

Daniel Naurin
Department of Political Science
Gothenburg University
Box 711, 405 30 Gothenburg
Sweden
E-mail: Daniel.Naurin@ppl.gu.se

From “rent-seekers” to public-concerned actors?

The effect of openness and transparency
on interest group behaviour.

Paper presented at the European Community Studies Association
Sixth Biennial International Conference
Pittsburgh June 2-5 1999

Introduction

Scene taken from an interview in Swedish television:

The local politician: *And finally, I want to emphasise how much I support the proposal to welcome 200 Somaliian refugees to our municipality. Not only does it give us an opportunity to help people who suffer, it will also enrich our community.*

The TV-reporter: *Thanks for the interview... But seriously, now that the interview is over, what do you really think about this refugee-question?*

The local politician: *Well, you know Magnus, we can't possibly bring those people here. How could we afford that? Besides, there will be trouble with the local people, and the house-prices will fall. It won't work!*

The TV-reporter: *So what do you say now, when I say that the camera is still rolling?*

The local politician: *What?! But... You can't do that!*

Openness and publicity¹, in this case in the shape of a TV-camera, can be very important for political behaviour. The attitude taken towards an issue can change completely, when a shed of public light hit actors that previously operated behind closed doors. This paper aims to discuss how a particular type of actor - private interest groups – change their appearance (the opinions and arguments they put forward) in response to changes in the degree of openness in the environment in which they are operating.

According to **deliberative theory**, openness has the effect of forcing self-interested actors to drop their egoistic arguments and motivate their standpoints with consideration for the public interest. From a **negotiation theory** and a **corporatism-theory** perspective, however, the opposite conclusion seems more probable – openness will promote a more group-oriented approach and prevent considerations of the common good to be raised in the discussion.

¹ The terms publicity, openness and transparency are used synonymously. They imply that there is a public watching. The broader the public, the higher is the "degree of openness". Thus, they are the opposites of "secrecy", "closeness", acting "behind the scenes" or "behind closed doors".

The question addressed in this paper is if, when and how the “censoring” mechanism of publicity, which proponents of deliberative theory refer to, affects the verbal “input” that interest groups bring to the political decision-making process. I argue that it is an empirical question to what extent the faith in the purifying effects of openness that can be found in deliberative theory is well-grounded, and show how negotiation theory, corporatism-theory and **agenda-setting theory** complicate and question this deliberative assumption. The paper ends with a presentation of a set of hypotheses, derived from the theoretical discussion, which eventually will be tested empirically as part of my dissertation project.

Openness as a tool in the service of democracy

Interest groups² are essential to a modern democracy. They provide political decision-makers with priceless information and bring valuable contributions to “the public discourse”. They are products of the uncontested democratic right to form organisations and promote political claims and ideas. A democratic political system without organised interests would not be desirable, even if it was possible.

But interest groups are also problematic from a democratic perspective. Their presence threatens to weaken the most fundamental of democratic principals – political equality. What is “one man-one vote” on election day worth, if some organisations can exert influence equivalent to thousands of votes between the elections? Groups in society with access to large political resources can be unfairly influential, compared with other groups, due to the work of their organisations.

The inequality of political influence is particularly serious when it is used to favour the powerful groups at the expense of the powerless. Interest groups are hardly known for having any scruples in that respect. They are often referred to with great cynicism by journalists and the public.

If, however, their influence was exercised in a more noble way than what is expected from their stereotype as “rent-seekers” (grabbing as much as possible for the group from the common pie), then the inequality would at least be more bearable. We can accept that elected representatives

² Private organisations acting to influence political decisions.

have greater political influence than ordinary citizens, because we know that they have the voters watching them and forcing them to consider the public interest. Is it possible to imagine any similar mechanisms that can keep interest groups away from their most egoistic behaviour?

The ideal from a constitutional perspective would be to find institutions that with a gentle hand could steer the representatives of the organised interests into a more altruistic course. Ideas pointing in that direction have been taken seriously within corporatism-theory. (Mansbridge 92a,b, Öberg 94) The desire to make large and important organisations take on the role of protectors of the public interest, instead of guardians of their particular self-interests, is considered to be one of the motives for the state to create corporative institutions. Mansbridge claims that corporative arrangements "*can interject into the negotiations [between groups] greater consideration of the public interest.*" (Mansbridge 92b p 493)

It is possible that corporative arrangements³ have the effect that interest groups act with the public interest before their eyes, but it is unclear why that should be the case (there is a risk that the consideration shown only will include those present around the negotiation table) and this has definitely not been shown empirically. Unfortunately, corporatism also has other democratic drawbacks. Only some organisations are allowed to exert influence this way and the decision-making takes place without public insight.

The possibility of finding institutions that make use of the positive contributions of interest groups, while at the same time minimising their negative consequences, is an interesting challenge. The fundamental question in this dissertation project is if the traditional democratic principle of *publicity* can contribute to that goal. If openness to a larger degree was allowed to characterise the political institutions, would that lead to interest groups acting less selfishly?

The basic idea is derived from deliberative theory.⁴ One of the main assumptions underlying this theory is that publicity censors egoistic and (according to the prevalent moral of the society) immoral *arguments*. It is pragmatically impossible to use these kinds of motives, since one will lose respect and hardly convince anyone. By participating in a public discussion the possibility to use these kinds of arguments are ruled out. (Elster 86 p 112f)

³ Advisory committees or institutions with decision-making authority, to which the state invites (some) affected interest groups.

⁴ As usual when treating a theoretical "school" it is not a homogenous collection of writers. I build mostly upon Miller 93, Elster 86, Mansbridge 92a,b, Gutmann and Thompson 96

That implies only, however, that acting publicly forces you to express concern for the common good *with your lips*. One should not underestimate the creativity of interest groups, as well as that of people in general, when it comes to formulating their egoistic claims in terms of the public interest. The effect of publicity, in the first stage, can therefore be hypocrisy. Selfish interests pursued by noble motives.

Openness is however in deliberative theory a medicine that works in two steps. A second basic assumption of the theory, beside the ability of openness to filter away unacceptable arguments, is that peoples' attitudes, opinions and preferences are formed in conjunctions with other peoples' arguments and opinions. Discussion can change the discussants, albeit perhaps with some time lag. In the long run, an environment where cynical and selfish behaviour is considered illegitimate will create less cynical and selfish actors than a political climate that accepts a more Hobbsian state of nature.

The built-in censoring mechanism of publicity means that the participants repeatedly must formulate their arguments and opinions in terms of the public interest, and listen to the likewise considerate motives of their counterparts. In this way, the message is hammered in.

Consideration of the public interest will eventually trickle down from the surface and hit the genuine preferences. In time, the actors maintain the opinions they first only pretended to have. Elster believes that this effect can be reached either because one is actually convinced by reasonable arguments, or because one cannot for psychological reasons stand the hypocrisy for very long. People want to avoid an unsatisfactory dissonance between statements and actual opinions. (Elster 86 p 113)

Openness and publicity is thus not only a democratic and moral value in itself (Gutmann and Thompson 96), or an instrument that makes possible the competition between arguments that paves the way for the truth (Mill 1859) and for the enlightenment of the people (Dahl 79). The potential of openness as a tool in the service of democracy is even larger, if it can contribute to make political actors (such as interest groups) act less selfishly and inconsiderately. In this way the negative consequences of the inequalities in political influence, would be reduced.

Studying the effects of openness

The purpose of my dissertation project is to study interest groups behaviour in open and closed environments. The basic question is if, when and how the filtering mechanism of openness affects the *appearances* of interest groups. Whether the political discussion also can affect *preferences* is not the topic of this study. It is assumed, though, that representatives of interest groups are not incorrigible selfish “rent-seeking” machines, blind for the values of the world around them and untouched by psychological forces (like the desire to act in a way that matches at least fairly well with one’s opinions).⁵ Thus, it makes a difference whether the political climate encourages or counteracts egoistic appearance.

The question is under what circumstances publicity can contribute to censor openly selfish behaviour. The logic can appear at first to be self-evident, almost trivial. Who would want to be seen as selfish or immoral before a public audience? There is however reason to question under what conditions publicity has such an effect. A more sceptical view is provided by negotiation theory and corporatism-theory, as I will show.

The *behaviour* that will be studied is what messages (information, standpoints, arguments) interest groups put forward in different contexts, characterized by different degrees of openness. It is presumed that, although difficult, it is possible to gather information about what has been expressed behind closed doors on particular issues, through interviews with the participants. Interviews can also be used for general questions about what is considered as appropriate behaviour in different situations.

The claimed effect of publicity is tested by comparing behaviour in environments that to different degrees and in various ways are characterized by secrecy and openness. The arguments of the interest groups are first compared between different “arenas” within a political system. “The internal arena”, “the lobby”, “the conference room” and “the media- and opinion-formation arena” (they are described more thoroughly later in the paper) are in an ascending order characterised by openness. Can the predicted change in behaviour posed by deliberative theory be traced when interest groups switch from a closed to a more public arena?

Second, the appearance of groups in an open, or “transparent”, political system is compared with that in a closed system – Sweden and the European Union. The “principle of publicity” that governs the Swedish public administration⁵, is considered to have played a large role for the administrations reputation of objectivity, impartiality and lack of corruption. The EU, on the other hand, is often criticised for its lack of transparency. Documents are seldom made official and information on how different issues are pursued is only selectively leaked to those who know their way in Brussels. The public is largely kept out and often unaware of what is going on.

It is not unreasonable to imagine that the “principle of publicity”, as a democratic institution, has an effect on the interest groups that seek to influence the decision-making and administrative authorities. Successful lobbying implies providing the decision-maker with solutions to his/her political problems. These “problems” will have a rather different character, when one has to give reasons for one’s decisions that show at least some consideration of the public interest, because one knows that one’s act will be made official. The interest group should therefore come up with some generally acceptable motivation for their claims, if they want to please the decision-maker.

There are also major differences between Sweden and the EU, when it comes to the prerequisites for a “public discourse”. The media-structure, the language differences, the lack of common interests, together with the absence of democratic accountability of the EU institutions, implies that the “media- and opinion-formation arena” has a different significance for interest groups working in Brussels, compared to nationally based groups. It can be argued that the “public arena” is *less public* in the EU than in the member states. Thus, the deliberative hypothesis can also be tested in a comparison of how interest groups act on the “media- and opinion-formation arena”, in the EU and in Sweden.

“Institutions matter”, is a common phrase among political scientists today. The idea here is to try out the *institution of openness* in several ways, to study what role it plays for the “input” of interest groups (the verbal messages they put forward) to political decision-making processes. It is

⁵ That view is shared by Mansbridge (92b) and Heclo (78). Mansbridge uses the concept of “ideological shirking” to describe the phenomena of representatives of interest groups using “for the public interest the time and effort that they were theoretically paid to use only in the narrow private interests of the members of their groups”. (Mansbridge 92b p 498)

⁶ All documents that are produced within government authorities, as well as all documents that are received by authorities from outside, are official, unless there are special reasons for keeping them secret (which has to be motivated). Civil servants also have a constitutional right to leak *secret* information (with some restrictions concerning the “safety of the Nation”) anonymously to the press.

possible that an increase in openness sometimes has the effect that deliberative theory anticipates, but in other cases is insignificant or even has the reverse effect.

The dissertation will be a study of the arguments and opinions interest groups express, but also of which channels they use to forward them. In a survey to a large number of organisations in Sweden and Brussels, information will be gathered about the use of different channels of influence – which political strategies are used (regularly, sometimes, never), which are considered most important, what changes over time are perceived?⁷ Similar studies have been conducted on the activities of American interest groups (Schlozman and Tierney 86, Walker 91, Kollman 98, Nownes and Freeman 98, Leech 98), and the questions will be worded so a comparison with the American results will be possible.

Knowledge of which channels the interest groups use for promoting their arguments and opinions gives a picture of the *significance* of the eventual effects of openness in the different political systems. If the less public strategies (lobbying, participation in corporate arrangements and advisory committees) dominates largely, while the “media- and opinion-formation arena” is weak, the interest group system will be characterised more by selfishness, *if* there is a clear effect of the kind that deliberative theory predicts.

From the perspective of the research on EU-lobbying, a systematic study of interest group strategies across policy sectors, with comparisons made with other political systems, is welcomed. Quite a few valuable case studies have been made, but the lack of comparative studies implies that “the emerging pattern of EU-lobbying” still needs to be better understood. There is a risk that the mistake made by the students of American interest groups is repeated: too many incomparable case studies and too few comparative studies. (Baumgartner and Leech 98)

⁷ Approximately 15 examples of political strategies that are used on the three “arenas” (“the lobby”, “the conference room” and “the media- and opinion-formation arena”) are given. E.g. “serving on governmental advisory commissions or boards”, “direct personal contacts with authority X, Y, Z...”, “talking with people from the press and media”, “holding press conferences”, “inspiring letter-writing or telegram campaigns to public officials” etc.

A more sceptical view of openness

In the perspective of deliberative democracy, collective decisions are viewed as products of an ongoing discussion between actors who are receptive to each other's arguments and perspectives. Ideally, this will lead to decisions characterised by mutual understanding and legitimacy. Those who do not want to go so far as to say that consensus can be reached on all issues hold that a rational discussion at least can make clear where the dividing lines goes and what the alternatives are. (Miller 93, Gutmann and Thompson 96)

Mansbridge describes the deliberative process as a broad ongoing "*probing of volitions*" (Mansbridge 92a p 35). Political actors give and take arguments and opinions in their contributions to the discussion. Interest groups have an important role in this continuing discussion, according to Mansbridge. Even what seem to be "one-way" messages (like political advertisements) can be viewed as contributions to the discussion.

In negotiation theory other aspects of the interaction between actors in collective decision-making processes are emphasised. (Lax and Sebenius 86, Kramer and Messick 95, Elgström and Jönsson 98) Traditionally, negotiation theory has been used mostly in relation to international diplomacy and labour market relations, but in recent years social scientists have increasingly started to stretch out its applications to collective decision-making processes in general. (Kolb 97) According to Lax and Sebenius negotiations prevail when there is a mutual dependence between the parties involved, a conflict of interests and strategic opportunistic behaviour.

A rational deliberative discussion, according to Elgström and Jönssons definition of "negotiation", is one of several ways to negotiate. In their terminology, negotiations can be characterised more or less by "problem-solving" or "bargaining". "Problem-solving" can imply a rational discussion, where the participants reach a common decision by convincing each other with arguments. "Log-rolling" or "market exchange" is a different way of reaching an agreement that satisfies the parties involved. "Bargaining" describes a situation where the actors stick to their pre-chosen preferences and show no desire to cooperate. Voting may then be the result, if a decision is taken at all.

The idea that individuals in some situations can convince each other to change opinions and reach common decisions through reasonable argumentation thus exists within both negotiation theory and deliberative theory. However, the two “schools” have completely diverging views of the role of *publicity*, in this matter. Interestingly, openness has a different effect according to negotiation theory compared with deliberative theory. They agree that openness can constitute a censoring force that filters out certain arguments, but the two theories have completely different opinions about which arguments can be uttered and which are taboo.

The conclusion that can be drawn from negotiation theory is, contrary to the belief of deliberative theory that publicity produces less “dirty” arguments, that openness leads to more selfish arguments and less consideration of the common good. In public, the parties will enact in “bargaining” rather than “problem-solving”. Closeness and secrecy are in fact necessary conditions for making possible collective decisions characterised by consideration to common interests: *“The fact that most negotiations are held behind closed doors has, according to all experiences, a positive effect on the results. The parties can act in a more flexible and less prestigious manner than what is possible publicly.”* (Elgström and Jönsson)

The reason why publicity can lead to more arguments in line with narrow group interests, rather than more consideration to the public interest, is that the leaders of the organisations enjoy more freedom of action with respect to their *members* when they act without public insight. It is believed that they are more prone to show respect for their counterparts’ arguments and preferences, and make concessions to reach compromises, behind closed doors. In a public situation, they must show the members that they strongly represent their interests. The members are assumed to be less understanding about the concessions that compromise requires.

A similar sceptical view of openness exists within *corporatism-theory*. One of the characteristic features of corporatism is that decision-making takes place around the conference table behind closed doors. The state invites the major organisations to discussions and thereby gives them a possibility to exert influence. In exchange, the state expects the leaders of the organisations to legitimise the decision among their members. Thereby open conflicts between important groups in society can be avoided.

Public insight into the conference-rooms of corporatism is considered an obstacle for agreements between the conflicting interests. (Streek and Schmitter 85, Quirk 89) The public, especially the members of the organisations, should be kept out of the negotiation process: "...*negotiations among interest group elites must be kept informal and secretive in an effort to insulate them as much as possible from ... dissidents within the associational ranks*". (Streek and Schmitter 85 p 13)

Apart from the lack of openness, corporatism has an additional important democratic limitation: not all concerned groups are invited to the discussions. Only the large dominating organisations are given the possibility to exercise influence through this kind of close and formalised cooperation with the state.

Thus, there is a risk that the increased consideration of the public interest that the closed deliberation might lead to, compared to single lobbying actions, only partly is "public". There is a considerable possibility that the consideration shown only will apply to the parties present around the conference table. Research on "policy networks" shows that common norms, values and perspectives can be developed within tight networks of elite-groups (interest groups, authorities, experts), in conflict with outsider groups. (Daugbjerg 98, Rhodes and Marsh 92)

Negotiation theory and corporatism-theory points to an interesting democratic dilemma. It seems to be difficult to combine openness with the goal of stimulating organised interests to motivate their standpoints in an unselfish public-concerning way. There is a risk that the sympathetic attitude towards the other parties, that at least sometimes characterise the closed negotiations of corporative institutions and policy networks, is reversed into stubborn egoistic group-behaviour, when the representatives of interest groups are forced to act in the public light. It seems that the political-institutional engineer must choose between openness and considerate behaviour.

Deliberative theory can be interpreted as a challenge to the view that such a dilemma exists. On the contrary, deliberative theory claims, openness is a precondition for the political discussion to be public-regarding. Publicity forces interest groups to "launder" their arguments. The egoistic group interests must be moderated or hidden behind generally acceptable arguments.

Whether publicity tends to make interest groups more attentive to the public interest in their appearances, or more prone to defend openly their own private interests, is an *empirical* question that will be studied in the dissertation.

The audience determines the message

Both deliberative theory and negotiation theory are highly general theories. Their description of how openness and secrecy affects behaviour can be applied to a wide variety of decision-making processes with different types of actors in different contextual settings. The fact that they exist on a high level of abstraction also implies that they must make simplifying assumptions about the complicated reality they reflect. Therefore, they can appear a bit "clumsy" when applied at a more concrete level.

The research on interest group activities and political strategies is closer to the empirical phenomena to be studied in this project. Thus, it is not surprising that this field has a different approach to the role of publicity for interest groups, than deliberative theory and negotiation theory. The later theories view openness as a contextual variable that characterises the arena on which the actors discuss or negotiate with each other. For the pluralistically oriented (to be distinguished from corporatism-theory) research on interest groups, publicity most often means the media, and is seen as one of several channels through which groups can promote their interests. Several studies treat "media use" as a dependent variable. (Walker 91, Kollman 98, Leech 98)

The "agenda-setting" literature is relative to the pluralistic interest group research. In this tradition, politics is seen as a struggle to win the "audience" over to one's side. (e.g. Schattschneider 60, Baumgartner and Jones 93, Cobb and Ross 97) The most important strategy for actors seeking influence over politics is to control who gets involved in the conflict. By seeking allies in the "audience" (groups and individuals who are not yet involved) an interest group can "expand the conflict", in the terminology of Schattschneider, to improve its chances of forming a winning coalition.

From this viewpoint, the outcome of the political process is determined by which actors that participate in the game. *"The agenda-setting literature is rooted in the perspective that all conflicts are potentially expansive"*, Cobb and Ross writes. *"As that expansion occurs, the nature of the conflict, the key actors, and the definitions of significant issues change, and new dimensions are added."* (Cob and Ross 97 p 4f) The idea that the outside audience has an essential role for the outcome of the political process is

markedly different from the corporatist view. In a system of corporatism the important political game is played directly between the leaders of the dominant organisations and the state (which is seen as a unitary actor). The public is kept outside.

The focus on the audience in the agenda-setting literature makes clear that *openness* is a more complicated phenomenon than what is implied by deliberative theory and negotiation theory. It also clarifies why the two schools of thought disagree on the effect of openness on the actor's behaviour: they have different views of "*who*" the public is. In the perspective of negotiation theory, interest group representatives act before their *members* when they appear publicly. Deliberative theory assumes that the audience is "*the general public*" (or at least actors concerned with the "public interest").

The simple answer given by the agenda-setting literature is that the content of the message is determined by which audience the actor turns to. If the audience is perceived to be comprised of members, then the group's interests are probably emphasised. However, if the audience is seen as the "general public", one would rather put forward arguments that go along with the public interest.

The view of the "public" within negotiation theory and deliberative theory, as composed only by members and "the general public" respectively, is too narrow and rigid in the perspective of the agenda-setting literature. The later school has a more diversified view of the audience. It *varies* who is the target in the public actions taken by interest groups. Depending on the political situation, the interest group might want to involve in the conflict "the general public" or parts of it, some authority, an interest group or some other elite actor. The target of the conflict expanding action determines how the message is formulated.

The members of interest organisations are seldom seen as the target audience in the agenda-setting literature. The concept of "conflict expansion" indicates that the "crowd" consists of "not-yet-involved" actors. That means that the assertion of deliberative theory that publicity censors selfish arguments probably holds also in an agenda-setting perspective. However, that does not imply that interest groups must use arguments that emphasise the public interest. Instead, specially tailored messages can be used to bring a particular actor (an authority, a political party or some group in society) over to one's side. The message should then be formulated to make the specific target-group aware of the interest it has to defend in the political conflict.

Hence, it is possible to imagine arguments put forward publicly, that appeal to the egoistic interests of *other* groups.

It seems as if the political strategists in the leadership of interest groups have a much more complicated task acting publicly than what is implied by especially deliberative theory. It is not just a matter of reformulating the arguments to be more in line with the interests of the general public. A group representative also has to consider the members and other potential coalition partners in the audience. It is probably common that the demands of the different audiences conflict.⁸

“Framing and “non-contradictory debates”, rather than a rational discourse

The “rational discourse” of deliberative theory should be seen as an ideal rather than a description of reality, at least when it comes to “the public discourse” in modern democracies. (Gutmann and Thompson 96) For the theory to be taken seriously in a national context, however, it must at least be *imaginable* to achieve a situation that somewhat resembles a rational discussion on an aggregated level. The picture given by the empirical agenda-setting research of how the public “discussion” actually works must be considered a difficult challenge for the deliberative theory.

The ideal deliberative discussion can be described as an exhibition in the art of rational impartial argumentation. The participants respectfully consider each other’s arguments and strive to clarify misunderstandings, specify the alternatives, and if possible reach a common position. The description in the agenda-setting literature of how “the public discourse” really works – meaning the debate in *media* – is something totally different. Action on the “public arena” is considerably more subtle and manipulative than the almost mechanical exchange of opinions and arguments of the “rational discourse”.

The concepts of “framing”, “social construction” and “issue-definition” (Baumgartner and Jones 93), frequently used in the agenda-setting literature, illustrates the substantial scope that actors have to *create* on their own the political reality they discuss. This phenomena is hardly easy to combine with the idea that deliberation shall clarify which alternatives “exist”. (Gutmann and

Thompson 96, Miller 93, Elster 86) In the agenda-setting literature the importance of being able to influence the definition of the problem, is repeatedly emphasised. By establishing the “right” definition you can control the expansion of the conflict and thereby bring together a winning coalition.

Since the “privilege of problem-formulation” is such an important instrument of power, the political actors, at least the strategically skilful, will work hard to promote their definitions, concepts, formulations and symbols. The effect is that political debates, to which there is an audience, often is, in the words of Baumgartner and Jones, “non-contradictory”. In their effort to defend their own perspectives on the issue, the participants in the discussion never respond to their counterpart’s arguments.

The fact that the “public discourse” in a modern democracy almost entirely is conducted in the media has important consequences for how it is performed. To reach out with their messages publicly, the political actors need to adjust their formulations in accordance with the “news criteria” of the media. Consequently, the dominating result of the comparison between how interest groups argue on the “media- and opinion-formation arena” and the closed settings of “the lobby” and “the conference room” (see below), may be “media orientation” rather than “group orientation” or “consideration of the public interest”.

“Media orientation” suggests emphasis on emotional pictures and symbols, which is very unlike the intellectual exchange of arguments of the rational discourse. The agenda-setting literature often stresses the importance for political success of being able to tie one’s messages to emotionally loaded and easily comprehensible symbols. Those who intellectualise lose: *“Too often those who advocate a more rational approach fail ... the message must also appeal at a gut emotional level.”* (Cobb and Ross 97 p 15)

For this dissertation project, the important conclusion to be drawn from the agenda-setting literature is that the media forces political actors to argue less rationally and more emotionally and symbolically, compared with what is possible in the closed arenas. It is also important to note that “media orientation”, “symbolic and emotional argumentation”, “framing” and “non-contradictory debates”, is the complete opposite of the deliberative “rational discourse”.

⁸ This situation can be compared with Sjöbloms description of how political parties act on different *arenas*: the voter

However, even if “the public arena” does function in accordance with the description of the agenda-setting literature, that does not necessarily imply that the particular aspect of the deliberative theory that is examined in this study cannot still be valid. It is still feasible that publicity will *cancel selfish and encourage public-concerning arguments*, irrespective of if the public actions of interest groups fits with the deliberative ideal of a rational discourse (which, anyway, hardly is claimed by any proponent of deliberative theory). It will just not be formulated in the same rational manner that deliberative theory presumes. The counterhypothesis of negotiation theory may also still be correct: the emotional and symbolic arguments may be used to unite the group.⁹ (Cobb and Ross 97, Hardin 95)

Hypotheses

This section will summarise the theoretical discussion, on the effects of openness and secrecy on the behaviour of interest groups, into a set of empirical hypotheses. What can be expected, according to the various theoretical perspectives, when it comes to the “input” (information, standpoints, arguments) of interest groups, when they shift from a closed to a more public environment?

The closely related question of who the *audience* is perceived to be, when interest groups act publicly, is also asked. In addition, there is reason to believe that interest groups pursue their messages through different channels, which to varying degrees are characterised by publicity, in Sweden, the EU and the USA. Variation in behaviour will also depend on the type of group and the issue.

arena, the member arena and the parliamentary arena. (Sjöblom)

⁹ Most often, however, it is assumed that interest groups seek to establish their perspectives and problem-definitions as broadly as possible. They want to bring over to their side as big a part as possible of the audience (the general

Closed and open arenas

Four different types of “arenas” of importance for interest groups are distinguished for the analysis. They exist both at the national level and at the EU level and capture roughly the most significant contexts where interest groups appear. The value of this distinction lies in the fact that the four arenas can be ordered according to the degree of openness to which they are exposed. In ascending order “*the internal arena*”, “*the lobby*”, “*the conference room*”, and “*the media- and opinion-formation arena*” are characterised by publicity. In accordance with the theoretical discussion, different behaviour can be expected from the various arenas.

The hypothesis that transparency in the decision-making- and administrative institutions affects the way interest groups argue implies that differences can be expected between the EU and Sweden on the *same* arenas (at least “the lobby” and “the conference room”), due to the Swedish “principle of publicity”.

“*The internal arena*” refers foremost to the discussion within the leadership of the organisation. The communication with the members, through newsletters and other kinds of information material, can also be considered a part of the internal arena. (That, however, makes the distinction towards the “media- and opinion-formation arena” a bit more difficult to make.)

“*The lobby*” indicates direct contacts with politicians and civil servants. It can be personal meetings, telephone calls, or written information. The situation is characterised by lack of openness: no other actor takes part of the communication between the representative of the interest group and the decision-maker. Nevertheless, “the lobby” requires that the interest group argue in a way that it can justify at least before the official, and is therefore considered more public than the internal arena.

“*The conference room*” refers to committees and institutions, advisory or with decision-making authority, set up on the initiative of some authority and composed by interest groups and other experts. In this setting, the interest group representatives act in front of both the officials they wish to influence, and their potential competitors. Thus, the audience is larger than in “the lobby”, as is the risk for leaks to the public outside, which means there is a higher degree of

public and elite groups). Since different parts of the audience have varying interests and share different norms, the messages therefore should be linked to general symbolic values.

openness. The conference room also requires interest groups to participate in discussions and respond to the arguments of the other parties involved.

“The media- and opinion-formation arena” is the most public of the four arenas. It contains the contributions of interest groups to “the public discourse”. The theoretical discussion above, however, showed that “the media- and opinion-formation arena” is a coarse categorisation. The agenda-setting literature points out that actors on “the public arena” can direct their messages to different audiences. Since one basic hypothesis behind this dissertation is that the content of the message varies with the audience, it is important to specify which different audiences interest groups focus on when they act on “the media- and opinion-formation arena”.

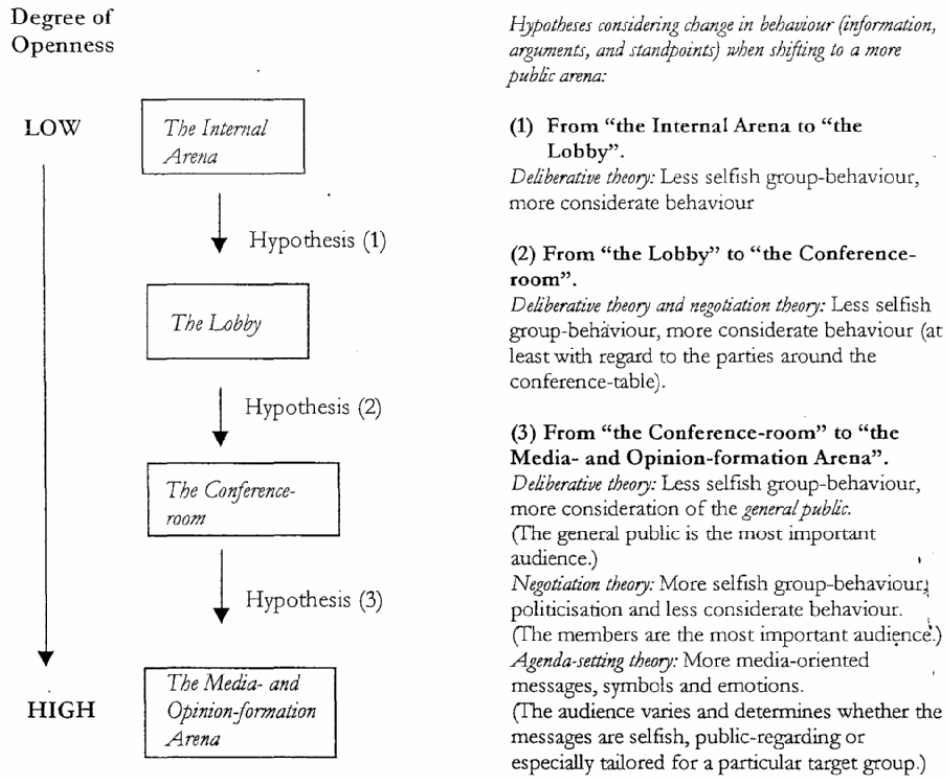
A distinction is made between three different types of “target audiences” on “the media- and opinion-formation arena”: *the members*, *the general public*, and *elite-groups*. To what extent interest groups generally turn to the members, the general public or elite-groups is a question for the quantitative part of the project. That question is closely connected to the theoretical problem of the effect of openness on behaviour. The agenda-setting literature expects the audience to vary, when interest groups act on the “the media- and opinion-formation arena”. In negotiation theory, the members dominate the focus of the leadership, while deliberative theory implies that the general public is the most significant audience on this arena.

Different medias reach different audiences. A few broad news companies reach large parts of the public, including elites. Interest groups can also attempt to get their messages through in more specialised medias, depending on which target audiences they are aiming at.

The effects of increased publicity between different arenas within a political system

The theoretical ideas presented so far give rise to a number of hypotheses that can be tested empirically. Hopefully, two figures can be helpful in making the presentation clearer. Figure 1 summarises the hypotheses that will be tested with regard to the effect of the different degrees of openness of the four “arenas” on the interest groups appearances.

Figure 1. Hypotheses considering variation in interest group action¹⁰ between different arenas, varying in their degree of openness (within a political system).



¹⁰ In the short run, which is the perspective of this study, it is foremost the *arguments* that are expected to change. If the argument that the short-sighted effect of publicity (“public-consideration”, according to deliberative theory) in the long run affects the actors preferences is accepted, one can expect for the longer time-frame that the standpoints will be modified so that the actors “come to believe what they earlier only pretended to believe” (Elster).

The effects of different degrees of transparency between "political systems"

The Swedish "principle of publicity" is considered an important factor to explain the relative objectivity, impartiality, and lack of corruption in the Swedish administration. The awareness of the fact that everything that is finally put on paper can be made official, requires the officials to motivate their standpoints with regard to the public interest. The question is if this in turn increases the demands on interest groups to formulate their messages more according to general principles, with the effect that the argumentation of interest groups becomes less selfish? Is it a fact that the further away from the watching eyes of the media and the public, the more inconsiderately interest groups behave?

Figure 2 illustrates the hypotheses following the comparison between the EU and Sweden: the first being (for the public) a closed political system lacking common medias and a common "public discourse", the second being an open (*transparent*) political system with a homogenous media structure and a reasonably functioning "public discourse". The degree of transparency matters for the officials and, according to hypotheses (4) and (5) in figure 2, also for interest groups trying to influence them.

"The media- and opinion-formation arena" in the EU is different from the Swedish in several important aspects. The lack of democratic accountability and the rather indifferent attitude of the public and the media towards most political issues in the EU, makes it reasonable to assume that officials in Brussels are *less sensitive to public opinion* than decision-makers on the national level. Public opinion is on most issues less important in Brussels than in the member states.

Moreover, the media structure at the EU-level is very heterogeneous compared with the national level. The language problem is a major obstacle, as is the fact that national news affects people more closely. A European "public discourse" barely exists. A few media companies have an international audience (The Financial Times, The European Voice, The European) but they hardly reach outside specially interested elite groups. (Who nevertheless can be very important for interest groups, but probably do not require the same kind of arguments as the audiences of broad national newsmedias.)

The differences between “the media- and opinion-formation arenas” in the EU and in the member states probably have important effects on how interest groups act on these arenas. First, one should expect activities on “the media- and opinion-formation arena” to be overall less important and less frequently used on the EU level. Compared to democratic political systems “outside lobbying” is probably not as important in the EU as in the member states.

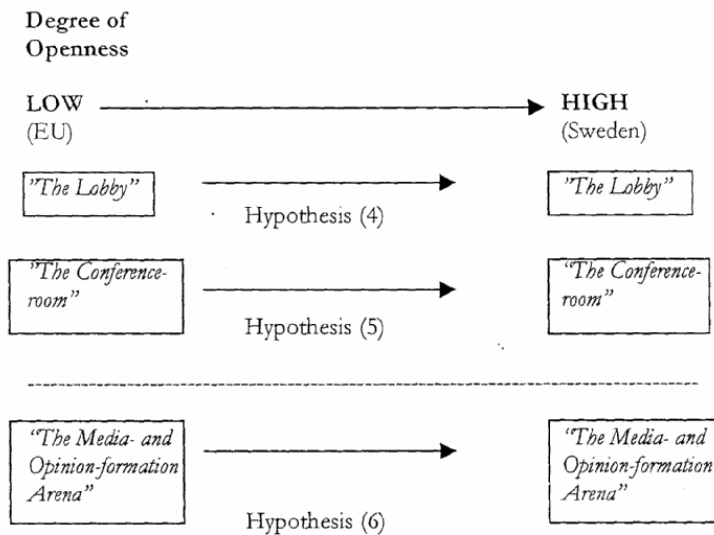
The growing literature on the activities of organised interests in Brussels has almost entirely focused on direct contacts with decision-makers. (Greenwood and Aspinwall 98, Mazey and Richardson 93, Van Schendelen 93, Van Schendelen and Pedler 94) To what extent interest groups after all do use “the media- and opinion-formation arena”, and for example try to take advantage of the many correspondents in Brussels, is therefore largely unknown. It is a question that shall be dealt with in the quantitative part of the project.¹¹

Second, it is reasonable to expect that the actions on “the media- and opinion-formation arena”, when it occurs, is directed more towards elite groups and less towards the general public (and possibly also the members¹²), than what is the case at the member state level (hypothesis 6). Elite medias are expected to be the most interesting for interest groups in Brussels.

¹¹ Preliminary interviews with interest groups and PA/PR-consultants made in Brussels indicate that direct contacts dominate, but media strategies are considered far from unimportant.

¹² It is reasonable to assume that most members, it may be individual members, companies and national organisations, follow the organisation leaders more closely in the national setting than in Brussels. The Brussels-based organisations, thus, enjoy more freedom of action with respect to their members.

Figure 2. Hypotheses considering variation in interest group action¹³ between different “political systems” characterised by varying degrees of openness.



Hypotheses considering the effects of shifting from a transparent political system with a functioning political discussion to a closed system

(4) From “the Lobby” in the EU to “the Lobby” in Sweden.

Less selfish group-behaviour, more considerate behaviour

(5) From “the Conference Room” in the EU to “the Conference Room” in Sweden.

Less selfish group-behaviour, more considerate behaviour

(6) From “the Media and Opinion-formation Arena” in the EU to “the Media and Opinion-formation Arena” in Sweden.

Less elitistically directed messages. The general public and the organisation members more important as audiences. Behaviour will be more selfish or considerate depending on which part of the audience is in focus.

¹³ Foremost the *arguments*. See note 10.

Additional questions

The survey will ask questions about the use of various political strategies: which strategies are used¹⁴ (regularly, sometimes, never), which are considered most important, what changes over time are perceived? Similar American studies exist and approximately the same questions will be used to make a comparison possible. (Schlozman and Tierney 86, Walker 91, Kollman 98, Nownes and Freeman 98, Leech 98)

What part of the audience on “the media- and opinion-formation arena” interest groups perceive as most important is closely connected with expected behaviour. The three theoretical perspectives provide different answers: deliberative theory – *the general public*, negotiation theory *the members*, agenda setting theory – *the audience varies*. There will be a question dealing with this in the survey.

Different *types* of interest groups – trade associations, companies, unions, “public interest” groups, professionals – emphasise different strategies. The type of members the organisation has and the leadership’s dependence on their members, affects the choice of strategy (Walker 91), and possibly the content of the arguments. The *issue*, and the political situation surrounding it, is another variable that should be controlled for in the analyses.

Method

Something should be said about the methodological questions, although short. It is a complicated task finding credible information about these questions. Nobody wants to appear as a selfish hypocrite. The methodological problems are difficult, but hardly insurmountable.

Three different kinds of data collection are possible. A survey will be sent to a couple of hundred interest groups of different types in Brussels and in Sweden. The survey will include questions concerning the use of different strategies, perceived changes in the use of strategies over time,

¹⁴ As described in note 9 approximately 15 examples of political strategies are given. E.g. “serving on governmental advisory commissions or boards”, “direct personal contacts with authority X, Y, Z...”, “talking with people from the press and media”, “holding press conferences”, “inspiring letter-writing or telegram campaigns to public officials” etc.

and the question of who is seen as the major audience on “the media- and opinion-formation arena”.

When it comes to the question of how the interest groups change their appearance depending on the degree of openness in the contextual environment, there are (at least) two possible methods, which can be combined. First, a few case studies can be selected where similar issues are followed through the four “arenas” (“the internal arena”, “the lobby”, “the conference-room” and “the media- and opinion-formation arena”) both in the EU and in Sweden. By interviewing the representatives of the organisations and the officials involved, using a traditional “police-detective” method, a picture can be drawn of how the messages have been formulated on the different arenas. Written material such as protocols and internal documents should of course be used, to the extent that they can be found.

Second, interviews can be done with representatives of interest groups and officials, focusing on what is *generally* perceived as a suitable behaviour in the different situations: how is an interest group representative expected to act in a certain situation, how does he/she perceive his/her role on the various “arenas” etc. What can be said in “the lobby” that one never would express in “the conference-room” or in front of a news reporter? How one perceives one’s role, and the expectations on it, largely determines one’s actions.

References

- Baumgartner, Frank R. and Leech, Beth L. (1998) *Basic Interests. The Importance of Groups in Politics and in Political Science* Princeton University Press, Princeton
- Baumgartner, and Jones, Bryan D. (1993) *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* University of Chicago Press, Chicago
- Cobb, Roger W. and Ross, Marc Howard (1997) *Cultural Strategies of Agenda Denial* Lawrence, University Press of Kansas
- Dahl, Robert A. (1979) "Procedural Democracy" in Laslett P. and Fishkin J.: *Philosophy, Politics and Society* 5th Series, pp 97-133, New Haven; Yale University Press
- Daugbjerg, C (1998) *Policy Networks Under Pressure: Policy Reform, Pollution Control and the Power of Farmers*. Aldershot; Ashgate
- Elgström, Ole and Jönsson, Christer (1998) *Negotiations in the EU: Problem-Solving or Bargaining?* Paper presented at the Third Pan-European International Relations Conference and Joint Meeting with the International Studies Association, Vienna, September 16-19, 1998
- Elster, Jon (1986) "The market and the forum. Three varieties of political theory." in Elster, Jon and Hylland Aanund *Foundations of social choice theory* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- Gamson, William A. and Wolfsfeld, Gadi (1993) *Movements and Media as Interacting Systems in the ANNALS of AAPSS* 528, July 1993 s 114-125
- Goodin, Robert E. (1986) "Laundering Preferences" in Elster, Jon and Hylland, Aanund *Foundations of Social Choice Theory* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- Greenwood, Justin and Aspinwall, Marc (eds) (1998) *Collective Action in the European Union: Interests and the New Politics of Associability* Routledge; London

Gutmann, Amy and Thompson, Dennis (1996) *Democracy and Disagreement*.
Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press

Hardin, Russel (1995) *One for All. The Logic of Group Conflict*
Princeton, NY, Princeton University Press

Heclo, Hugh (1978) "Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment" in King Anthony (ed.)
The New American Political System Washington, DC, American Enterprise Institute

Kolb, Deborah M. (1997) Review of: Kramer, Roderick M. And Messick, David, M. (eds.)
Negotiation as a Social Process (Newbury Park, CA, Sage, 1995) in *Administrative Science Quarterly*
September 1997

Kollman, Ken (1998) *Outside Lobbying. Public Opinion & Interest Group Strategies*
Princeton University Press, Princeton

Kramer Roderick M. and Messick David M. (1995) *Negotiation as a Social Process*
Sage; Thousand Oaks, CA

Lax, David A. and Sebenius, James K. (1986) *The Manager as Negotiator. Bargaining for Cooperation
and Competitive Gain* London, Macmillan

Leech, Beth L. (1998) *Lobbying Strategies of American Interest Groups*
Ph.D. Diss., Texas A&M University

Lewin, Leif (1991) *Self-Interest and Public Interest in Western Politics*
Oxford, Oxford University Press

Mansbridge, Jane (1992a) "A deliberative theory of interest representation" in Petracca, Mark
(ed.) (1992) "The Politics of Interests. Interest Groups Transformed" Boulder, Westview

Mansbridge, Jane (1992b) "A deliberative perspective on neocorporatism" in *Politics & Society*
December 1992, Vol. 20, Issue 4, p493-506

Mazey, Sonia and Richardson, Jeremy J. (1993) *Lobbying in the European Community*
Oxford; Oxford University Press

Mill, John Stuart (1859/1967) *On liberty* Stockholm, Natur och Kultur

Miller, David (1993) "Deliberative Democracy and Social Choice" in Held, David (ed.) *Prospects for Democracy*. North, South, East, West. Cambridge, Polity Press

Nownes, Anthony J. and Freeman, Patricia (1998) Interest Group Activity in the States in *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 60, No. 1, February 1998, 86-112

Quirk, Paul J. (1989) "The Cooperative Resolution of Policy Conflict" in *American Political Science Review* 83, s905-21

Rhodes, R.A.W. and Marsh, D. (eds.) (1992) *Policy Networks in British Government*
Oxford; Clarendon Press

Schattschneider, E.E. (1960) *The Semi-sovereign People. A Realist's View of Democracy in America*
Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York

Schlozman, Kay Lehman and Tierney, John T. (1986) *Organized Interests and American Democracy*
Harper & Row Publishers, New York

Sjöblom, Gunnar (1968) *Party Strategies in a Multiparty System* Lund, Studentlitteratur

Streek, Wolfgang and Schmitter, Phillippe (1985) "Introduction" in Streek och Schmitter (eds.)
Private Interest Government Beverly Hills, Sage

Van Schendelen, M.P.C.M (ed.) (1993) *National Public and Private EC Lobbying*
Dartmouth; Aldershot

Van Schendelen, M.P.C.M and Pedler R.H. (eds.) (1994) *Lobbying in the European Union. Companies, Trade Associations and Issue Groups* Dartmouth, Aldershot

Walker, Jack L. Jr. (1991) *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America. Patrons, Professions, and Social Movements* The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor

Weiss, Janet A. (1989) "The Powers of Problem Definition: The Case of Government Paperwork
in *Policy Sciences* 22 s97-121

Öberg, PerOla (1994) *Särintresse och allmänintresse: Korporatismens ansikten*
Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell