 2) is a confederation as it is an association of associations following the federal principle: FoEE is the European level organisation of Europe's national *Friends of the Earth* associations which in turn are national association-associations. It embraces 30 national members and has only one single member per country. At the national level (fifth organisational level starting from the CSCG level) we find variations in the number of sub-national or local member associations, depending on the territorial structure of the country. In Germany, the *Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland* (BUND, Friends of the Earth Germany) was founded in 1975 as a federation of pre-existing sub-national groups; its 16 *Länder* branches reflect the German federal structure and territorial differentiation goes even two levels further down: Only at the seventh organisational level individual citizens are members in local groups. Similarly, in France we have the national umbrella association, Friends of the Earth France (FoEF, *Les Amis de la Terre France*), which incorporates sub-national member organisations. FoEF is organised in 21 territorial groups (3 regional, 11 departmental, 7 local groups). However, this territorial differentiation is not organised in a hierarchical way; i.e. in France individual citizens can be members of and participate in these various territorial groups.

The organisational structure of the *Climate Action Network Europe* (CAN-E) is quite different (see Table 3). As its name indicates CAN-E is dedicated to a very specific purpose. It has 98 full members coming from 24 countries with a very uneven distribution of members across countries. We find seven full members from Belgium and seven from the Netherlands, 11 from Germany, 14 full members from France, and 17 from UK; smaller countries are often represented by fewer or even only one full member (for example Armenia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovenia, etc.). Looking at the national membership (the fourth organisational level) - as an explorative example we again take

Germany and France -, we mainly find member associations with a rather broad environmental agenda (see Table 3). Some of these national members are organised according to the federal principle such as the already above mentioned Friends of the Earth Germany and Friends of the Earth France. But others include a diversity of functionally specialised associations. This is, for example, the case of the *German League for Nature and Environment* (Deutscher Naturschutzring/ DNR) an umbrella association of German conservation and environmental protection organisations. The DNR organises one hundred PIAs from various territorial levels (national, sub-national, local) and with varying degrees of functional specialisation, ranging from associations with broad aims like “Protection of the Environment” or “Animal Welfare” to others with a very specialised agenda like the “Otter Centre” or the “Initiative against Bird Murder”, etc..

These two examples demonstrate that even though functional specialisation is a dominant feature in the organisation of Europe’s public interest associations, the model of a hierarchical organised confederation built up from the local to the regional, the national and finally the EU level is not the rule. It coexists with organisations which gather like minded public interest associations of wider or slightly different orientation and are organised at different territorial levels. Thus, they also reflect the multilevel system of the EU but not in a hierarchically structured way. Furthermore, the CAN-E example demonstrates that networks may have overlapping memberships in the sense that a member organisation of the EU network representing a specific functional denomination is at the same time member of a national network with a different functional denomination. What holds true for the sector of environment is also characteristic for EU public interest associations in other domains.

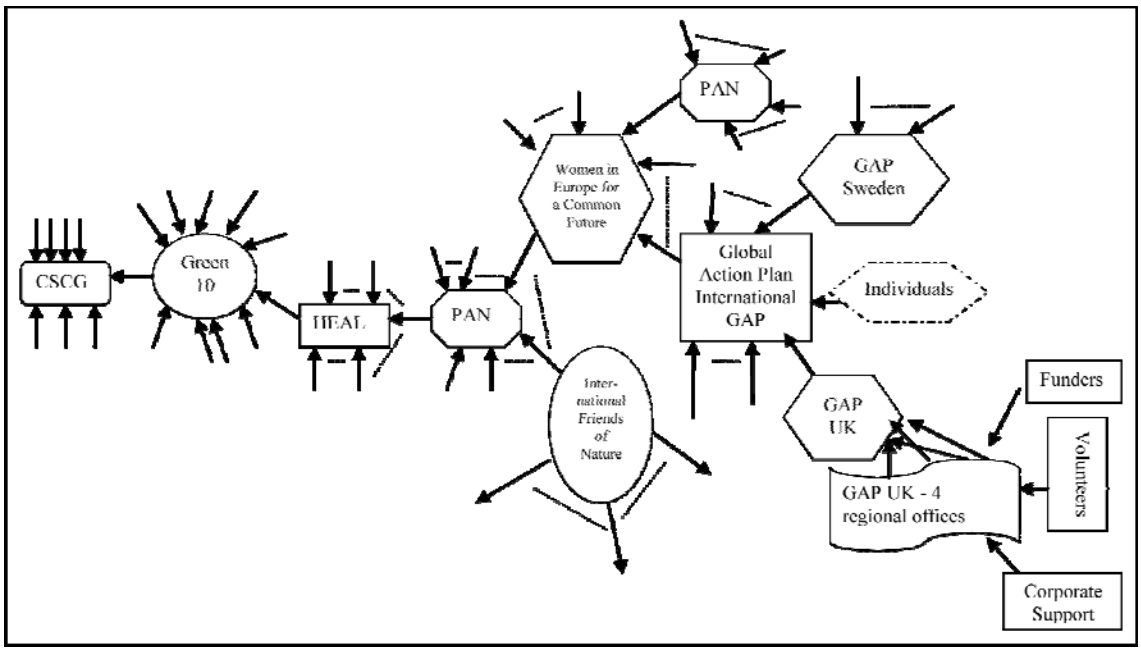
Membership-chains

The empirical examples give telling insights with respect to the “membership-chain”. They demonstrate how many organisational levels have to be bridged to communicate from Brussels to the grass roots and vice versa (Figure 3). Frequently, we find extreme long “membership-chains”, which in some instances span over up to nine organisational levels from the CSCG to the individual citizen and grass roots constituency (see Figure 3). Such “membership chains” are longer the higher the number of networks (as compared to federations) be it at the EU-level or the national level.

The graph illustrates not just the many steps from the ordinary citizen to the EU representative but also the complexity of the organisation. This complexity is aggravated by organisational nestling. As mentioned above we find some European as well as national (umbrella) PIAs being represented at several levels in the “membership-chain” of networks. One striking example is SOLIDAR. SOLIDAR is a European network of associations working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. It is a member of CONCORD, the European Confederation for Relief and Development. SOLIDAR,

however, is not only present at the EU level but also at lower levels since at the fifth organisational level SOLIDAR is a member of its own member, namely the International Federation of Workers' Education Association (IFWEA). The same constellation holds true for the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) (see Figure 3), which is a fourth organisational level member of the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL). One of the members of PAN is the Women in Europe for a Common Future (fifth organisational level), but in turn PAN is again a member of the network Women in Europe for a Common Future (sixth organisational level). What this implies in terms of communication patterns has to be substantiated by further empirical research.

Figure 3: From centre to periphery



* Dotted lines indicate further members.

From a theoretical point of view we should not be surprised that the division of labour within networks is not following straight specific functional logics. Networks are characterised by heterarchy and members enjoy a high degree of autonomy. However, the type and degree of organisational nestling vary, and these variations matter. When we want to assess communication patterns between centre and periphery it is important to know the number of information and communication brokers and transmitters involved.

Multiple memberships, especially when organisations are represented by the same persons, may support communication. Yet, multiple memberships may also render communication structures opaque and extremely complex. As a result, resources and attention may be deviated from vertical communication with the grass roots members or constituency to communication at the horizontal level. When considering the large number of organisations and the heterogeneity among member state level PIAs with

their different national backgrounds (political culture, duration of EU membership, experience with democracy, etc.), it is obvious that bottom-up as well as bottom-down processes of communication via the organisational membership-chain are not easy – maybe even impossible - to achieve.

Organisational demography

The data collection on organisational demography is concentrating just on the CSCG and its eight members. The information is very difficult to access via the Internet; the relevant data are fragmented or simply not available and have to be checked by personal contacts. Even though we present a limited number of organisations, they give an illustrative picture which invites some tentative conclusions.

Table 4: The staff of the CSCG and its direct members[16]

	CSCG	Social Platform	Culture Action Europe	EPHA	HRDN	EUCIS-LLL	CONCORD	EWL	GREEN10
Employed staff	1 The CSCG coordinator is on the pay roll of the Social Platform	7	4	9	0	1	8	8	0

From the data we managed to find (Table 4) we can see that our nine PIAs can be split into three groups: (I) The Social Platform, CONCORD, EWL and EPHA employ a medium size staff when compared to other EU level associations (7 to 9 staff). (II) Culture Action Europe and EUCIS-LLL only have a minimum number of own staff, and (III) the CSCG[17], HRDN and GREEN10 fully rely on their members' personnel.

The size of staff is important for the capacity of a network to communicate. Another factor is the career pattern of the networks' staff. When the staff of an EU association is changing jobs within the CSCG-network, personal networks at EU level may emerge. Anyway, the communication pattern will be different than in a case where job rotation between member state associations and EU associations dominate.

[16] Data collection in December 2009. The number of staff has fluctuated between January 2008 and December 2009. CONCORD and EWL have reduced their staff by two, Culture Action Europe by one. The Social Platform employs one more staff. EPHA has expanded its Brussels secretariat noticeably, from three to nine full-time staff.

[17] Since the CSCG coordinator is on the pay role of the Social Platform we ad the CSCG to the group of those relying on their members' personnel.

Our data[18] indicate that only a small percentage of staff has previous work experience[19] gained on the sub-national and local level. At the same time a large part of CVs shows European and International experience, with a clear dominance of the former. In several cases, career experience was gained in European public interest associations, for example employees changing jobs between the associations of the CSCG family.[20] About a third of the CVs show professional experience in the Commission and the European Parliament.

To put it short: The dominant picture is that of “EU-level lobbying professionals”.

Organisational locus

Communication is made easy because not only the eight direct members of the CSCG have their offices in the same area in Brussels, closely located to the European Commission, but also many of their members are closely located to the “power centre”. The Social Platform hosts the CSCG in its building so that regular informal contacts take place. This also applies to the sector specific networks and associations. Random evidence confirms that a number of third level PIAs share the office of “their” second level PIAs. This proximity works in favour of unplanned and informal meetings; PIA staff members know each other well and are well aware of their respective portfolios.

5. CONCLUSIONS

From our research we conclude that a tense relationship between horizontal and vertical communication may be expected in the “world of the CSCG”. Taking into consideration the long membership-chains that connect the CSCG or rather its eight member networks with member organisations and constituencies at the grass roots level, communication that makes for democratic representation and deliberation will be rather the exception than the rule.

Concentrating attention to communication at the centre is also fostered by the recruitment strategies of PIAs. Only few representatives of PIAs seem to have grassroots experiences relevant enough to be mentioned in their CV. Most PIA staff members have the profile of classical “professional lobbyists” and the feature of “job hopping” between associations is not unknown in the circles of PIAs. The rather young age of a

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[18] Information is taken from 55 CVs of current and former staff as well as board members of the CSCG and the direct member associations.

[19] We focused on work experience in the NGO-sector and did not include professional experience at universities, colleges or similar institutions.

[20] This can take place within as well as between sectors.

third of the PIAs, limited and unsecured funds and the resulting fluidity of the job market certainly is a main reason for staff rotation.

Concentrating attention on the Commission and other interest group actors is also supported by the close location of PIA offices in the same town district of Brussels. Meeting at the same events organised by EU institutions are common and thus PIA staff members know each other well. In addition, since PIAs have to come to an agreement on issue specific civil society representation in EU advisory groups, hearings or conferences, they are well aware of their respective portfolios. This certainly has an advantage for horizontal communication and cooperation between PIAs, but it is a mixed blessing because it leads to “club behaviour” and thus again detracts from vertical communication. Such a tendency may be supported by multiple memberships not just at the organisational level – an association being member in several other associations or networks – but also at the personal level – the same person acting as representative not just of one but two or even several associations.

Thus, summarising our results, there obviously exists a tendency to concentrate communication in the centre rather than to give prominence to the “periphery”, i.e. the constituencies or grassroots members. This might explain why “grassroots actors tend to trust European institutions but not their own European delegates”, as the data from the CIVGOV[21] project shows (Trenz 2007: 12). From our results it is not surprising that grassroots actors “express mistrust to internal procedures of representation and describe delegation within civil society as elitist and undemocratic. Especially local grassroots discard the representativeness of European umbrellas and of the kind of civil society organisations engineered by governments” (Trenz 2007: 12). Yet, the problem specification alone will not suffice to induce change or counter-balance the lopsidedness of PIA communication.

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