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Interest Organization Demography Research in Europe

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Introduction

European population ecological studies of interest organizations are rare. The concern about the Schattschneiderian upper-class accent motivating such studies in the US (e.g. Salisbury 1984) never gained much traction in European, ‘organized’ interest systems. There have been, however, several large-n studies that seek to describe or explain the numbers and types of interest organizations. These have come under several theoretical headings that have some affiliation with ‘population ecological’ interests, such as resource dependency or complex associations theory. Such studies tend to have a focus on a specific sector or organizational type, such as social movement organizations or business interest associations rather than a system-level, behavioral focus on what Jordan et al (2004) label ‘pressure participants’. Only very recently, scholars in several European countries have initiated system-wide, population ecological studies (e.g. Halpin& Jordan 2011b, Messer, Berkhout & Lowery 2010) or have started data collection on such populations of interest organizations (e.g. Fisker 2013, Klüver 2012, Naurin& Borang 2012). In this review I assess the longer running research traditions of large-n studies, recently published ecological studies and some projects that are still on-going.

I compare these studies on their implicit or explicit assumptions about the ‘competitive environment’ of the organizations studied and how these assumptions are included in the research design. The selective (or competitive) environment or ‘fundamental niche’ is the multidimensional space where organizations compete for resources and which, eventually, determines whether an organization or certain organizational (political) activities survive. It is conceptually and empirically very difficult to simultaneously study multiple competitive dimensions. Researchers have to prioritize some dimensions over the others. The dimension that is deemed most important is used to select cases and these cases are classified along other dimensions of interest. The main distinction in the literature is between, on the one hand, researchers who assume that interest organizations of a certain type such as social movement organizations or business interest associations compete for organizational resources, and, on the other hand, researchers who assume that interest organizations active on a certain topic, policy field or economic sector compete for organizational resources.

In the following literature review I first discuss the studies that focus on a certain organizational type and then review studies that use some sort of institutionally demarcated set of organizations. Please note that this structuring of the field complexly relates to several other conceptual divisions of the field. Most importantly, this is the differentiation of researchers focusing on behaviorally defined ‘pressure participants’ in general (including ‘institutions’ such as schools, companies or municipalities) and those who focus on a specific structural organizational form of collective action such as business interest associations (Halpin& Jordan 2009, Halpin& Jordan 2011a). The research field is further fragmented between those who conceptually prioritize ‘bottom-up’ (or supply) explanations in the constitution of interest populations and researchers whose key interest is in ‘top-down’ (or demand) explanations. These interests directly affect the selection and classification of interest organizations.

The review concludes with an assessment of specific empirical and theoretical challenges in various strands in the literature, opportunities for fruitful comparisons of research findings of different projects and venues for further research.

Counting organizations per type

In the following I discuss studies which have selected cases on the basis of organizational type. In the second section, I focus on studies that use some sort of classification scheme in order to differentiate relevant competitive environments within more general populations consisting of various types of organizations. The latter part of the review is per country. Three organizational-type traditions are discussed in this section. These are the quantitative approaches in studies of non-profit or voluntary organizations (e.g. in the tradition of Salamon and Anheier, 1998; Clifford et al 2013), business interest associations (e.g. van Waarden, 1992) and social movement organizations (Olzak and Uhrig, 2001)

In selecting studies for inclusion in this review, I have been relatively flexible as regards the precise theoretical perspective used. Some of the studies mentioned do not fall within the population ecological approach but engage in similar mapping exercises. Others take an organizational rather than population ecological approach in the tradition of Hannan and Freeman (1989) and Hannan and Carroll (1992), with a dual focus on organizational and population level factors. It should be noted that more or less all of the studies are designed in such a way that the organizations included rely on similar resources, and consequently share their selective environment. This usually requires the selection of organizations focusing on a

certain cause (e.g. women's rights), working in a certain geographic area (e.g. neighborhoods) or bringing together certain groups of people in society (e.g. workers).

First, there is a cross-national research community with the aim of counting the numbers and various attributes of non-profit or voluntary associations, in Salamon and Anheiers words (1998, 216) 'the scope and structure of nonprofit activity'. The network is centred around the John Hopkins University Center for Civil Society Studies (*ccss.jhu.edu*). This tradition relies on a 'structural/operational' definition of non-profit organizations as formal, private, non-profit distributing, self-governing and voluntary organizations (Salamon& Anheier 1992). The precise cut-off point on each of these dimensions is, in some ways, arbitrary (Anheier 2004). Furthermore, the structural rather than behavioral nature of the definition fits only a limited range of theories and produces some peculiar comparative research outcomes. For instance, structural definition of non-profits leads to 'top' scores in various density measures in the Netherlands (e.g. Dekker 2004 151). This is so because, in contrast to for instance the United Kingdom, all Dutch schools and health care institutions are included as non-profit organization as they are relatively independent from government (Burger et al. 1997). It is not clear how this helps answering relevant research questions because in functional or behavioral terms Dutch schools or hospitals are not different from British ones.

One of the achievements of the research network is that the United Nations adopted their definition as a guideline for national statistical offices (United Nations 2003). This allows the network to rely on aggregate data collected by national statistical offices in various countries on the number of non-profit organizations, their turn-over, their staff and so on. A first wave of publications on several Western European countries occurred in the mid-nineties (Anheier& Seibel 2001, e.g. Archambault 1997, Kendall& Knapp 1996) and the project expanded in term of countries and depth over the past decade or so (Salamon& Sokolowski 1999, Salamon& Sokolowski 2004).

As regards theory, Salamon and Anheier (1998) propose a 'social origins' theory of nonprofit activity. They postulate that social forces such as religious diversity and income per capita drive the establishment of nonprofit organizations and these factors are mediated through four distinct third-sector regimes (statist, liberal, social-democratic and corporatist). In terms of the indicators used, there are some similarities to population ecological models of density and diversity. Such models have, however, never been explicitly employed to explain nonprofit density or diversity (See review of studies of nonprofit density in: Lecy& Van Slyke 2013).

Adjacent to the study of national nonprofit density, are studies on the variation in sub-national numbers of voluntary organizations. The focus at the very low, geographical level, such as neighborhoods, makes it possible to include several explanatory factors that are otherwise difficult to precisely link to density numbers such as income levels, government subsidies and so on (Clifford 2012, e.g. Clifford, Geyne-Rahme & Mohan 2013, Mohan 2011). These UK studies are interested in measuring social capital or the associational development as a welfare policy tool. The locally precise, high-n data is, however, very well suited for the assessment of population ecological theory.

Wollebæk (2009, 2010) shares this interest in social welfare policies but, in contrast the UK studies, theoretically relies on the organizational ecology tradition in among others social movement studies (Minkoff 1997). He is interested in the change in density and the turn-over / volatility of local populations of voluntary associations. Social capital students, most notably Putnam (1995), view associational volatility as indicators of social decline and disruption. Wollebæk (2010 145) highlights that it matters when organizational volatility occurs in the context of aggregate population growth, stability or decline. To address this and as illustrated in Table 2, he differentiates between, shrinking, stagnant, dynamic and expanding organizational populations. The relationship between volatility (or turn-over) and growth is also one of the main interests in some of the mapping exercises mentioned below on the UK and the EU (were stability masks underlying dynamism). Concerning the research at hand this means that, on the one hand, in cases where local communities experience a decline in the aggregate number of voluntary associations and high volatility, one may be pessimistic about the welfare functions provided by these organizations whereas, on the other hand, volatility in the context of aggregate growth is probably an indicator of social dynamism and renewal . This is a reminder that for probably a broad range of research questions it is insufficient to solely focus on aggregate numbers irrespective of turn-over. Another contribution is Wollebæk's specification of the effect of demographic changes on voluntary associations. He departs from the assumption that 'humans are the main resource for the small-scale, amateur-run associations' in his study, and includes the number of persons, demographical 'turn-over' due to migration and the physical distribution of people per locality. He shows that such changes indeed affect the (change in the) density of associations but not in a detrimental way as expected by some social capital students. In broader terms, this suggests that the 'supply' or 'area' term in population models requires a more complex specification than a 'simple' aggregate number of potential constituents or indicator thereof.

Table 1: Typology of change in organizational populations, adapted from Wollebæk (2010 156)

		Growth	
		No	Yes
Volatility	Yes	Shrinking	Dynamic
	No	Stagnant	Expanding

To conclude, these studies of voluntary non-profit organizations merit attention from those interested in population ecology. The elaborate data sets potentially provide for the statistical leverage to assess various explanatory factors at, especially, low geographical levels. Furthermore, the specification of the ‘area’ or ‘supply’ term for ‘social’ sectors is surely more sophisticated than ‘simple’ public preferences but also include various socio-structural factors.

A second, longer running, distinctively European, partially neo-corporatist, research tradition focusses on business interest associations (Grant 2002, Grote, Lang & Schneider 2008, Schmitter& Streeck 1985, Streeck et al. 2006). The so-called Organisation of Business Interest (OBI) project coordinated by Schmitter and Streeck has been particularly central in this field (Schmitter& Streeck 1999). Their research outputs during the eighties relies on a 1980 snapshot of around 350 business associations in ten mostly European countries, including the United Kingdom and Germany (Grant 2002). Their central research interest is in the organizational management of the tension between the logic of influence and the logic of membership (Coleman& Grant 1988, Schmitter& Streeck 1985). In their view, the differences in density and diversity of associational systems in economic sectors and countries depends on the organizational capacities to manage the aggregation of interests (logic of membership) and the articulation of interest in the policy process (logic of influence). This means that, among others, the numbers of associations per country or sector are commonly related, as both cause and consequence, to the proportion of potential constituents, internal organizational structures and economic growth or political-economic structures.

Several researchers out of this research network continued with counting business associations in follow-up projects in the nineties (Crouch& Traxler 1995, Traxler 2000, Unger& Waarden 1999). This broadened the research approach and community to industrial organization more broadly, consequently including counts of both business associations and labour unions (Ebbinghaus& Visser 1999, Visser 2006). The associated interest in macro-

economic policies also produced a research interest in the organizational adaptation of associations to Europeanisation and globalization (Grote, Lang & Schneider 2008, Streeck & Visser 2006, Wilts 2001) and beyond the network of researchers associated with the OBI project (e.g. Eising 2009). Let's look into two studies of such studies that have an organizational ecological component.

To start, van Waarden studies (1999, 1992a, 1992b) the historical development of Dutch business interest associations in comparative perspective. Among other findings, Unger and van Waarden (1999, 429) find the typical density depend S curve in their counts of business associations in the US, Canada and the Netherlands, 1880-1975 (also based on: Aldrich et al. 1994, Coleman 1988). This supports the notion that there is some sort of natural limit in the number of interest organisations (at a certain 'saturation point') that can exist in a certain socio-economic resource environment (which van Waarden labels: 'push factors'). This finding contradicts Olson's (1982 38-41) idea that stable societies accumulate increasing numbers of interest organizations. Van Waarden (1992, 541) also points to changes in the policy or institutional environment of business associations (or (governmental) 'pull factors' as he calls them). That is, pre- world war two government policies 'were often highly branch-specific' (1992, 541) whereas the (new) issues on the political agenda after 1945 such as new social legislation, central wage policy etc, impacted on 'a much larger group of business people' (ie across economic sectors). This produced new organisational forms of representation, most notably encompassing business interest associations. This led to mergers of sectoral business associations into encompassing associations with sectoral sub-divisions and led to a *decrease* in the number of business associations despite the favorable membership resource environment (i.e. economic prosperity). Though this research only implicitly uses the language of population ecology, it speaks to some of the recurring population ecological discussions on the relative importance and complex interaction of societal and policy factors in their effect on associational populations.

Grote and Lang (2003) integrate studies of Europeanization, the abovementioned tradition of Schmitter and Streeck, and ecological theories of organizations. They focus on business associations in two industries in Germany (and in later publications also four other countries (e.g. Schneider, Lang & Bauer 2006)) that share 'similar patterns of resource utilization'. Their ecological approach balances the common organization theoretical dichotomy between organizational adaptation and selection. That is, on the one hand, they explicitly include 'environmental limitations' to the organizational room for maneuver, in the broader social,

economic and technological environment of business associations (2003 231). On the other hand, they assume that these organisations ‘have a choice of many different strategies of action to overcome their situations of uncertainty caused by resource-dependencies and institutional requirements’ (2003 235). This theoretical flexibility makes it possible to study both typical corporatist associational arrangements (in their case in the German chemical industry) and a dynamic, more competitive environment (representatives of IT-companies). They find that, in the chemical industry, organizational adaptation to mainly economic changes occurs through change in the *internal* relationships between the federation and the sub-sector associations. Whereas in the IT sector, economic and technological change produce the emergence of new interest organizations and niche changes within the population rather than organizational adaptation (Grote& Lang 2003 243-245). The conceptual and empirical differentiation and interrelation of intra- and interorganizational changes is a more general and important reminder to students of populations of interest organizations. Similar forces potentially trigger different but perhaps functionally equivalent organizational reactions that have distinct effects on organizational density. For instance, it may help to understand the recent increase of proportions of independent institutions within certain lobbying communities. That is, it may be that some interest communities channel the lobbying ambitions of such institutions through associations (intra-organizational adaptation) and on other cases these institutions ‘go alone’, observed in high densities (inter-organizational adaptation). Like van Waarden’s findings, they clearly relate the adaptation capacities of associations to population-level outcomes.

Third, in the research community on social movement organizations there have been some attempts to evaluate the numbers and types of organizations in ecological terms (Olzak& Uhrig 2001, Sandell 2001, Vermeulen 2013). These studies build on the organizational ecological notions of legitimation and competition as the key causal mechanisms for the density dependence of certain ‘industries’ of social movement organizations (Hannan& Carroll 1992, Minkoff 1993). These mechanisms are used as flexible theoretical tools that may be related to various dimensions from which social movement organisations derive their identity, such as ideology, tactics or geography. The distinction of multiple rather than one or two ‘selective environments’ is the main contribution of the research community on the ecology of social movement organizations.

One of the main contributions of Vermeulen (2013) is his focus on ideological competition or the ‘ecology of ideology’. Commonly, the ‘selective environment’ of interest associations is

classified along the lines of policy issues, ethnic / identity groups or economic sectors. In contrast, Vermeulen highlights the importance of political cleavages (Similar to: Barnett & Woywode 2004). These potentially provide niches within organizational communities and, in his case, local ethnic community organisations in Amsterdam and Berlin. He argues that environments that are open to ideological competition, in this case Amsterdam, produces a more fragmented and dense population of organisations, whereas in environments where institutional incentives restrict ideological polarization, in this case Berlin, there is more collaboration, and there are lower numbers of organisations.

Olzak and Uhrig (2001) focus on the legitimation of certain tactics and related organizational forms, and the subsequent competitive pressures, within the German women's movement between the fifties and the nineties. Within this movement, they find a typical density dependent pattern of mobilization. They also find that competitive pressures occur especially among social movement organisations with very similar tactics (Olzak & Uhrig 2001 710). The key contribution is that, at least for these types of 'new' organizational formats within specific movements, specialization by tactic is probably very common. The organisations under study initially benefit the activities of similar groups as the issue and political tactics used become legitimated. After this initial phase and as predicted by organizational ecology (Hannan & Carroll 1992) competitive pressures reduces the growth in number of organizations. They rely on protest event data coded from newspapers for counts of organisations per year (which is relatively common for such organisations with an extensive outside-oriented action repertoire, (e.g. see: Bernhagen & Trani 2012, Earl et al. 2004, Soule & King 2008).

Sandell (2001) looks into the size (number of members) of social movement organizations of substantially distinct movements that locally compete for members (Similar to: Hedström 1994, Stern 1999). He finds that, once reasonably established, local organizations do not grow in size, measured by membership numbers. This implies that the growth of social movements as a whole fully depends on the number of (local) movement organizations, in this case trade union, free church and temperance movement. The density of such organizations, in turn, must be explained by organizational ecological or niche theory rather than strategic theories of social movements. Sandell's focus on the local resource environment of movements is particularly innovative and the 371 Swedish local districts provide him with sufficient statistical leverage to assess variation in the density and membership-growth of organizations.

To summarize, these research traditions specialized in specific types of organizations contribute to population ecological thought in a couple of ways. The study of non-profit organisations makes use of data sets that are of interest beyond the sociological interests currently pursued. The research of business interest associations highlight the relevancy of the (complex) linkages between internal organizational adaptation and organizational birth and death, in responses to various social, economic and political forces. The students of social movement organizations draws our attention to the multiple and distinct dimensions of competition among such organizations.

General studies of organizational populations

Researchers who rely on some sort of general data source to capture populations classify these organizations in their selective environment(s). There is variation in the research focus between those who are mainly interested in the policy presence or activity of interest organizations (top-down, demand) and those who are mainly interested in the existence of interest organizations in society (bottom-up, supply). This has various consequences for the use of population ecological models. Most notably, organizational birth / death and population entry / exit refers to the policy-related activities of organizations for the first group of researchers whereas it refers to actual organizational establishment or disbandment for the latter. Further, most researchers acknowledge that a combination of demand- and supply-factors (and associated data sources) produces the best specified model, but encounter grave research design difficulties in the linking and matching of the different levels of observation of these factors. I discuss the general studies of organizational populations per country-case. I start with an extensive discussion of the EU case and then look into the studies in several European countries, most notably, but not exclusively, in Scotland, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

The lobbying community of the European Union is the most extensively studied European case. Butt Philip provides the first comprehensive list of interest organizations in Brussels (Butt Philip 1985, Butt Philip 1991, Butt Philip, Gray & Porter 1996)(See for longer-term, historical, large-n descriptions of the EU lobbying community: Rollings and Moguen-Toursel (2012) and Laurens and Michel (2012)). During the mid-nineties there have been a couple of surveys of associations registered in the official register of the European Commission (Aspinwall & Greenwood 1998 2-3, 30, Balme & Chabanet 2002 45-62, Greenwood, Grote & Ronit 1992 1-2, Kohler-Koch 1997, Kohler-Koch & Eising 1999, Mazey & Richardson 1993). This survey tradition, including its reliance on the official registers, continues after the turn of

the century (Eising& Kohler-Koch 2005, Mahoney 2004, Wessels 2004). More generally, over the past decade, there has been an increase in research attention to lobbying in the European Union (Beyers, Eising & Maloney 2008, Coen& Richardson 2009, Dür 2008, Mahoney 2008). A substantial proportion of this research deals with research questions about interest group strategies, and to a lesser extent, policy influence. Among others, these are questions about the relative importance of ‘voice’ and ‘access’ strategies, and the choice for ‘national’ versus ‘European’ channels of influence (Beyers 2004, Beyers& Kerremans 2007, Bouwen 2004, Eising 2007, Pappi& Henning 1999). As part of this increase in large-n research attention to EU interest representation, several studies address the numbers and types of interest organizations in the EU (Broscheid& Coen 2007, Messer, Berkhout & Lowery 2010, Wonka et al. 2010). Within this work there are distinct foci on data issues, population description and the assessment of explanatory frameworks.

Berkhout and Lowery (2008) note the major data challenges involved in the construction of a relevant census of active interest organizations that covers multiple EU venues and that is consistent over time. They point to the substantial differences between, among other data sources, the register of lobbyists accredited to the European Parliament, the ‘official list’ of the European Commission and the Public Affairs Directory published by Landmarks (currently: Dod’s). This makes especially the research mentioned above based on the umbrella-group-oriented, official or CONECCS register very vulnerable to selection bias. Wonka et al. (2010) address this issue by combining a snapshot of different data sources (the register of the European Parliament, the Public Affairs register and CONECCS) and make them publicly available for the research community. The inconsistency among data sources may be somewhat alleviated as the European Commission and the European Parliament have, as part of the ‘European Transparency Initiative’, initiated a joint voluntary register of lobbyists. This fully downloadable Register of Interest Representatives provides new research opportunities but also needs to be approached carefully as it seems to contain non-EU active organization and misses some of the major PA firms (ALTER-EU 2013). When one accounts for this, this means that there are currently several ways to produce general counts of interest organisations in the EU. However, all of these data sources provide snapshots in time, whereas some of the most interesting research questions require time-series. The data issues are not unique to the EU and the lack of overlap among sub-populations points at the importance of mixing or careful selective sampling of organizations.

As regards the *descriptive* work, Berkhout and Lowery (Berkhout& Lowery 2010, Berkhout& Lowery 2011) provide both a long-term as a medium-term analysis. As regards the longer term, they show that there has not been an ‘explosion’ of lobbyists in Brussels. The number of lobbyists grew in the early nineties but remained more or less constant from the mid-nineties onwards (Berkhout& Lowery 2010). This is in spite of the substantial differentiation of policies the EU and its eastern enlargement. Some of this may be captured by the growing diversity of interests represented, with a notable increased share of ‘public’ interests present.

Berkhout and Lowery (2011) examine the shorter-term turn-over in the EU interest group population. They use both the EP register and the EC CONECCS list and show that there are substantial turn-over rates in both of them. This indicates that a substantial proportion of groups in Brussels are ‘lobby tourists’ that maintain only short-term presence. Only about thirty percent of the organizations belongs to the core of policy lobbyists that maintain continuous policy engagement with the EU institutions. This has consequences for the relative lobby experience of interest organizations with stark contrasts between experienced ‘old bulls’ and novice ‘Mayflies’. It also means that the EU interest population is far bigger than can be observed at a single moment in time because a substantial proportion of groups switch between national and European policy work, and between policy work and membership-oriented activities. The typical distribution in age and experience has been found in the US case as well (Anderson et al. 2004, Lowery, Gray & Cluverius 2013) but the level of turn-over probably varies systematically, but in currently unknown magnitudes, across policy areas and countries.

There are a couple of recent studies that seek to *explain* the density differences sectors within the general EU interest population. Some researchers, such as Lowery and co-authors, takes an explicit population ecological approach, whereas others, such as Coen and several co-authors, tends to take a relatively EU-specific and more inductive approach. Broscheid and Coen (2007) seek to explain the differences numbers of interest organizations between Directorate-Generals of the European Commission based on self-reported data from CONNECS. Their main finding is that in policy areas where policy makers (i.e. officials of the European Commission) invite interest organisations to participate in the policy process, larger numbers of interest organizations are present. They label this a ‘mutual relationship’ (2007 360). However, they have great difficulty showing statistically significant relationships due to the relatively low number of DG’s (n=21) compared to the number of independent variables (DG staff, Consultative fora, administrative units, distributive nature of policy, age

of administrative unit, involvement of national governments). A more or less similar research design is used by Coen and Katsaitis (2013) to explain variation in diversity in terms of the relative presence of NGO's and 'in-house lobbyists'. They use the Register of Interest Representatives in which groups list the DG-policy areas of their interest. Again, they highlight the informational demands on the part of the European Commission as the critical factor in the explanation of the relative interest of NGO's or company representatives. However, the precise causal order and mechanism is not fully specified because Coen and Katsaitis use an indirect and general measure of the link between DG's and groups, and of 'informational demands' (staff, nature of policy, DG age). Further, generalization beyond the EU case is hampered because of the use of the DG subdivision rather than a more generally used and conceptually embedded policy classification such as the policy agendas code scheme (www.policyagendas.org).

By making use of online consultations that have a distinctively narrower policy focus than DG's, Rasmussen and co-authors are able to better specify the policy interest of interest organisations and the associated group densities of the 142 consultation studied (Rasmussen, Carroll & Lowery 2013, Rasmussen & Carroll 2013). Rasmussen and Carroll (2013) descriptively compare the population of consultation participants with the Register of Interest Representatives and seek to explain the level of business interest participation in policy consultations. Similar to various other researchers (e.g. Wonka et al. 2010 467), they find 'very obvious' aggregate business dominance, with even stronger dominance in consultations than in the register. This suggests that business interests are not only more numerous but also more active. Somewhat similar to Coen and his co-authors, they expect and find that 'demand' generated in the policy process shapes the numbers and types of interests represented. This 'demand' is broader than political-administrative informational needs, central for Coen, and also includes the conflict structure of the policy area. They differentiate administrative, regulatory and expenditure proposals, and classify policies in terms of the concentrated or diffuse cost distribution for those affected. They find that regulatory proposals in which the costs are concentrated lead to a 'biased' pro-business mobilization of interests. Of course, in the absence of an agreed reference point consisting of the 'actual' distribution of interests in society or on specific policies, this does not answer the normative question how a 'unbiased' participation of groups would look like, nor whether policy outcomes are actually biased.

In addition to some of the demand-factors mentioned, Rasmussen et al (2013) include several supply-factors to explain the density of interest associations in some 142 EU consultations. Most importantly, they include data on the relative importance the public attaches to certain policies and interest guild density measure from the Register of Interest Representatives. They find that ‘more interest organization mobilize on issues with consequences for public budgets and that fall within policy areas regarded as important by the public’ (2013 16). At the same time, they find that when public opinion is included in the analysis, interest guild density no longer significantly predicts the level of consultative activity. This suggests that there is some complex causality going on, in which public opinion affects various other factors in the model such as policy adoptions (legislation) and interest guild density (2013 17). Complex modelling strategies, including appropriate data, are required to properly examine the precise effect of public opinion on the policy activities of interest organizations. One of the main challenges is the lack of issue-specific public opinion data.

Toshkov et al (2012) rely on a time-series model to isolate the expected effect of legislative activity on interest organization density. They do not include a broad range of explanatory factors but specifically look into the order of the relation between the number of entries in the EP register and the number of EP legislative proposals per legislative domain. Their results are quite sobering. Despite the relatively, precise nature of the data, they do not find a clear relationship in which interest organizational presence lags, leads or is contemporaneous with legislative activity. Their interpretation of this is that a general theory, here differentiated as pluralist, corporatist or transactionalist theory, of this relationship is too shallow and that a more circumstantial or contingent theory, while more challenging to construct, is better suited. Such a theory then should include various aspects of the legislative proposal at hand and various characteristics of the interest guild involved.

Also studying the EU group population, Messer et al (2010) and Berkhout et al (2013) seek to explain variation in interest group density between economic sectors. By relying on economic sectors rather than DG’s of the European Commission, consultative issues or legislative fields, they are definitively closer to the members-resources dimension of the selective environment of interest organization than the other studies mentioned above. This increases the theoretical and empirical plausibility that ecological phenomena, most notably density dependence, occur. It also provides substantial number of cases which gives the statistical leverage needed to assess several potential explanations. However, this also necessitates the researchers to empirically link the ‘energy’ in the policy areas to interest organizations

mobilized through the 'area' resources in economic sectors. This can only be done in an imperfect manner. The focus on economic sectors also leads to the exclusion of the substantial, 'social' or 'public' part of the EU group population (but note the relatively unsuccessful inclusion of such sectors in Messer et al (2010)). Messer et al (2010) explicitly import the population ecological Energy-Stability-Area model from the US. They show that the most important components of the model such as the 'valued added' (or turnover) per sector predicts, as in the US case, the number of interest organizations per sector present in the EU. Berkhout et al (2013) use a more precise measures and a somewhat broader range of independent variables than Messer et al. (2010). They also use a model specification that allows for the cross-sectoral assessment of time-dependent density dependence by interacting all explanatory variables on number of potential constituents.

The main contribution of these EU-focused articles is that they show that, with some adaptation, population ecological models can travel across different political systems. They also provide some innovative attempts to address the challenges that arise from the different dimensions along which interest organizations compete and the associated linking of policy-related and constituency-related classification schemes.

The majority of studies of the population of interest organizations in the United Kingdom are descriptive in nature and rely on the Directory for Business Associations. This directory has been used to describe changes over time (Jordan & Greenan 2012) and for comparisons to the United States (Jordan et al. 2012) and other Anglophone countries (Johnson 2013). Jordan and Greenan (2012 84) note that the aggregate numbers of associations has been relatively stable at around 7500 over the past decades. This is, however, an 'illusion' of stability as they find, among other changes, a distinct decrease in the numbers of trade associations in favor of a rise in professional associations. Their interpretation of the potential implications of these changes is explicitly ambiguous. That is, as they write, in reference to Scholzman (2010), that 'vigorous representation may be inversely related to number' (2012 94) because reduced numbers may indicate a more effective organization of interests and, in support of some of the findings of studies of business association mentioned in the previous section, more successful representation of interests in the policy process. As regards comparative work, Jordan et al (2012) qualify the interest group growth in the United Kingdom compared to the, more substantial but still no explosive, growth in the United States. Their use of the policy agendas classification allows for a direct comparison of the organizations in the (British) Directory for Business Associations and (American) Encyclopedia of Associations. Also using these

sources, Johnson (2013) notes the comparatively substantial presence of the ‘non-membership’ group in the United States compared to the United Kingdom. Both studies are instructive for researchers planning country comparative research. Scarce comparative research relies on data collected about organizations providing oral and written evidence to the legislative (Pedersen, Halpin & Rasmussen 2013), or media mentions of groups (Bernhagen & Trani 2012, Binderkrantz, Halpin & Chaqués Bonafont 2013).

Halpin and several co-authors studied various aspects of interest representation in (mainly) consultative procedures in Scotland, including the ‘breadth’ of policy engagement (Halpin & Binderkrantz 2011), the ‘bandwagon’ distribution of interests across issues (Halpin 2011), the distinct differences of group populations across political arenas (Halpin, Baxter & MacLeod 2011) and the ‘mortality anxiety’ of interest groups (Halpin & Thomas 2012). His interests explicitly depart from the US literature on population ecology and adjacent research fields, and tend to show the general applicability of the theories, and, in some cases, similar research outcomes. A common thread in his research is that he explicitly includes the group-level strategies to survive through niche-positioning, identity formation and other forms of organizational adaptation (Halpin & Jordan 2009). This contrasts with ‘pure’ population-level ecological approaches that tend to be largely agnostic to such strategies.

Among several of such findings, Halpin (2011), as Baumgartner and Leech (2001), finds substantial ‘bandwagons’ of interest organizations jointly and simultaneously focusing their policy interests on certain issues while disregarding others. Extending Baumgartner and Leech’s work, he also points to the several cue-givers (media, civil service, campaign groups) who are potentially responsible for the cascades of interest group attention to some issues. He specifically highlights the strategic choice on the part of federations to mobilize (or not) their constituents. That is, federations may mobilise their constituent member associations into lobby campaigns, consequently producing a ‘bandwagon’ effect on a certain issue. However, Halpin (2011, 221-2) points out that umbrella groups may also ‘absorb’ the activity of affiliate groups by taking sole representational responsibility. These dynamics are somewhat similar as those highlighted by the students of business interest associations discussed in the previous section.

Consistent with population ecological research, Halpin and Thomas (2012) find that groups compete for members rather than policy attention. Such competition produces anxiety among groups about their survival, especially, and this is a contribution, when past organizational

change has been unsuccessful. Halpin, Baxter and MacLeod (2011) highlight the lack of overlap between group populations active in executive politics (consultation, direct contact), legislative politics and media politics. Among other things, this implies that there is a clear hierarchy between an ‘ever-presently engaged policy-dedicated core and an ephemerally engaged amateur periphery’ (2011 136), as also found in abovementioned research on the EU case. It also indicates that ‘multiple lenses seem a sensible strategy’ when selecting data sources for the construction of interest group populations.

In the Netherlands, Braun-Poppelaars has pioneered the general mapping of interest organizations (Poppelaars 2009). She relies on the government administered organizational register and filters interest organisations from other organisations on the basis of keywords and official classifications (See for a similar approach to the Belgian population: Fraussen 2014). Together with a survey among civil servants, she cross-sectionally shows that characteristics of the immediate organizational environment of interest organizations shape the relationship between bureaucrats and interest organizations. The inclusion of population level explanatory factors in models of interest group policy behavior is an important contribution to the field. Relying on the same method and similar data, Braun-Poppelaars et al (2011) show that, among other findings, the ‘bandwagon’ effect found in the US and other cases, also seems to occur in the Dutch case. They also highlight the fragmentary nature of the Dutch interest population with a notable specialization in either interest articulation (seeking policy influence) or interest aggregation (membership involvement). They caution that such specialization potentially undermines the ‘linking function’ commonly attributed to interest organizations. Berkhout (2010 63-111) also makes use of parts of this data and compares the Dutch group population to the EU population. He points out that the differences found, most notably the more numerous business interest representation at the EU level, can largely be attributed to the specific set of policy competences of the EU.

Last, there are several on-going, currently unfinished research projects that highlight the promising nature of future research output on population ecological studies based on data from several European countries. In Denmark, Fisker (2012) builds on a longer running Danish research tradition (Christiansen et al. 2010, Christiansen 2011) in her assessment of survival in the Danish interest population from the mid-Seventies onwards (Fisker 2013), and her evaluation of the density dependence of Danish patient groups from the early twentieth century onwards (Fisker 2013). In Sweden, Naurin and Borang (2012) have collected interest group data on the basis of registers of senders of letters to strategically selected ministries.

This provides them with a long time-series and some information of actual policy interest of interest organizations. In Germany, as mentioned earlier, Klüver (2012) uses the Lobbyists register of the German Parliament (Bundestag) from the mid-Seventies onwards. Among other research questions to be pursued in this project, she uses the relatively long time-series to show that, while controlling for various factors, public opinion on environment and defense issues drives interest group mobilization on those issues in parliament.

Two recent comparative surveys on interest group strategies show that it is possible to collect the data needed for comparative population ecological work. Dür and Mateo (Dür & Mateo 2013) survey interest organizations in Austria, Germany, Ireland, Latvia and Spain using multiple data sources per country.¹ As regards the German case Jentges et al (2012, 2013) take a similar approach (but they include the OECKL directory as well). Currently, several research projects for which population ecological data is a small or substantial part, most notably this is the Intereuro project (www.intereuro.eu), Interarena project (www.interarena.dk) and recent initiatives by Beyers (Beyers 2014a, Beyers 2014b) that build upon his, and co-authors, Belgian research (Fraussen, Beyers & Donas 2014).

Discussion and conclusion

I conclude with an assessment of specific empirical and theoretical challenges in various strands in the literature, similarities and differences in research outcomes, and venues for further research.

First, a challenge for *descriptive* projects is the choice (if any) of data source. As the EU and Scottish cases show, there are distinct differences in the types of groups present in different arenas or associated with the different original aims of any directory, list or register. This complicates the comparison of research outcomes of surveys relying on different sources within a single system, and country-comparisons in which non-equivalent sources are used. The mixing of data sources, as recommended by several of the authors discussed, partially addresses this issue.

Second, a common challenge in the construction of *explanatory* frameworks is the valid connection between independent variables and the dependent variable when these are not

¹ Dur and Mateo (2013, 679) use: For Ireland: Administration Yearbook & Diary 2008. For Spain: the Boletín Oficial del Estado & Registro Nacional de Asociaciones. For Austria: Österreichische Amtskalender & www.herold.at. For Latvia: Lursoft; www.lursoft.lv & consultations. For Germany: Lobbyistenregister Bundestag & www.verbaende.com.

observed at the same level. That is, interest organizations compete for organizational resources from multiple environments, most importantly the policy and constituent environment, and these cannot be captured using a single classification scheme to which all relevant variables can be connected. The current approach of linking, of for instance public opinion issues to consultation issues, is consequently imperfect but the best available.

A couple of things are noteworthy as regards the similarities and differences in research findings. First, in several cases scholars report different mechanisms that mediate between actual changes in the resource environment (e.g. economic growth, policy change) and the expected effect on the density of interest organizations. One of such mechanisms is the 'Bandwagon'-effect according to which interest organizations take cues from others in focusing their attention to certain policy changes rather than others. This implies that the mobilizing effect of policy change (a 'disturbance' in the Trumanian sense) is mediated by the presence of cue-givers such as the media or colleague-interest organizations (e.g. Halpin 2011). Another mechanism noted is the organizational capacity of centrally-networked associations or federations. Such organizations in some cases absorb the 'supply' (or 'area') of organizational resources in a certain guild. As shown by Grote and Lang (2003), this is the case for interest representation of the German chemical industry. Here, economic and policy changes over the past decades did not affect the density of interest organizations. Jordan and Greenan (2012) point to a similar phenomenon in their evaluation of the decline of trade associations in the United Kingdom. In other cases, and probably also dependent on the nature of the 'energy' in the policy process, business associations cannot fully 'channel' the lobby activities of their company-members, and these members choose to lobby on their own (with associated effects on the density and diversity of pressure participants).

Second, a consistent finding in the UK and EU studies that cover longer time periods is that aggregate numbers of organizations potentially mask underlying turnover of organizations. This turnover shapes the diversity, for instance in the UK case affecting the relative proportion of professional vis-à-vis trade associations, and determines the age-composition and associated distribution of lobby experience within populations. In the UK and Norwegian case, researchers have suggested that the turnover is explained by supply-side changes on the part of constituents such as economic specialization and local migration. In the EU case, it seems more plausible that demand-side system characteristics, i.e. EU's multilevel nature, is conducive to high turnover. This requires further study, as no study has systematically

assessed the determinants of turn-over in interest guilds or populations (nor its precise implications).

As regards future research, the main trend seems to be in the direction of relatively large datasets that include multiple countries, is cross-sectoral, over a long time period, at different geographical levels and in multiple arena's using a behavioral definition of interest organizations. Through the combination of datasets from different projects, for instance at the EU and national level, such complex data on the numbers and types of organizations is within reach. However, besides the various empirical challenges regarding the explanatory variables, the theoretical development of a well-specified model is theoretical very demanding. That is, as highlighted by Lowery et al (2008), such comparative, multi-level, time-series models introduce a lot of variation in the nature of the relationships that appear relatively 'simple' in standard versions of population ecological models. For instance, the effect of demand-side factors such as policy conflict potentially varies strongly between political systems, depending on, among other factors, the relationship between political parties and interest groups. In some countries, political conflict may have a strongly mobilizing effect on interest organizations due to their affiliation with parties, whereas in other countries such mobilization is strategically unfavorable because groups may want to cherish long-term relationships with bureaucrats in policy networks. The great difficulty to isolate the 'group-system' from other components of the political system, and to isolate population dynamics from other aspects of interest representation, lead Lowery et al (2008, 1245-46) to be 'somewhat pessimistic' about complex comparative theory formation on interest representation and see only room for 'careful, narrow comparison across relatively similar systems'. The main challenge is to design population ecological research in such narrow fashion that it retains its theoretical validity but broad enough to include variation on several demand-, supply- and mediating factors, possibly at multiple levels of observation.

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