



**European Collaborative Research Projects
in the Social Sciences (ECRP) – ECRP VI (2010)**

Project Leader: David Lowery

Project title:
**Comparative research on interest group politics in Europe
(INTEREURO)**

SECTION ONE: SUMMARY OF THE COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT

1.1 Main aims of the Collaborative Research Project (*Max. 5 aims/150 words*)

The main purpose of this CRP (INTEREURO) is to promote a more comprehensive theoretical and empirical understanding of the role interest groups play in the European polity. Specifically, we will examine interest group mobilization; organizational maintenance and professionalization; strategies for influencing political decision-making; framing processes; and their impact on policy outcomes. The project will link the different aspects of the role of interest groups in the European policy process in an integrated theoretical framework. Our guiding intellectual tenet is the generation and strategic use of *information* by organized interests. To confront our theoretical contribution with empirical data, we will develop a comprehensive database that contains information on the individual stages of the influence production process at the national and EU levels. Employing an issue-centred sampling approach we will combine bottom-up with top-down sampling of interest groups and integrate quantitative and qualitative research methods.

1.2 Potential impacts (academic and non-academic) of the Collaborative Research Project (*Max. 200 words*)

By providing information and other input to the policy process, interest groups can improve the quality and legitimacy of EU decision making. Groups also use access to decision-makers to advance their interests. Who are these lobbyists? How do they organize? What are the implications for public policy and democracy in the EU? These are key research questions in the fields of civil society, lobbying and public policy. While research on European interest group politics and civil society has increased substantially during the past 15 years, very little collaborative and systematic comparative work has been conducted. The CRP will develop an integrated theoretical framework and generate a multi-level, multi-country data set. It will be the first study covering all important dimensions of the lobbying process in order to generate a joined-up understanding of interest representation in compound polities. The impact of this research will extend beyond academia, being of direct benefit to policymakers, interest groups, and the media. It will shed much needed light on issues such as transparency and lobbying, the 'democratic deficit', the themes of biased access and influence, and interest group regulation as a potential remedy of bias.

1.3 Added value of the multinational collaboration (*Max. 200 words*)

This project will provide an intellectually and methodologically robust investigation of interest group behaviour. The primary shared research focus is the EU, but the integrated modular comparison of national and EU systems allows us to account for the role of contextually driven forces in different segments of the influence production process. The collection and analysis of the data at the EU and national levels, necessary for testing the hypotheses that will be developed, cannot be conducted by single country teams or by national teams working discretely. The testing of a comprehensive theory requires systematic collaboration among several teams to build an integrated, large-N data-set. The multinational collaboration will allow us to propose nuanced contextualized explanations pertaining to old and young democracies, older and more recent members of the EU, small and large countries, and politico-economic systems with corporatist as well as pluralist institutional structures and traditions. The research teams include both highly regarded and newly emerging scholars with all the necessary expertise to undertake the research necessary for generating a robust understanding of the European policy process. The project will benefit from cooperation with a 'sister' study to be conducted in the US by leading interest group scholars (Baumgartner and Mahoney).

1.4 Data handling aspects (if relevant): quality assurance, storage, access

(Max. 200 words)

Throughout the project, country teams will collaborate closely to develop a single coding protocol that ensures comparability and equivalence across countries and levels. A steering committee (Beyers, Dür, Eising, Lowery, Maloney) will coordinate and guide this process. Under this common guidance each country team will be responsible for a particular aspect of the data-collection process and maintenance. The existing experience and expertise of the country teams in different data collection methods will provide quality assurance. Country specific data and collaboratively generated data from the shared interview, document, and website coding elements of the project will be collated into a single database and will be made publically available in a downloadable format to all interested parties at the end of the project. This dissemination will become an important public good relevant to several audiences.

SECTION TWO: DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT

The Project Leader should describe the collaboration using the structure below (Country Contributions will be described in detail in Section Three). (*Max. 2500 words, excluding annexes. Entries exceeding 2500 words will not be accepted*)

2.1 Short description of the state of knowledge, illustrating the context of the proposal and explaining the originality of the proposed research.

The contemporary political-institutional context is characterized by the blurring and transformation of traditional boundaries. Political responsibilities are increasingly fragmented, shared or divided among different political levels (transnational, EU, national and regional). National political authorities have to cope with a hollowing out of their competencies, and with various organized interests bypassing them. Recent years have also witnessed the decline of political parties as the aggregators of societal interests (Mair 2005). In response, there have been calls for the greater involvement of a diverse range of groups in contemporary democratic systems. The EU Commission's *White Paper on Governance* and the post-Lisbon settlement, for example, are focused on reducing the EU's democratic deficit by bringing citizens in via a wide variety of civil society organizations and fora. However, our theoretical understanding and empirical knowledge of the role that interest organizations play in international and European multilevel systems remains limited.

Current limited intellectual understandings of interest groups politics are the result of two parallel trends in the literature. First, we face a diverse collection of theoretical perspectives on interest group behaviour that fail to communicate effectively (see Beyers et al. 2008; Eising 2008). Analytic-descriptive approaches that focus on interest group institutionalization and patterns of state-society relations provide us with useful generic typologies, such as the corporatism-pluralism continuum, but these typologies are less useful for developing testable hypotheses on interest group behaviour in multi-level governance systems (Falkner 1998). Other explanatory approaches, such as the exchange (Bouwen 2002), framing (Baumgartner and Mahoney 2008), and venue shopping and agenda-setting perspectives (Princen 2009) have provided testable hypotheses on interest group behaviour, but the interconnections between these approaches have not been investigated.

Second, until recently research on interest group behaviour was mainly based on qualitative case study designs. While these studies have generated valuable insights in specific sectors (e.g. Pedler 2002; van Schendelen 1993), they rely heavily on non-comparable research designs in terms of sampling, measurement, and data analysis. This makes it difficult to combine their insights into a comprehensive understanding of group behaviour in the European policy process. More recently, research has developed a more quantitative and explanatory approach, focussing more extensively on a wider range of theoretical issues (Crombez 2002; Eising and Kohler-Koch 2005; Wessels 2004) and using quantitative research designs that facilitate steps toward comparable research strategies needed for the advancement of knowledge (Bernhagen and Mitchell 2009; Beyers 2004; Bouwen 2002; Broscheid and Coen 2007; Mahoney 2008). Although these studies test general propositions about interest group behaviour, they are often based on idiosyncratic research designs that make direct comparison and wider inference difficult.

The political reality of fragmented compound polities, the related democratic deficit and limited knowledge accumulation on interest group behaviour mean that a comprehensive analysis of interest group politics in the EU would be intellectually timely. We aim to build upon existing work by developing a novel theoretical framework that connects different aspects of interest group behaviour and aims to construct a comprehensive dataset to test our hypotheses and contextualize accounts of interest group behaviour in the EU. In so doing, our ambition is to reconnect the study of European interest group politics to the broader scholarship on comparative and multi-level governance and to rescue interest group studies from its 'Cinderella status' compared to political party scholarship (Beyers *et al.*, 2008).

2.2 CRP aims and objectives; potential contribution to knowledge and academic and non-academic impacts.

The project's overall objective is to provide a better understanding of the influence production process in the EU. The theoretical framework incorporates different aspects of interest group politics and the research design will generate an integrated dataset enabling us to test implications of the theoretical framework. The project has broader relevance for studying the evolution of European democracy and the emergence of a European public sphere. It will be the first comprehensive attempt at studying the preferences, behaviour and influence of interest groups across the entire range of the European influence production processes. It will allow us to assess the contribution of civil society to the emergence of a European public sphere and the structuring of the European political space in a broad range of policy issues and in different politico-institutional contexts.

2.3 Research design, theoretical framework and methods. Include a work plan with time frame and description of the execution of the proposed collaborative work

Our theoretical framework proceeds from the assumption that *information* is the key currency in policy making interactions. Policy-makers require scientific, technical, legal, economic and social (and implementation) advice and expertise as well as guidance on constituency preferences. Such information can: be seen as a tradable asset that facilitates political access (Bouwen 2002); affects beliefs and expectations about outcomes; and assists policymakers' goal attainment priorities (Hall and Deardorff 2006). Interest groups differ in the kind of information they possess, their capacity to control it, and their ability to use that information as a strategic asset to gain political access and influence policy outcomes. The reliability, credibility and the quality of groups' information will be influenced by organizational resources, such as money, professional staff, type of membership, and the size and importance of the sector or constituency they claim to represent.

We organize our analysis around the stages of the *influence production process*. The process runs from the initial mobilization of societal groups through organizational maintenance and survival to the influence stage. In this process, many organizations professionalize their operations and apply a highly expert and scientific approach to selecting issues, strategies and frames within specific institutional contexts to influence outcomes. Information plays a key role in all stages of the influence production process:

POPULATION ECOLOGY:

The study of the population ecology of groups is essential for our informational approach because the density of an interest group population is likely to have an impact on the scope and type of information that groups' can offer to decision-makers, and on the strategic value of that information. The denser a population, the more information sources are open to policy-makers and the less exclusive the information provided by a group will be.

ORGANIZATIONAL MAINTENANCE AND PROFESSIONALIZATION:

Within the analysis of internal interest group dynamics (organizational maintenance and professionalization) and its links to external dynamics (influencing outcomes) it is important to understand the ability of interest groups to exploit information as a strategic asset. We suspect, for instance, that the level of professionalization affects the capacity of groups to select issues, frame them, employ expert and political information in lobbying strategies. Professionalization also affects groups' capacity to link citizens more effectively to the state and to offer a partial remedy to the (EU) 'democratic deficit'.

STRATEGIES:

Finite resources and the limited amount of information that can be processed by one organization mean that interest groups can prioritize a small number of issues. Which issues groups prioritize partly depends on the type of information they possess. The type of information available to a group also affects the choice of strategy, because strategies differ in terms of the information that can be transmitted. Insider strategies can be particularly useful for the transmission of detailed operational and technical information, while outsider strategies inform policymakers of the size and the scope of political conflict.

FRAMING:

Framing processes connect the study of interest representation directly to policy outcomes because the way in which an issue is understood fundamentally influences the outcome of a policy debate. The link with information exists on two levels: framing studies highlight that policy information is socially constructed and not objectively given; and the nature and amount of information (technical or political) that is available to policy advocates in the EU political process shapes the frames actors seek to construct.

INFLUENCE:

Information is a crucial power source because many lobbying efforts aim to change policymakers' perceptions and perspectives by widening the lens, presenting new evidence or concealing 'unfavourable information' (Bernhagen 2007). Policy makers rely heavily on the information provided by interest groups about complex policy areas and grassroots preferences that can be provided by interest groups to attain their policy goals and objectives. Interest groups use their information capabilities – technical expertise, data on markets and production costs, and information on citizen preferences – to achieve political goals.

These stages and their associated activities are connected in complex but yet underspecified ways and we seek to shed some much needed light on the various interconnections. To do so this project will tie the different phases of the influence production process to the informational dimension of EU policy-making.

Research design

Our research design is based on modular comparisons of national and EU interest group behaviour. The modular comparative approach is designed to test hypotheses on specific aspects of the influence production process. The inclusion of both national-level and EU-level analyses ensures that the design is sensitive to the multilevel dynamics of EU policy-making and the specific contexts in which organized interests are active. This requires variation on key contextual variables such as corporatism versus pluralism; large versus small countries; young versus old democracies, and old versus new EU members. To achieve this, we will study interest group behaviour at the national level in six of the eight collaborating countries: Germany, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK.

The data collection will proceed in several steps (see also figure 1).

1. We begin with a sample of 120 legislative proposals introduced by the European Commission from 2008 to 2010 (see annex III).
2. We then identify the population of policy advocates involved in each proposal, both at the EU and the national level in the eight member countries. Each country team is responsible for identifying the interest groups involved in their national issues as well as the identification of the EU-level advocates for a subset (n=15 per country team) of the 120 issues. This will entail extensive document analysis and some snowballing through a limited number of expert interviews (see annex II for the details).
3. Parallel to steps 1 and 2, the Dutch team develops an integrated census of the EU interest system using website coding of organized interests. This bottom up census is important for studying the population dynamics involved in the EU interest system and for weighing the results of the issue studies, as they are conducted on the basis of the top-down sampling of issue populations (see step 1 and 2). In this way, we can generalize from the sample results to the EU population of interests as a whole.
4. The next steps in the research project combine two modes of data-collection, one focusing on document analysis and another on interviewing. Each country team will be responsible for concrete aspects of the data collection (see Annex II and the separate projects):
 - a. Detailed interviews will be conducted with public officials (120 face to face, plus 120 by phone) and interest group representatives (app. 150 face to face, covering an important share of the population of groups active on our sample of legislative proposals). Critically, these interviews will be based on the same questionnaires addressing the full range of substantive topics addressed in the specific projects covered by the country teams.
5. For the analyses of professionalization, framing, and influence, extensive document analysis and/or coding of websites is required (see the separate project descriptions). In addition to

the shared EU research, the Spanish, German, UK, Swedish, Slovenian and Dutch teams will examine 20 issues in their national context, thereby providing comparisons between the EU level and the national level and across the member states. The sampling criteria and data collection methods for these national studies will be analogous to those applied to the EU-level data collection and include interviews with interest group officials (40) and key policy makers (20).

Figure 1 shows how the different data collection segments are located within the duration of the project.

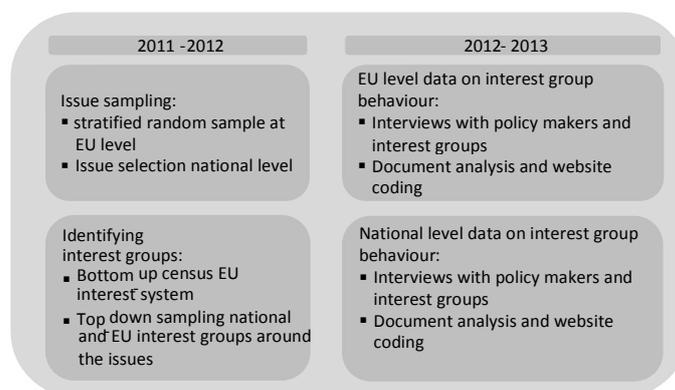


Figure 1: time frame data collection

2.4 Describe the integration of the Country Contributions in the CRP and the added value of the multinational collaboration¹

Much of the recent progress in the study of interest group politics has grown out of the EU funded CONNEX network, an ESRC funded interest group seminar series (*Organized Interests: Democratic and Governance Issues*), and a recently established ECPR Standing Group on Interest Groups. This proposal capitalizes on these networks and attempts to move towards an even more integrated research group including a mix of young and established scholars. In each of the countries, we have identified and secured the cooperation of experts in at least one of the constituent elements of the influence production process. Each country team will focus on a specific aspect of the influence production process, on how information plays a key role in that particular stage and its interconnectedness to the other stages. The first module led by Lowery (the Netherlands) will focus on population ecology, while a second module by Maloney (UK) will tackle the organizational development of groups. A further two modules (and an associated project) will examine interest groups' involvement in the influence production process at the EU level focusing on political strategies (Beyers, Belgium) and issue framing (Naurin, Sweden; and Baumgartner and Mahoney, US). A fifth module will deal with the measurement of influence over public policy (Dür, Austria). The sixth module, finally, will focus on national level interest group behaviour (Eising, Germany; Chaqués, Spain; and Fink-Hafner, Slovenia).

2.5 Practical management of the multinational collaboration and arrangements for its coordination, including coordination costs.

A steering committee consisting of Beyers, Dür, Eising, Lowery and Maloney will coordinate and guide the research process. Each member of the steering committee has lead responsibility for a specific theoretical aspect of the influence production process (see Annex II). The steering committee will also coordinate the data collection effort, which is equally shared by the individual country teams. To ensure the smooth working of the project, the steering committee will meet at the start of the project and then twice a year for the duration of the project. In addition, several smaller workshops and meetings will be organized in order to deal with more detailed issues. We will also organize the

¹ Under "added value of the collaboration" please describe why it is essential or advantageous to carry out the proposed project as a multinational collaboration involving a particular set of countries, rather than in one or two countries only. It is important to convince that each CC will make an essential contribution to the CRP.

exchange of staff members in order to collect the data and work together on the measurement instrument. Finally, we will develop a protocol which regulates the sharing and use of the data.

2.6 Planned outputs (publications and dissemination activities, e.g. conferences) over the course of the project.

The project's planned outputs are as follows:

- at least one edited volume reporting results for all dimensions of the influence production process;
- a small series of joint monographs presenting more specific results on interest group professionalization, framing dynamics, influence etc.;
- presentations in project meetings and at international conferences;
- an online working paper series at the project website;
- articles in refereed journals;
- several PhD theses;
- a summary report of the main findings that will be distributed among all interviewees, including a non-technical executive memorandum for non-academic users;
- a common conference with scholars from outside of the project, officials, politicians, and interest group practitioners towards the end of the project;
- a database that will be made available to other scholars after the initial use by members of our team.

2.7 Overall amount of funding requested (in Euros)

1. NL Country contribution	
2. SE Country contribution (SEK: 4178547)	429.989
3. AT Country contribution	250.738
4. BE Country contribution	254.000
5. UK Country contribution (GBP)	
6. D Country contribution	386.388
7. SL Country Contribution	272.340
8. SP Country Contribution	196.000
TOTAL (euro)	

2.8 Annexes (including no more than 1 side of A4 for references) and no more than 2 sides of A4 for technical details, short bibliographies, etc. if appropriate)

Annex I: References

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- van Schendelen, M. P.C.M. ed. (1993). National Public and Private EC Lobbying. Ashgate: Dartmouth.
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Annex II: Overview of specific research activities associated with each module

The overview below presents the research modules run by the different country teams and the data collection modes they rely on. Note that issue and actor sampling precede establishing the issue advocacy population (see project outline above). Each team covers part of the work with regard to the identification of the interest groups involved in about 20 issues. The coordination of the management of this data will be done by the steering committee and this work needs to be done during the first sixth month of the project. Interviewing and surveying will start after some documentary-analysis as this enables us to take into consideration a lot of substantive information regarding the policy issues.

In the bottom row of the table we list the members of the steering committee. Each member of the steering committee coordinates the research activities for a specific stage in the influence production process. The X-signs represent the responsibility of each national team. The work for the EU-level will be conducted by the Austrian, the Belgian, and the Dutch teams whereby they have the following division of labour:

- Austrian team: taking the lead in building a measurement instrument for document analysis, detailed document analysis for measuring goal attainment, organizing a training session for coders; coordinating this work with the framing study that is conducted by the US-based associated project; coordinating and conducting the fieldwork on strategies in Brussels with the Belgian team;
- Belgian team: taking the lead in designing an interview protocol on strategies; in charge of the bulk of the Brussels interviews; organizing a training session for interviewers; coordinating the conduct of the remaining interviews with the national teams;
- Dutch team: conducting the bottom-up census of the EU interest group population and coordinating the bottom-up identification of issues and issue-populations.

The work for the national level will be carried out in parallel by six teams, all of which concentrate on organizational adaptation and development, the domestic framing of issues as well as the strategies domestic interest groups deploy with regard to EU legislative issues. Each national team adopts the same research strategy which is equivalent and comparable to the EU-level study.

	<i>Population</i>	Stages of the influence production process				<i>Influence</i>
		<i>Organizational development</i>	<i>Framing</i>	<i>Strategies</i>		
EU (AT Dür, BEL Beyers, NL Lowery)	X	X	X	X	X	
ESP (Chaqués)	-	X	X	X	-	
GER (Eising)	-	X	X	X	-	
NL (Lowery)	-	X	X	X	-	
Slovenia (Fink-Hafner)	-	X	X	X	-	
SWE (Naurin)	-	X	X	X	-	
UK (Maloney)	-	X	X	X	-	
<i>Steering Committee</i>	<i>Lowery</i>	<i>Maloney</i>	<i>Eising</i>	<i>Beyers</i>	<i>Dür</i>	

Annex III: Sampling policy proposals & identifying policy advocates

Our project requires a stratified random sample of 120 legislative proposals introduced by the European Commission between 2008 and 2010. To arrive at this sample, we will do the following:

1. In a first step, we will rely on the European Commission's Prelex database (http://ec.europa.eu/prelex/rech_avancee.cfm?CL=en) to create a list of legislative proposals introduced by the European Commission between 01/01/2008 and 31/12/2010. We will exclude proposals for decisions and recommendations from this list as the former tend to be directed at very specific recipients and the latter are not legally binding. We will, however, include green and white books and use them to establish a sample of issues that are not yet formally on the agenda. This allows us to study lobbying at the agenda setting stage. Limiting the list to proposals that have been introduced in 2008, 2009, and 2010 will allow respondents to recollect the details of the decision-making process.
2. We will then create separate lists of proposals for regulations, proposals for directives, and green and white books. This will allow us to create a stratified random sample, which will deliberately over-represent proposals for directives and green and white books. To illustrate, in 2008 the European Commission introduced 177 proposals for regulations, 82 proposals for directives, and 10 green and white books. A random sample including all proposals would most likely include only few of the latter two types of documents, which would be problematic for our project. We consider directives important because they need to be transposed and implemented within the member-states, which makes them theoretically relevant from a multi-level governance perspective. Green and white books are interesting because they allow for a study of the agenda-setting stage of the policy-process.
3. We set apart legislative proposals that did not generate public attention at a moment equivalent for each proposal. These are likely more technical issues that do not motivate a public response. We will choose publicly salient proposals by checking whether it has been given substantive attention in *Agence Europe*, the *Financial Times*, *Le Monde*, and/or the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.
4. Drawing on our randomly sorted lists of proposals, we will repeat step 3 until we arrive at a random sample of 100 proposals ensuring a sample encompassing both highly and moderately visible issues. The stratified sample will include: 50 proposals for regulations, 40 proposals for directives, and 10 green and white books. We will oversample both proposals for directives and green and white books relative to their frequency in the Prelex universe of legislative proposals for the reasons noted above.
5. We randomly select another 20 proposals from those set aside in step 3 as a control. This sample of proposals that did not garner public attention will be stratified using the same proportions as for the publicly-salient proposals: 10 for regulations, 8 for directives, and 2 green and white books.
6. Of the final list of 120 proposals, we will select 20 proposals based on the type of proposal, salience, level of controversy, and dimensionality that will be analysed in the national-level studies.

We will carry out this work in late 2010 and early 2011 to allow for a start of the project in March of that year. The steering committee will develop a detailed protocol in the course of 2010.

With the list of 120 proposals, we will identify the population of policy advocates involved in the policy-making process for each. The following considerations are important in this context:

1. Our definition of involvement is rather broad and could include many different aspects ranging from giving expert advice within a committee or advertising policy positions in the media.
2. We will concentrate on actors that are identifiable as separate organizations; this may include government agencies, party officials, interest groups, firms, trade unions, universities, cultural institutions, and so on.
3. Research suggests that the distribution of involvement – number of actors linked to a proposal – will be skewed with a few generating much attention and others little. Thus, the procedure for finding involved actors may differ from proposal to proposal.
4. We will snowball from similar news-sources, position papers and official documents (EP-hearings). Later in the process, this might be complemented with a limited number of interviews with experts (for example, academics or journalists) depending on the quality of the sources.

Given this labour-intensive process, a protocol will be developed so that 8 country-teams do this research in a decentralized but reliable and replicable manner, with each team covering 15 proposals at the EU-level. The coordination and management of the overall data collection process will be done by the Leiden-team.