SECTION 3

The policy cycle

Overview

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An important feature of any policy is its “policy cycle.” This third section of the Routledge Handbook of European Public Policy contains six chapters on various aspects of the policy cycle.

The sequential notion of policy cycle was introduced by Harold Lasswell (1956) and was refined (see, for example, Anderson, 1975; Jones, 1970) as a framework for organizing thinking about how an idea eventually finds its way into an actual policy that presumably solves a wicked problem, a “routine” problem, or simply makes life more enjoyable for the individuals whom the policy affects. The policy cycle divides the policy process into (usually) four discrete stages: agenda setting, policy formulation and legitimation, implementation, and evaluation (Brewer & deLeon, 1983; Sabatier, 2007, p. 6). Sometimes policy formulation and policy legitimation are divided into separate sequential stages for a five-stage cycle. So, too, a sixth stage drawing inspiration from life cycle theory is sometimes added after evaluation, where the policy is changed or terminated (Brewer & deLeon, 1983).

While the policy cycle seems persuasive with its clearly defined stages in the policymaking process, it has long been recognized that these stages are not discrete, but rather as often as not overlap or even blend one into the other (Lindblom, 1968) and that the cycle never actually ends (Lindblom & Woodhouse, 1993). With respect to the last point, the linear conception has been replaced by a circular depiction, with a common example of this continuous circle in the passage of legislation. Policy does not stop when a law has been passed because administrative law must now come into play to deal with the technical matters with which legislative bodies do not concern themselves. Yet while administrators are busy implementing and evaluating new policy, policy does not necessarily stand still: new aspects of the policy are appearing on the agenda for a variety of reasons—unanticipated consequences of the policy, changing circumstances, and formative and/or process/implementation evaluations may reveal ineffectual or improperly implemented policy—which likewise influence the policy which is in the process of being implemented and evaluated. These criticisms are encapsulated by Nakamura’s (1987) dismissal of the policy cycle framework as a “textbook approach” to understanding policymaking, lacking the scientific rigor of empirically testable propositions.

It should be emphasized that the policy cycle is just one way of many to understand policymaking. As illustrated by chapters in Section 1 of this handbook, it is sometimes more useful to focus on key aspects of policymaking such as agenda setting rather than attempt an analysis of the entire policy cycle, which risks falling into the trap of “grand theory”—explaining everything
and nothing. So, for example, Section 1 contains two chapters in this tradition applied to the study of European Union (EU) policymaking, one utilizing John Kingdon’s (2011, first published in 1984) multiple streams approach and the punctuation equilibrium theory associated with Baumgartner and Jones (Baumgartner, Green-Pedersen, & Jones, 2006; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Competing paradigms include the advocacy coalition of epistemic (expert) policy communities developed by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith (Sabatier & Weible, 2007), the policy diffusion framework (Berry & Berry, 1990, 2007), and social construction in the policy design (Ingraham, Schneider, & Deleon, 2007; Stone, 1988).

Despite the weaknesses of the policy cycle as an empirical theory of policymaking, it is still widely included on course syllabi and in policy texts, and continues to be the organizing principle of some policy courses. It has also been explicitly utilized as an organizing heuristic device in the study of EU policymaking as well (see Buonanno & Nugent, 2013, pp. 102–118; Young, 2015).

This section includes chapters that explore the policy cycle with respect to a particular policy cycle stage as well the key actors and stakeholders involved in the policymaking process. Chapter 25 authored by Andreas Hofmann demonstrates the field of lobbying and interest group politics in the EU is “now firmly established and well integrated into the study of public policy more generally.” Hofmann documents the relationship between the EU’s expanded policy portfolio and the activity of organized interests. He then defines the field, charts the evolution of a neo-corporatist institutional structure created in the founding treaty to an increasingly pluralist interest group population, and considers the literature with respect to the “resource exchange” view of the relationship between EU institutions and interest groups. Hofmann explains that the expansion of EU competences along with institutional differentiation and agencification, has created multiple points of entry for interest groups. Despite significant advances of the study of interest groups and lobbying at the EU level, studies of the impact of interest groups, as with their counterparts in other advanced democracies, are bedeviled by the empirical challenge of demonstrating a link between interest group desires and policy outcomes.

In Chapter 26, Petya Alexandrova and Marcello Carammia consider agenda setting in the EU. They begin with a review of the two primary contrasting views of agenda setting (rational and bounded rationality) with several examples of EU policies studies shaped by these approaches. Next the authors consider various actors in empirical studies of EU agenda setting, including the EU institutions and EU member states as well as the overall process of setting agendas and issue evolution paths. They also explain the role of the “Comparative Agendas Project” in building an empirical basis to the study of agenda setting. The authors conclude their chapter with a consideration of the criticisms, continued relevancy of agenda setting to understanding EU policymaking, and promising areas for future research.

John McCormick, in Chapter 27, explains the conceptual challenges with understanding the institutions responsible for shaping policy at the EU level against the backdrop of uncertainty to policymaking brought about by several challenges to the European integration project. In his discussion of the five key EU institutions from a policy perspective, he uncovers “numerous challenges and handicaps,” including the lack of an EU government akin to national governments, a “complex and ambiguous system of governance,” the evolution of EU’s institutions, and significantly for the state of the discipline, a lack of agreement among EU scholars and practitioners to agree on what exactly the EU is and the ultimate destination of European integration.

Chapter 28, by Mark Rhinard, asks, “How do strategically-oriented actors shape policy outcomes in political systems characterized by diffused authority, institutional fragmentation, and competing networks?” He explains that “strategic framing aims to account for
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both structure and agency in shaping outcomes, albeit doing so in an empirically verifiable way.” Strategic framing assists in identifying the potential constellation of interests, induces cooperation, and strengthens policy networks. Rhinard demonstrates that the Commission is a particularly rich institution for applying the strategic framing concept because it “is characterized by organizational fragmentation, dispersed authority, and significant policymaking authority at the domain level.”

Chapter 29, by Gerda Falkner, concerns itself with the penultimate stage of the policy cycle—implementation, and the (often) neglected problems of compliance and enforcement in the European Union. Member state governments must implement EU law, while the Commission serves as the main EU body ensuring compliance. Falkner finds that SOLVIT (an alternative dispute resolution mechanism for misapplication of single market rules) is “particularly interesting from a social science perspective because it creates a cooperative arrangement between the Commission and national public administration in a process which is neither strictly intergovernmental nor supranational.” Falkner identifies some of the many challenges to implementation (especially compliance) research, including the tendency of studies to equate transposition of EU laws as compliance; unreliable databases (overly reliant on the Commission’s transposition and infringement proceedings); and, the contradictory findings of the many implementation or compliance studies. Falkner offers several arguments as to why non-compliance is a danger for European integration and suggests specific remedies to the EU’s non-compliance problems, including additional resources for the Commission, a public campaign in the EU “promoting compliance and the basic, fundamental values involved in European integration,” and the adoption of innovative institutions at the European level to monitor the “abrogation of the EU’s basic values.”

In the last chapter of this section, Claire Dunlop and Claudio Radaelli take up the question of policy evaluation, posing the paradox, “If Evaluation is the Solution, What is the Problem?”—that is, does evaluation close the EU policy cycle? The authors are concerned with two broad purposes in seeking an answer to this question: to clarify the nature of evaluation in the EU, and to understand the two dimensions of evaluation—ex-ante and ex-post (formative and summative). The authors find that in the “goal of ‘closing the policy cycle,’ the bar has been set quite high.” One major problem in EU evaluation is the diversity in both the locus of evaluation (sometimes in the Commission, sometimes in consultancy firms) and the diverse “constellation of actors” producing these evaluations, creating ambiguity in methodology, objectives, and so forth. It remains to be seen whether new evaluation oversight mechanisms—particularly the Regulatory Fitness and Performance Program (REFIT) Platform (set up in 2015 by the Better Regulation Communication to make EU regulation more efficient and proportionate to their objectives), REFIT’s Fitness Checks (comprehensive evaluations of a regulatory framework), Cumulative Cost Assessments, or the future Regulatory Scrutiny Board will be able to close the evaluation gap in the EU’s policy cycle. Nevertheless, a certain amount of ambiguity in the evaluation system may be by design because, as the authors conclude, “Evaluation, in fact, is also a frame of reference and locus of activity where the Member States, the Sec Gen, the DG of the Commission, and the EP test and constantly re-define the question of who has control over EU policy.”

References


The growing importance of the European Union as a producer of public policy has not gone unnoticed by organised interests. Much like in national political systems, decision-making bodies in the EU attract a multitude of lobbyists seeking access and ultimately influence. Academic interest in lobbying and interest group politics has burgeoned along with this growing awareness on the part of practitioners. At the same time, this interest in the role of interest groups in European integration has deep roots. Early accounts of the driving forces of integration accorded interest groups a central role. Neo-functionalists, in particular Ernst Haas, expected that interest groups and political parties, rather than governments or the population at large, would react to the relocation of power to new policy-making institutions and ‘shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities to a new center’ (Haas, 1958, p. 16). In other words, interest groups would show an acute sense of ‘where the action was’ (Streeck & Schmitter, 1991, p. 133) and thereby drive the process of political integration. Subsequent to the (temporary) demise of neo-functionalism, however, attention to interest group politics remained comparatively limited until the inception of the single market programme in the middle of the 1980s (Bunea & Baumgartner, 2014, p. 1420). Ever since the Treaty of Maastricht there has been talk of an ‘explosion’ of interest group activity at the European level (Berkhout & Lowery, 2010, p. 449; Coen, 2009, p. 145; Mazey & Richardson, 1993, p. v) and a concomitant ‘mushrooming’ (Saurugger, 2008, p. 1274) of academic interest in the phenomenon. There is evidence that the field is experiencing strong growth. A recent survey of academic contributions found that 70 per cent of journal articles on the subject have been authored after 2007 (Bunea & Baumgartner, 2014, p. 1420). The same survey also showed that authors are moving away from an earlier emphasis on explorative and descriptive case studies toward work that is more strongly theory led and comparative. Despite still being considered a niche interest (Beyers, Eising, & Maloney, 2008, p. 1103; Bunea & Baumgartner, 2014, p. 1412), the field of European interest group politics has its own textbooks in multiple editions (Greenwood, 2011; Richardson & Coen, 2009) and it is well represented among special issues in leading academic journals (Beyers et al., 2008; Coen, 2007; Dür & De Bièvre, 2007b; Klüver, Braun, & Beyers, 2015).
Defining the field

The field of lobbying and interest group studies suffers from a profusion of terms that describe its subject matter, making a summary and comparison of research efforts difficult (Baroni, Carroll, Chalmers, Marquez, & Rasmussen, 2014, p. 141). The term ‘interest group’ has competitors that are often used synonymously, such as organised interest, interest organisation, pressure group or advocacy group. The term ‘civil society organisation’ is a close relative, but is usually reserved for groups pursuing a public cause, and it carries a positive normative connotation highlighting presumed benefits for a democratic society. Social movement research, moreover, is interested in similar phenomena, although the interest group literature usually presupposes a degree of formal organisation of its subjects that can be lacking from broader movements. The term ‘lobbying’ also has its competitors in terms such as the broadly synonymous ‘advocacy’ and the more general ‘interest representation’. Much of the literature on lobbying and interest groups defines it subject matter by what it does – mobilising resources to influence policy outcomes in line with their preferences (Baroni et al., 2014, p. 144) – but this, too, can lead to ambiguity. Protest and contestation do not fall under the concept of ‘lobbying’ (although ‘advocacy’ may be a more encompassing term in this respect), but is a strategy many groups pursue in order to achieve influence (Della Porta, 2007). Lobbying is often carried out by interest groups, but single companies also lobby (Coen, 1997), and professionalisation has brought with it an increasing number of consultants that engage in lobbying without an agenda of their own, offering lobbying as a commercial service to a diverse set of clients (Bouwen, 2002, p. 367). Consultancy can be a career for former politicians and administrative officials – a subject that has so far seen fairly little research. Other entities such as regional administrations and cities also have representations in Brussels and engage in forms of lobbying. They, too, do not fit into the mould of ‘interest groups’.

While in practice the lines are often blurred, Beyers, Eising and Mahoney offer a set of useful delimitations to narrow down the subject matter (Beyers et al., 2008, p. 1106): In order to classify as an interest group, a group needs to have a degree of formal organisation (to distinguish it from a broader movement) and a political interest (to distinguish it from groups that do not seek to influence policy outcomes), while at the same time not striving for public office (to distinguish it from political parties). Their definition of interest group politics as ‘the organisation, aggregation, articulation, and intermediation of societal interests that seek to shape public policies’ broadly captures a majority of the approaches in the literature (Beyers et al., 2008, p. 1103).

The European interest group population

The early design for a system of interest representation at the European level followed the mould of national systems of corporatist concertation. The Treaty of Rome foresaw the establishment of an Economic and Social Committee that would constitute an organised forum of sectoral interest representation, through members nominated by national governments and appointed by the Council. Although embedded in the legislative process through compulsory consultation in some policy fields, it has never achieved a privileged status in interest representation and is not subject of much scientific attention. The first interest groups to establish themselves in Brussels were peak level associations of industry, later joined by trade union and consumer associations. None of the early groups had individual members, all were federations of national associations (Streeck & Schmitter, 1991, pp. 136–137). Although representatives of all social partners were present in Brussels by the 1970s, ideas of a Euro-corporatism never came to fruition. Labour remained ‘underorganised’ (Streeck & Schmitter, 1991, p. 139) and employers
strategically avoided to set up well-organised central representations that could negotiate with the labour side (Streeck & Schmitter, 1991, p. 141).

Instead of developing hierarchically integrated neo-corporatist structures at the European level, the interest group population grew increasingly pluralist. With reliable numbers hard to come by, its increase can only be described in outlines, from about 100 European level groups in 1960, to 400 in 1970 and 800 in 1990, and even steeper growth from then on (Greenwood, 2003). With the growing number of interest groups active at the EU level comes a growing complexity that creates significant uncertainty about the actual size and composition of the interest group population. Measuring it is therefore not a straightforward task, but no less important. Establishing a robust census is necessary in order to distinguish the types of interests represented in Brussels and to identify possible bias, in particular with regard to the widely reported overrepresentation of business interests (Berkhout & Lowery, 2010, p. 450). Many studies base their estimates on official registers. The Commission has long collected information on groups that participate in committees and hearings, and the European Parliament registers lobbyists that apply for entry passes to the Parliament building. Since 2011, the Commission and the European Parliament operate a joint ‘Transparency Register’ with a view to publicise information on all organisations and self-employed individuals engaged in lobbying activities, albeit on a voluntary basis. Commercial registries also collect such information. None of these sources are comprehensive and they cover different segments of the interest group population. Wonka et al.’s 2010 study aggregates several sources (before the establishment of the transparency register) and lists 3,700 lobby groups active at EU institutions, which they consider a low estimate (Wonka, Baumgartner, Mahoney, & Berkhout, 2010, pp. 464–466). Their overview shows that about half of the entities they identify are interest groups in a narrow sense, whereas the rest of the population is made up of corporations, consultants, law firms, regional administrations, international organisations and think tanks. By the time of Greenwood and Dreger’s 2013 investigation of the transparency register, it contained 5,500 entries. Cross-referencing with other sources showed that the registry still underrepresents the totality of the lobby population, particularly among companies and NGOs (Greenwood & Dreger, 2013, pp. 147–148). About half of all entries represent producer interests (companies, trade and business associations), whereas just under a quarter are registered as non-governmental organisations representing more ‘diffuse’ interests. A comparison of self-reported lobbying expenditures shows that while the difference in average expenditure between business and NGOs is not as large as might be expected, at the upper end of the scale a significant number of entities associated with producer interests outspend even the best funded NGOs (Greenwood & Dreger, 2013, pp. 153–157).

The existence of bias in interest group politics has been noted in other political systems and is not unique to the EU (Schattschneider, 1960). Most explanations of this phenomenon make reference to Mancor Olson’s ‘logic of collective action’ (Olson, 1965, pp. 33–36): small groups that can expect concentrated or exclusive benefits from a certain measure (such as businesses lobbying against strict emission standards) have an easier time cooperating toward this goal than large groups whose gains are widely dispersed (such as citizen groups lobbying for strict standards). Groups representing diffuse interest face the problem of ‘free riding’, where those unwilling to contribute to the effort will still receive its benefits. Such groups are hence less likely to organise. While the overall distribution of interest groups at the EU level seems to reflect this situation, several studies argue for a closer look at specific sectors where Olson’s logic might not hold (Coen & Katsaitis, 2013; Pollack, 1997). In particular, such studies have identified the European Commission as an institution that actively supports and provides both funding and access to underrepresented civil society interests (Kohler-Koch, 2007, p. 268; Mahoney & Beckstrand, 2011).
Resource exchange

Interest group research in the EU has traditionally had an emphasis on the Commission (Bunea & Baumgartner, 2014, p. 1423), stressing both the attractiveness of the Commission as a lobbying target and the active role of the Commission in creating a European system of interest representation. The Commission encouraged interest group involvement in policy-making from the outset. Short of staff and given a multitude of responsibilities, it sought input from affected interests in an effort to increase the quality of its proposals and to foster support (Streeck & Schmitter, 1991, p. 137). Access was granted to the policy-making process through advisory committees and expert groups. Such efforts created a constituency that was otherwise lacking, with a concomitant hope to enhance the legitimacy of the Commission’s activities. The Commission’s 2001 White Paper on European governance explicitly linked the openness of policy-making procedures and the wider involvement of civil society to the goal of more democratic governance, in particular through the promotion of online consultation and discussion (Kohler-Koch, 2007, pp. 255–257). Such efforts have been characterised in the academic literature as an exchange relationship between the Commission and interest groups that results in mutual (resource) dependence (Pappi & Henning, 1999). Both sides hold important resources that the other side needs. Bouwen, in particular, synthesised earlier exchange theories to focus on resource exchange between the political actor opening up to lobbying and the interest groups responding to this opportunity. The Commission would provide access to policy-making, whereas the groups would provide certain ‘access goods’ such as technical expert knowledge and political information on national and sectoral interest (Bouwen, 2002, p. 369). The type of access goods an interest group can provide depend on its constituency. Individual firms are expected to be able to offer primarily technical expertise, whereas interest groups with wider membership can provide information about preferred solutions for wider constituencies. Both types of information can confer greater legitimacy on the resulting policies. Bouwen applied his version of resource exchange theory to other venues that had also seen an increase of lobbying activity, such as the European Parliament. He hypothesised that different actors require different access goods and hence attract different types of groups. The European Parliament, for example, was expected to attract groups with wider membership, since its demand for information is primarily related to the preferences of important political constituencies (Bouwen, 2004, p. 345). Such demand-based explanations now constitute the dominant framework to explain variation in the composition of the EU interest group population across different sectors and EU institutions (Bunea & Baumgartner, 2014, p. 1421; Chalmers, 2013, p. 40; Coen & Katsaitis, 2013).

Lobbying strategies

The expansion of EU competences, coupled with an increasing institutional differentiation and ‘agencification’ of EU politics, has created many potential access points for interest groups. While demand side explanations highlight that interest groups will gravitate toward the venue where the type of access goods they can provide is sought after, a significant amount of studies focus their attention on interest group agency, in particular on interest groups’ choice of lobbying strategy. The European multi-level polity offers a vast political opportunity structure for interest groups (Kitschelt, 1986; Princen & Kerremans, 2008). This can be both an opportunity and a challenge – interest groups are faced with a choice of who to lobby (regional, national or European policy-makers, different EU institutions), at what stage of the policy-cycle (agenda setting, policy formulation, legislation, implementation, enforcement), which channels to use (direct lobbying, hired consultants, national or European associations) and what lobbying strategy
to employ (insider or outsider strategies). Interest groups’ choices depend on such things as the resources that are at a group’s disposal, their internal organisation, other competing or collaborating groups, the specificity of their mandate and their ideological disposition, or the nature of the policy in question (Dür, 2008, pp. 1214–1218; Klüver, Braun, et al., 2015; Vanhala, 2009, pp. 739–744). Such constraints usually force them to choose a limited set of venues, and choices are often path-dependent (Beyers & Kerremans, 2007). Multiple access points, however, allow a well-organised group to ‘venue-shop’ in order to specifically target the policy-making venue that is most favourable to the represented cause. Venues can be strategically activated by choosing a suitable issue frame (Baumgartner, 2007, p. 484). Studies of issue definition and framing are becoming more numerous (e.g., Boräng & Naurin, 2015, p. 500; Klüver, Mahoney, & Opper, 2015). Defining an issue as a question of law rather than political deliberation, moreover, makes it possible to activate courts (Bouwen & McCown, 2007). The growing importance of the European legal system as a venue for the production of policy, primarily driven by private litigants (Kelemen, 2011), demonstrates that opportunity structures are not just external constraints on interest group strategies, but enterprising advocates can at times shape the opportunities at their disposal. A question that has been raised in this regard is whether the legal and political system of the EU offers opportunities for groups that are weak domestically. Empirical research has however largely demonstrated that groups that are active at the EU level tend to be quite powerful domestically (Börzel, 2006, p. 149; Kriesi, Tresch, & Jochum, 2007, p. 64; Princen & Kerremans, 2008, p. 1133). The EU in that sense does not level the playing field. While most studies agree that the EU does not lend itself well to protest politics – except in the case where the EU is a target of protests at the national level (Imig & Tarrow, 2001; Marks & McAdam, 1999, p. 103) – comparatively little attention has been paid to other ‘outsider’ strategies such as media campaigns (Beyers, 2004; Chalmers, 2013).

**Influence over policy outcomes**

The central interest of the field of lobbying and interest group politics is to identify who is ultimately successful in their efforts and for what reasons. At the same time, very few studies actually address this question head-on. This is primarily due to the difficulty of demonstrating influence in a methodologically convincing fashion. Since there is a consensus that access to the decision-making process is a necessary condition for interest group influence on outcomes, the bulk of studies has focused on this somewhat more tractable issue. However, the danger is that the literature remains in ‘elegant irrelevance’ for the wider discipline if the most important questions are left unanswered (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998, p. xvii). A number of recent studies have therefore gone a step further and attempted to measure influence empirically. Broadly three approaches have been used for this purpose (Klüver, 2009, p. 536). The first are detailed case studies of individual policies that trace the process of interest group influence from the agenda setting and policy formulation stage to its implementation (Woll, 2007). While such studies can provide insights into the mechanisms at work, they can say very little about systematic effects across policies. Another approach has been to ask experts or participants in the policy process to estimate the influence of various actors (Dür & De Bièvre, 2007a). While results of such studies are relevant in their own right to reveal discourses and perceptions of influence, they say little about actual influence. The approach that has most directly addressed this issue is a systematic comparison of the policy preferences of interest groups participating in the policy process with the outcomes of this process. Other than hand-coding policy documents, quantitative text analysis software has been proposed as a tool to identify the policy position of large numbers of actors involved in policy-making (Klüver, 2009). Establishing ‘policy congruence’ between
revealed preferences and outcomes, however, is only the first step. Seeing one’s preferences reflected in the outcome is not the same as having influenced that outcome (it could be sheer luck, for instance, Klüver, 2013, p. 63). Rather, the analysis of influence is based on an underlying counterfactual: What would the policy have looked like if the actor in question had not participated in its production? Congruence between preferences and outcome is therefore only one end of a scale of influence. Influence can also mean averting the worst possible outcome, or achieving the lesser of two evils – cases where the outcome is a little closer to but not identical with the interest groups’ preference. Such ‘spatial’ effects of interest group influence are even more difficult to detect (Bernhagen, Dür, & Marshall, 2014, p. 206), but are probably more common than full preference attainment. Moreover, systematic influence can only be detected if the analysis demonstrates that lobbying success is systematically connected to certain actor characteristics (Klüver, 2013, p. 63). In this sense, Klüver finds that the cumulative resources of lobbying coalitions, in particular the amount of information they supply, their public support and their economic power, relative to their opposition, systematically predict lobbying success (Klüver, 2013, pp. 155–176). At the same time, Bernhagen et al. have cautioned that such findings may vary with the type of measures that are chosen to identify success (Bernhagen et al., 2014, pp. 214–215). Influence as the Holy Grail of interest group studies, like election success in party research, continues to remain elusive (Leech, 2010, p. 534).

**Interest groups and democracy in the European Union**

The question of interest group influence on policy outcomes addresses a central normative concern of the literature on interest group politics: is lobbying good or bad for democracy? The worry is that potential bias in the interest group population, in access to policy-makers and in influence on policy outcomes will affect central democratic principles of representation and equality. On the other hand, an active participation of ‘civil society’ in politics is sometimes advocated as a counterbalance to a crisis of confidence in parliamentary politics as evidenced in declining electoral participation. Some form of ‘associative’ or ‘participatory’ democracy appears particularly desirable in a political system such as the EU’s that is widely held to suffer from weak electoral accountability (Kohler-Koch, 2007, p. 255; Kröger, 2016, p. 7; Saurugger, 2008, p. 1275). This latter view has been espoused by the Commission in its promotion of greater representation of societal interests at the European level, most prominently expressed in its 2001 White Paper on European governance. Such participation was further hoped to contribute to the establishment of a European public sphere or even a European demos, both of which are often assumed to be prerequisites for the functioning of a European democracy (Kohler-Koch, 2007; Kröger, 2016, p. 39). The insight that openness to such interests alone would not automatically lead to the desired effect is reflected in the Commission’s effort to fund groups representing interests that might otherwise not mobilise. Greenwood and Dreger demonstrate that grant recipients representing a ‘European’ interest on average derive almost half of their budget from EU sources (Greenwood & Dreger, 2013, p. 154). Still, doubts remain over how well the representation of societal interests works in Brussels. The Commission has been shown to suffer from ‘interest overload’ and it has responded by closing down certain types of access and to instead provide selective channels to insider lobbyists that have established a favourable reputation (a system that Coen calls ‘élite pluralism’, Coen, 2009, p. 149). While EU funding is tied to organisational criteria that aim to stimulate representativeness and autonomy in civil society organisations (Sanchez Salgado, 2014, p. 338), there is still limited empirical evidence in how far these efforts really lift underrepresented voices onto the European stage and guarantee that representatives actually represent their constituency.
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(Kröger, 2016; Saurugger, 2008, p. 1285). One step toward meeting such concerns has been the (reluctant) move by the Commission and the European Parliament to better regulate access and to increase the transparency of who actually lobbies EU institutions, the culmination of which has been the launch of the transparency register (Greenwood & Dreger, 2013; Holman & Luneburg, 2012). At the same time, the desired ‘civilising power’ of transparency has yet to be established empirically (Naurin, 2007, p. 144).

Prospects of the field

The field of lobbying and interest group politics in the European Union is by now firmly established and well integrated in the study of public policy more generally (Baumgartner, 2007, p. 486). The involvement of both European and American scholars in the field provides for a regular exchange and the involvement of interest group scholars in the Comparative Agendas Project (e.g., Princen, 2011) anchors the literature in the wider discipline of political science. The establishment of a standing group on interest groups by the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) in 2008 institutionalised professional networks and with the inception of the journal Interest Groups & Advocacy in 2012 the field has also created its own specialised publishing outlet. Collaborative research projects such as INTEREURO (Beyers et al., 2014) engage in large-scale comparative data collection efforts that will provide an expanded and improved empirical basis for future studies. Under these conditions it would not come as a surprise if the recent growth in the field’s output continued.

References


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