Multilevel venue-shopping in Europe

A comparative analysis of interest organizations in four EU member-states

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Abstract. This paper describes and explains the variable extent to which domestic interest organizations seek access to the multiple venues provided by the EU system of governance. Our in-depth analysis of four member-states – France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany – reveals substantial variance in multilevel venue-shopping, differences that disconfirm some descriptive accounts reported in the Europeanization literature. Surprising is that French organizations develop extensive Europeanized network strategies whereas the political strategies of Dutch interest organizations are, compared to other countries, rather weakly Europeanized. Our multivariate analysis reveals that the nature of policy issues significantly explains the extensiveness of multilevel venue-shopping and that generic information on policy sector or the interest organization's political capabilities has little explanatory power. These conclusions are due to a fine-grained measurement instrument that takes into consideration the actors involvement in specific policy issues as well as the fragmented nature of the demand-side of interest group politics.

Introduction

In the early nineties Streeck and Schmitter (1991) formulated the hypothesis that a European transnational pluralist system of interest representation would gradually supplement existing systems of national corporatism. Partially in response to the Streeck and Schmitter thesis, much scholarship started to concentrate on finding a proper characterization of interest group politics at the level of the European Union (EU). Since the last ten years there has been a growing literature on how the development of the unique European interest group system feeds back into traditional modes of interest representation at the member-state level. This research on the adaptation of domestic modes of interest representation is strongly linked to a broader empirical literature on Europeanization, whereby the overarching research question concerns, simply put, how features of the EU system cause a response and the nature of this response within domestic political systems (Eising 2007a). In this area, most scholars categorize interest group research under heading 'the Europeanization of *politics*', namely how does the EU affect meso-level political organizations such as parties and interest groups. Are these actors able to exploit new political opportunities? Do they adapt their political strategies and/or frame their issues of concern differently when confronted with EU issues?

However, the fragmented nature of most research efforts has resulted into a literature that remains ambiguous about how national systems of interest intermediation adapt to a political context where these national systems are increasingly embedded in a supranational system of governance. Underlying this puzzle is the notion that European integration has substantially affected systems of national interest representation, both in terms of the groups that matter for government, the groups that are able to pressurize government, and for the strategies group deploy when seeking political influence. The main purpose of this paper is to offer a more systematic and comparative empirical account of these issues. More concretely, we aim to get a better sense of how domestic groups select among the large supply of access points within the European multi-level political environment. We call this multilevel venue-shopping and we presume that this shopping varies according to member-state, organization type or policy sector. Additionally, we identify and test some factors that explain the occurrence and extensiveness of multilevel venue-shopping. More in particular, we investigate the embeddedness of groups within the domestic political constellation, policy sector and policy specialization, some specific characteristic of the policy-issues groups are involved in and their exchange networks with key domestic institutions.

The paper takes a bottom-up perspective, namely the domestic input into the supranational level and how various factors 'push' groups to transcend borders. We ignore

importance of implementation as well as the direct impact of the EU interest system – the pull-effect of the EU – on the national system. Our starting point is that national groups are confronted with a set of European and international policy issues, issues which challenge them to develop a political influence strategy. The nature of these strategies – more precisely the effort of groups to build lobby-networks at multiple layers of government – forms the empirical core of the paper.

The paper will be structured as follows. The next section outlines the research problem by, first, sketching the effects of political de-bordering on national representational systems and the multilevel nature of interest group strategies, and second, reviewing existing empirical studies. The subsequent section presents our research design. This is followed by an empirical description of how groups in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany seek access at multiple levels of government. The third section describes some explanatory factors and analyses their effect on our dependent variable which measures the extent to which domestic interest groups build diverse multilevel networks.

Studying EU governance and its impact on domestic groups

The notion of transnational pluralism, as introduced by Schmitter and Streeck, implies a denser, more diverse population of interest groups and, because resources are finite, more competition for scarce political resources and a decreasing potential for centralized policy coordination. Moreover, the fact that the boundaries of national political systems are blurring creates exit-options and the opportunity to realize political objectives by by-passing the central government (Hirschman 1970; Bartolini 2005). Such a 'de-bordering' also entails institutional fragmentation whereby different political levels offer specific opportunities for a large number of, often more specialized, interest organizations. In sum, exit-options and specialization mitigate the level of potential competition to be expected in a crowded population of interest organizations. As a result, national interest organizations operate in a complex multilayered political environment. In the past, the coincidence of boundaries led to the institutionalization of interest representation at the nation-state level and the development of distinct national modes of interest representation (e.g. consociationalism in the Benelux countries, statism in France, neo-corporatism in Scandinavian countries). De-bordering, however, leads to a pluralist EU-system with distinct traits (Eising 2008), including a plurality of modes according to which state-society relations can be organized (Falkner 2000). We still know very little, however, on how national interest groups and policy-makers cope with the complexities of the increasing multi-level political environment of the European Union.

During the past two decades interest group scholars started to analyze this puzzle empirically and part of this research has been concentrated on how domestic constellations affect the propensity of domestic groups to make use of EU-level political opportunity structure. A large literature discusses how these developments shape or transform the bias of political representation. To put it bluntly, does Europe disadvantage weaker interests and reproduce existing power constellations or does it empower weak interests and thereby transform power constellations? Yet, although most researchers agree that a substantial relation exists between the embeddedness of an interest groups within the domestic contexts and its inclination to address EU-level actors, the precise nature of this relationship remains unclear, partially due to seemingly contradictory research outcomes.

Generally, two opposite conclusions predominate with regard to how domestic embeddedness relates to multilevel political strategies. On the one hand, there are those who argue that multi-level venue shopping requires substantial capabilities and that especially large players with abundant resources are able to develop such sophisticated strategies. Based on an analysis of data collected among German, British and French business associations, Eising concludes that European integration reinforces existing constellations and re-affirms the position of those players that are already strong (2007b). This is similar to what Beyers labeled as the so-called persistence hypothesis (2002) which states that extensive multilevel networks are related to strong domestic access; groups with strong (weak) domestic access are more (less) likely to be active at the EU-level, i.e. something that resembles what Wessels calls 'national corporatism at the European level' (1999). On the other hand, other researchers show that groups use the EU-level in order to bypass an unfavorable domestic constellation. For instance, Poloni-Staudinger analyses British, German and French data on the activities of environmental groups and concludes that 'as the national opportunity structure begins to close, groups shift their activities to the European level' (2008; see also Marks and McAdam 1996; Fairbass and Jordan 2001). In contrast, when the opportunity structure opened – because parties with a greener platform became part of government – groups were less likely to shift to Europe.

Another point of disagreement concerns the explanation of the relationship between domestic variables and EU-level activities. Basically one can distinguish four types of explanation.

First, there is the argument that domestic interest groups are socialized by national modes of interest representation. The rules, norms and habits adopted in different national contexts may fit well with the modes of policy-making at the European level. Well-known in

this regard is Schmidt's claim that the EU can be best characterized as a semi-pluralist system that opens up for domestic group access and influence. However, in contrast to traditional pluralistic systems the EU is heavily characterized by consensual non-majoritarian modes of policy-making, which makes it similar to a neo-corporatist system of policymaking. In Schmidt's comparison of Germany, France, the UK and Italy it is argued that the EU's multi-level environment makes German actors more at ease in Brussels 'because they have been much more multi-level players than either the French of the British' (2006, 142-3; see also Schmidt 1996; Coen 1998, 97-8; Eising 2007b, 335). The negotiation skills German groups acquire domestically are a valuable asset in an EU context. In contrast, for French groups the political environment of the EU is a rather unfamiliar one; the French statists context is less featured by horizontal negotiations between public and private actors. Although the EU would provide French groups with new opportunities, the clash of the French style of – more closed and often confrontational – interest intermediation makes that French groups are not well-adapted and latecomers in the European lobby-process (2006, 123). Consequently, EU-level activities among French groups remain limited compared to groups originating from neo-corporatist countries such as Germany, Austria, the Netherlands or Belgium. This expectation conflicts with the notion of a compensation hypothesis whereby actors with weak domestic access, mainly situated in statist countries, are eager to seek compensation at the EU-level. Yet, the comparative knowledge about this argument is mixed. While some scholars found evidence in support of this argument (Eising 2007b; Coen 1998; Schmidt 2006), others researchers observed that groups in statists countries (such as France, Spain, Italy) were more likely to target EU institutions compared to neo-corporatist countries such as the Netherlands and Germany (della Porta and Caiani 2007).

Second, most researchers have looked, in various ways, to organizational resources and capabilities. The obvious hypothesis in this regard is that the larger the organizational capabilities, the more interest groups will turn to the EU. This hypothesis is equivalent with the more general notion that the EU empowers the already powerful and tends to reproduce and existing power constellations. The basic idea hereby is that a complex multi-level environment requires many resources in order to be effective. This hypothesis finds support in Eising's research (2004; 2007b), but not all researchers have tested this hypotheses systematically. One of the problems with this variable is its multidimensional nature whereby different proxies for resources may generate different research outcomes. Also the various ways in which this variable has been made operational makes a comparison of research outcomes difficult. For instance, in Eising's research the economic weight of business firms

has a positive impact, but this variable is tested in little other research (2007b). Moreover, the resources of some groups, such as NGOs, cannot be easily measured in terms of economic weight.

A third set of variables concerns not resources as such, but focuses on resource dependencies (not mere resources). Also this is a concept that can be conceived in various ways. One way is to look at the organization's goals and to analyze to what extent an organization depends on EU institutions in order to realize its political goals. Much research shows that the relevance of EU institutions coincides with the policy sector within which a group's goals are situated and, therefore, strategies are likely to depend considerably on this factor (Bennett 1999; Kriesi et al. 2006, 350; Beyers and Kerremans 2007b; Eising 2008). Some groups are active in policy domains where EU competencies are weak or non-existent and where policy benefits are still realized at the national level. Such groups are less pressured to Europeanize their strategies, while groups active in strongly Europeanized sectors will adapt more. Another way to look at resource dependencies focuses on resources that are crucial in terms of organizational survival. Here we can think about dependence on government subsidies, membership dues or the competitive nature of the immediate environment in which groups need to survive. In a recent paper Beyers and Kerremans demonstrate when much energy is spent on managing these sorts of dependencies, less is invested in EU-related policies (2007b). One limitation with this recent analysis, however, is that the dependent variable concerns investment in EU-related policies and not whether these investments are situated at the EU-level and entail political strategies that target EU-institutions.

A fourth set of explanations concerns how groups are politically positioned within their domestic political environment. More concretely we can consider the extent to which groups are close to or far away from a dominant status quo and the political actors representing this status quo. One of the main ideas of multilevel venue-shopping is that once groups are blocked at one policy level, they turn to another level in order to find attention and support for their objectives. This argument resembles what Beyers labeled as the compensation hypothesis, whereby the EU-level is used as a venue that compensates for domestic weakness (2002). The mechanism is more general than EU-studies and covers a broad literature on federalism (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 216-34), protest and contentious politics (Sewell 2001, 51-88) and transnational advocacy (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Those scholars who focused on the preference positioning of interest groups in the EU often arrive at the conclusion that fits into a compensation effect (Fairbass and Jordan 2001; Poloni-

Staudinger 2008).

Interestingly, research that concentrates on compensation focuses on the strategic notion of damage-limitation as a consequence of failed or limited domestic access, while the persistence-argument relies more on the explanatory power of organizational skills and experiences gained through repeated interactions at the domestic level. The question, however, is to what extent these are mutually exclusive mechanisms or not. Unfortunately, little research has been conducted in order to test and compare these hypotheses systematically.

In addition to ambiguity regarding the dependent and explanatory variables, research on this matter is also plagued by methodological and conceptual fragmentation. To begin with, some of the existing ambiguities are due to the fact that scholars use different conceptual categorizations. For instance, because Schmidt classifies the UK as a statist system and Green Cowles puts the UK in the pluralistic camp, both develop contradictory expectations which they see confirmed in their data (Eising 2007a, 178-9; Schmidt 2006; Green-Cowles 2001). Another problem with current empirical research is that scholars rely on very different data-sets. For instance, Rainer Eising's analysis is based on business organizations in the UK, Germany and France and confirms the persistence hypothesis. In contrast, scholars who observe a compensation effect – e.g. Fairbas and Jordan 2001, Poloni-Staudinger 2008 – relied mainly on environment NGOs. Generally, there are very few examples where a diverse sample of groups – including different sorts of NGOs, business and labor organizations – is analyzed. Finally, in measuring lobby contacts – at both the EU and the domestic level – researchers tend to rely on rather crude measures of different institutions and levels of government (Polini-Staudinger 2008, 539-40). Sometimes a simple distinction is made between 'an EU institution' and 'the domestic level' whereby the former category doesn't differentiate to what extent actors with the same nationality play the role as key inter-mediators between the domestic and the EU-level. For example, it is plausible to assume that with regard to the European Parliament national MEPs are easier to access compared to MEPs of other countries. Or, the Council is accessed through the national permanent representative (PR) in Brussels rather than through foreign PRs. Our research design attempts to redress these shortcomings by offering a more fine-grained measurement of lobby-networks and by covering a large variety of interest groups – business, labor and NGOs – in four member-states.

Research design

Our dataset is part of a larger research project on how interest groups interact with

elected and non-elected officials in four member states – Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands[1] – as well at the EU-level. The focus of this project is on the efforts interest groups make to influence the EU's external trade policies in the World Trade Organization (WTO), more particularly in the areas of agriculture, steel/metal and services. One part of this larger project tries to find out whether and if so, how national interest groups have Europeanized their political strategies. Data collection has been based on an elite-survey conducted between May 2003 and February 2006. In this section, we briefly outline the research design by indicating how the fieldwork was conducted and how interest groups were sampled.

One of the problems with elite-surveying concerns the identification of a relevant sample of interest groups. As part of the research questions can only be dealt with in a comparative design, cross-sectional samples that are structurally equivalent and comparable across countries are needed. For each country and the EU-level we aimed at a final sample of 120 completed interviews; 20 with public officials and 100 with interest groups.[2] In addition to this we tried to get a diverse sample with a large variety of interest groups including NGOs, public interests, business interests and labor interests.

Basically, our sample is constructed on the basis of a positional sampling technique for which we screened a large amount of formal sources.[3] From all these sources only interest

[1] These countries represent advanced export-oriented economies with a long and – as founding members of the EU – a shared and similar tradition of multi-lateral co-operation. They differ, however, on some key variables. There is of course the difference between small and large or medium-sized countries. A more important variation though, concerns the varying policy positions of these countries on trade liberalization, ranging on a continuum from a great reserve (France) to a small reserve (the Netherlands). France, for instance, traditionally shows some reluctance and skepticism with regard to further trade liberalization while the Netherlands has traditionally been more in favor. Germany and Belgium are located somewhere in between these two countries, with Belgium being more reluctant towards trade liberalization than the Netherlands, and Germany being more positive on trade liberalization than France. This variation is not only reflected in official government policies of these countries, it is also visible in their respective public opinions on trade (see Beyers and Kerremans 2007a). A comparison between the interest groups system and how this interacts with party and government officials may thus yield interesting results.

[2] Our research project also includes public officials and how they interact with interest groups, but because public officials are only indirectly relevant for the problem we deal with in this paper (the measurement of gaining access to public officials, see below), we do not pay extensive attention the interviews conducted with them.

[3] Because the larger project deals with trade policymaking, we especially focus on sources which list interest groups that are potentially active in this sector. The WTO-website (www.wto.org) contains a number of useful sources ranging from listings of interest groups and civil society organizations attending ministerial conferences, expert meetings, position papers delivered to the WTO and so on. These sources included:

- Joint UNCTAD WTO Symposium (September 1997), to prepare for the High Level Meeting on Least-Developed Countries,
- Symposium on Trade, Environment and Sustainable Development (1998),
- Ministerial Conference Geneva (1998),
- Third Ministerial Conference Seattle (30/11-3/12 1999),
- Work session on services (06/07/01),
- Work session on Trips-access to essential medicines (06/07/01),

groups were retained; think tanks, institutes, policy centers, media actors and individual firms were not considered. There is of course overlap among the different sources. Each interest group has been coded once as soon as the group was mentioned in one of the sources. All these interest groups were coded on the basis of a number of variables such as type of interests (employers, trade unions, NGOs), policy sector in which the group is active and so on. For this, a coding frame was established beforehand and coding occurred through an interactive process among the researchers that included an extensive consultation of external sources (such as monographs, websites and experts). The established list, however, does not correspond with a balanced cross-sectional sample that is structurally equivalent across countries. Two major problems had to be solved.

First, the list was too large as it contains several highly specialized business interest groups that had no link at all to the policy-sectors on which the project focused (external trade policies with regard to agriculture, steel/metal and services). Regarding sectoral business and labor interests we only retained those sectoral associations that have a direct (agriculture/food industry, metal/steel, services) or an indirect link (transport and retailing/distribution) with the policy sectors under investigation. NGOs were retained in the sample as well as cross-sectoral specific interest groups such as cross-sectoral employer unions, trade unions and associations representing small and medium enterprises (SME's).

Second, there was a risk that our sources would generate a biased sample with regard to access and mobilization; less visible and less active organizations run the risk to be excluded.[4] This risk was particularly high for trade unions. Although trade unions play an active part in domestic politics (especially in neo-corporatist countries such as Belgium, Germany, or the Netherlands), they were barely named in the sources mentioned above (Beyers and Kerremans 2007). In order to redress this potential bias, we proceeded as follows. First, for all international and European umbrella organizations mentioned in one of the above sources, we checked whether or not their European or domestic members were already

- Work session on food safety and the SPS agreement (07/07/01),
- NGO's attending the Ministerial Conference in Doha (2001),
- Public Symposium Doha Development Agenda and Beyond (29/04/02 – 01/05/02),
- All position papers for the period 27/10/1998 – 13/11/2002.

From all this we selected the lists of attendance for the Euro-level, Belgian, French, German and Dutch actors. Second, DG Trade of the European Commission has established a Civil Society Dialogue, an open process of consultation to which interest groups may subscribe (http://trade-info.cec.eu.int/civil_soc/intro1.php). Also from this source we retained Euro-level, Belgian, French, German and Dutch actors. Third, we coded all interest groups mentioned in a policy event data set that was developed for the purpose of this project. Fourthly, we added Euro-level, Belgian, French, German and Dutch actors that are listed in the WTO-history project, University of Washington (http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist).

[4] However, it should be noted that some of our sources, such as the EU's Civil Society Dialogue, have a very low access barrier as it mainly functions as a registration database.

included. If not, they were added. Second, for the three policy sectors, we investigated the potential cleavages so that our sample would include varying and/or opposing policy positions. In order to identify the actors connected to these cleavages we used the relational data-set compiled by Bernhard Wessels (*Wissenschaftzentrum Berlin*) which links Euro-level associations to their domestic members (Wessels 2004). Finally, we consulted a number of experts (especially with respect to trade unions) and checked the composition of key advisory bodies at the domestic and the EU-level (such as the EU's Economic and Social Committee) in order to fine-tune the sample with regard to trade unions.

Table 1 gives an overview of the results of the fieldwork regarding the interviews with interest group officials in the four countries.[5] In the table we make a rough distinction between a) NGOs or public interest groups, b) economic/business and employers and c) trade unions. The first group consists of environmental NGOs, consumer NGOs, development NGOs and a small number of women's organizations or organizations representing protest movements. The second group contains cross-sectoral business associations, sectoral business associations (especially in the field of agriculture, services and metal/steel) as well as small 'businesses' such as farmers, professions and small and medium enterprises. Under the category of trade unions we find both cross-sectoral and sectoral employers' associations. Although this categorization in three classes conceals much heterogeneity, our analyses show that much variation in the sample corresponds to this rough distinction.

There is another aspect of the table which needs to be clarified, namely the fact that the sample size differs considerably from country to country. Especially the bigger sample of Belgium and France compared to the smaller sample for Germany is noteworthy. Our sampling was aimed at a structurally equivalent and comparable sample across countries; this does not necessarily mean samples of an equal size. As such, specific institutional and political conditions within the four countries resulted in different sample sizes. Two factors explain the size of the Belgian sample. First, there is the specific nature of the Belgian federation which results in a fairly fragmented interest group system. For instance, whereas in most other countries we find one environmental peak association, Belgium has four environmental peak associations, one for each of the sub-states (Bursens 1997). In addition to this, interest representation by labor unions is quite fragmented with different sectoral and cross-sectoral unions linked to the socialist, liberal and catholic pillars. The fragmentation of

[5] In addition also 146 representatives of government institutions, parliamentarians and political parties were interviewed, but these interviews are not analyzed in this paper. The same project also includes 139 EU-level interest groups and public officials.

the trade union system is even more pronounced for France and explains the larger sample compared to Germany and, to some extent, the Netherlands. In Germany the existence of one big cross-sectoral trade union and its cross-sectoral satellites led to an identification of 15 trade unions of which 13 were sampled. A similar procedure in France led to the identification of 65 trade unions of which only 36 could be sampled.

Table 1. Overview of the sample and fieldwork results (Belgium, Netherlands, Germany and France)

	Belgium	Netherlands	Germany	France	**Total**
NGOs/public interests					
- sample	53	37	36	38	164
- n response (%)	44 (83%)	34 (92%)	28 (78%)	34 (89%)	140 (85%)
Economic/business/employers					
- sample	87	65	73	78	303
- n response (%)	80 (92%)	57 (88%)	52 (71%)	62 (79%)	251 (83%)
Trade unions					
- sample	29	18	13	36	96
- n response (%)	24 (83%)	16 (89%)	10 (77%)	32 (89%)	82 (85%)
Total					
- sample	169	120	122	152	563
- n response (%)	148 (88%)	107 (89%)	90 (74%)	128 (84%)	473 (84%)

Interviews were conducted on the basis of a standardized questionnaire with almost all questions being closed. Key parts of the questionnaire dealt with different characteristics of the political system within which the actors operate, the policy positions of actors with respect to twenty policy issues, their political strategies (including both traditional forms of lobbying as well as outside lobbying) in relation to these issues, the resources actors had at their disposal and invested in political activities, and their embeddedness in domestic and/or European policy networks (by social network analysis). In this paper only a subset of the variables will be used, namely those variables that concern the efforts to seek access to other public and private actors at multiple levels of government. It is important to add that the data do not concern measurements at the level of each individual actors, but at the level of specific trade policy issues in which actors were involved. When interest groups officials were involved in three, two or one issues, they were asked for information on these three, two or one issues respectively. This makes that the size of the analysed data does not equal the number of respondents, but the number of actor-issue interactions.

Multilevel network strategies beyond the national level

In this section, we compare and analyze the different network strategies – the seeking of access – actors deployed on the occasion of different issues in which they were involved. The section is organized as follows. First, we discuss the extent to which different types of

interest organizations in different countries sought contact to different EU-level and international level institutions. As the issues our respondents were involved in concern WTO-related trade policies, it is relevant to consider some non-EU related international venues as well. Second, we analyze to what extent there exists a systematic and cumulative pattern in this data so that it is meaningful to summarize all different venues into one scale which measures the overall extensiveness of the multilevel network strategies.

It is important to note how we conceptualized network strategies, inside lobbying or seeking of access. All network questions during the interview were introduced with a short description so that respondents were presented a similar understanding of what we meant with 'seeking access to'. The statement was worded as follows:

> *In order to prepare policy positions and to affect policies interest groups, politicians and public officials often seek access to other actors. In such contacts, exchange of information is vital. We define 'information' fairly broadly. It may include advice on the best political strategy to be used, knowledge about others' strategy, as well as a range of sometimes confidential technical and scientific expertise. With the subsequent questions we investigate these contacts with respect to the event you selected*

The next three tables present bivariate results for different types of access points, namely transnational interest group (table 2), European institutions (table 3) and venues at the level of the WTO (table 4). For each table we separated the sample into, first, organization types, and, second, nationality. The tables also include Chi^2-tests which help us to focus on the most significant and substantial differences.

Table 2 shows the extent to which domestic interest organizations sought access to different transnational organizations. In order to put the magnitude of transnational contacts in a comparative perspective we put in the first row a dummy-variable which represents the extent to which domestic interest organizations addressed other domestic organizations. It is clear that generally domestic networks prevail over transnational networks. In addition to the opportunity to work with EU-level interest groups, domestic groups may seek collaboration with domestic groups in other member-states (for instance German groups having networks with French groups), international interest groups (such as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions), domestic interests groups in countries outside Europe (for instance in the US, Canada or elsewhere) or domestic interest groups within European countries that are not part of the EU (such as Norway, Iceland, Turkey).

Table 2. Interest group type (percentages, N=567)

Overall (percentages)	Organization type				Country of origin				
	NGOs	Business	Labor	Chi^2 df=2	Belgian	Dutch	German	French	Chi^2 df=3
1. domestic interest groups (84%)	86	84	80	Ns	80	82	96	88	ns
1. Euro-level interest groups (68%)	59	75	70	23.04 p=.0015	58	69	68	79	15.88 p=.0012
2. National groups in other member states (52%)	50	52	53	Ns	56	36	51	61	19.80 p=.0002
3. International interest groups (47%)	53	42	47	Ns	52	48	43	46	Ns
4. National groups outside Europe (41%)	54	39	21	31.99 p<.0001	45	37	42	37	Ns
5. National groups in European countries not part of the EU (21%)	24	21	16	Ns	24	14	21	24	Ns

When we compare all these possibilities, we find some substantial differences between various access-points, different countries and types of interest groups. To begin with, all other non-EU related multi-level and transnational networks are, although not negligible, substantially less important compared to networks with EU-level associations. It appears that French, German, Dutch and Belgian groups are strongly encaged in a European-national framework whereby EU-level interest groups function as a crucial intermediating channel to the European level (68% contact Euro-level interest groups). Yet, groups in these four countries develop substantial transnational networks with other EU member-state level groups (52% of the cases), but it is not always clear to what extent these contacts take place independently from the EU-level contacts. Unfortunately, we didn't systematically measure this. It is plausible to imagine that these European transnational networks result from interactions taking place within EU peak associations and that this variable is strongly correlated with networks developed with EU-level associations.[6]

Some of the groups develop considerable transnational networks, at least more than others. For instance, NGOs seek more contact with other national groups outside Europe and they develop somewhat more contacts with international groups (although not significant). While NGOs have rather strong transnational networks, their networks with EU-level groups are compared to labor and business significantly less dense. The transnational orientation of NGOs can be explained by the fact that several of these groups are involved in development cooperation projects in developing countries, something which ties them to clients outside

[6] Indeed, the variable 'exchange with EU-level interest groups' is significantly related to 'national groups in other member states' (Cramer's V=.33, Chi^2=62.2274, df=1, p<.0001). A similar argument can be made with regard to national interest groups of European states that do not belong to the EU (such as Norway or Turkey). Quite some EU level interest groups (for instance Business Europe) have non-member-state interest groups among their membership.

Europe. Finally, when we look to the labor unions, it appears that they, compared to business and especially NGOs, have the most institutionalized EU-centered networks; they stick most to the domestic level (see Beyers and Kerremans 2007b), they work primarily through EU peak associations and their transnational networks remain confined to other EU-countries.

In addition, when making a distinction according to nationality we observe some interesting differences. Dutch groups develop 20% less contacts with interest groups situated in other EU member-states and also for other transnational contacts, the Dutch have on average a lower percentage than the other countries. A significant difference concerns contacts with EU-level interest groups where we see that Belgian groups are, despite their proximity to Brussels, significantly less interested in Euro-level interest groups. It is not completely clear why this is the case, but possibly the complex multilayered nature of the Belgian polity makes that a large number of groups specialize in policies that are situated at the regional levels.[7] Also remarkable is the higher number of French groups that actively seeks access to Euro-level interest groups, a finding that apparently contradicts an image of French groups as being less Europeanized (see above).

Table 3. Seeking access to European institutions (percentages, N=567)

	Organization type				Country of origin				
	NGOs	Business	Labor	Chi^2 df=2	Belgian	Dutch	German	French	Chi^2 df=3
1. national MEP (62%)	57	66	60	Ns	57	60	60	69	Ns
2. Commission DGs (52%)	49	61	32	26.90 p<.0001	48	41	59	57	11.04 p=.0115
3. National PR (31%)	12	47	26	67.07 p<.0001	30	27	20	36	Ns
4. Commission cabinets (28%)	15	38	25	30.61 p<.0001	25	17	28	39	16.89 p=.0007
5. Other MEP (26%)	28	25	21	Ns	24	17	32	29	9.33 p=.0253
6. Member art. 133 (19%)	12	25	17	14.10 p=.0009	20	21	22	14	ns
7. EP other committees. (15%)	9	23	7	24.04 P<.0001	8	**7**	21	26	29.341 p<.0001
8. EP Rapporteur Trade (7%)	5	11	5	7.37 p=.0251	9	6	4	10	Ns
9. Secretariat Council (7%)	3	10	6	8.58 p=.0137	2	8	4	12	11.84 p=.0079
10. Other PR (5%)	2	7	7	7.4578 p=.0396	6	2	7	6	Ns

Table 3 analyses the seeking of access to European institutions. Let's first look to the overall ranking in the first column. Most contacted are national Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and Commission DGs. The results for the EP are interesting because the

[7] Policy level specialization will be more outspoken in a dual federation compared to a cooperative federation – Germany – or a unitary state – France and the Netherlands.

policy issues to which the responses refer concern issues to be situated in the external trade policy domain, an area in which the EP has few formal competencies. That means that groups seek contact to institutions that are not necessarily the most influential (at least formally or procedurally) or that they build their network for some other reasons than immediate influence. The venues specialized in trade issues – such as committee 133 or the EP committee rapporteur on trade – gain on average less attention than for instance national MEPs or other committees in the European parliament. Probably it is important for interest organizations that MEPs are more pivotal than EC- or Council bureaucrats in generating a public debate on some salient issues; especially groups aiming to increase the scope of political attention will address the EP. In later analyses we'll come back to this issue.

Table 3 shows some relevant differences with regard to the type of interest group and the country where a domestic interest group comes from. To begin with, business interests are much more inclined to network with EC DGs, with the national Permanent Representation (PR), with Commission cabinets, with members of Committee 133, with rapporteurs in the EP and with the secretariat of the Council. The percentages are always higher than those of the NGOs and labor unions. This picture confirms some earlier analyses (see Beyers and Kerremans 2007b; Eising 2008); business is much more Europeanized and these results demonstrate that this general orientation translates into more extensive multilevel strategies. Moreover, it appears that the lobby-efforts of business interests are much more targeted at the institutions that enjoy formal and procedural influence (such as the EC DGs, Committee 133 and the national PRs) in this policy area. Second, when looking at the country of origin it appears that the four countries do not differ much when it concerns seeking access via national intermediaries such national MEPs or the National PR; much access to Europe is sought through these two venues and national intermediaries in the Council or the EP play an equally important role in all four countries. Less prevalent are contacts whereby the origin of the interest organization and the origin of the addressee are not similar (such as contacts with 'other MEPs' or 'other PRs').

There are quite some differences regarding institutions such as the Commission and the EP. Dutch groups show the lowest propensity to lobby with the Commission DGs or the Cabinets; overall the Dutch results are below the level of activity found in the other three countries. The German and the French organizations are most active when it comes to contacting the Commission DGs and cabinets. Although Dutch groups target the EU via their national MEPs, they are, compared to the Belgians and in particular the Germans and the French, less often inclined to rely on non-Dutch MEPs. This image confirms some of our

earlier research findings of Dutch interest organizations as being less Europeanized (Beyers and Kerremans 2007b) and it fits into the results of table 2 which shows that Dutch organizations are, compared to other countries, on average less inclined to Europeanize their policy networks.

As our project concentrates on WTO trade policies, the interview protocol included some venues that specialize in trade. It is not that we expect organizations to concentrate all their efforts on the WTO-venues in Geneva; basically the WTO is an intergovernmental organization. Therefore, it is crucial to convince member-state representatives and/or the EU-delegation. Yet, given the importance of the WTO as a forum for negotiations in this domain, we can imagine that interest organizations try to convince various players who are active in this field. The results confirm indeed that WTO-level agents are far less important than domestic institutions or EU level agents (compare table 4 with table 2 and 3). Basically, the WTO-venue is accessed via the national PRs in Geneva (26% of the contacts); much less through the EU PR or indirectly through the PRs of other WTO partners (such as the US, Canada or Japan). Nonetheless, it is interesting to see how various organizations target this venue. To begin with, labor unions (again) make much less use of WTO-level opportunities compared to NGOs and, especially, business. This confirms earlier analyses whereby we traced the development of the WTO interest group system over time and where we observed labor unions are lagging behind when it comes to WTO-level mobilization (Beyers and Kerremans, 2007a). Second, when we compare the country of origin we see that organizations of bigger states, primarily France (again), are much more actively seeking access to the WTO. Also this confirms some earlier analyses of the involvement of French organizations in the WTO ministerial conferences and corresponds to an earlier finding of French groups being more active in the European multilevel system.

Table 4. Seeking access to WTO venues in Geneva (percentages, N=567)

	Organization type				Country of origin				
	NGOs	Business	Labor	Chi^2 df=2	Belgian	Dutch	German	French	Chi^2 df=3
1. national PR in Geneva (26%)	21	33	19	10.95 p=.0042	20	20	28	37	15.43 p=.0015
2. WTO secretariat (19%)	22	23	6	15.86 p=.0004	4	8	8	5	Ns
3. EU PR in Geneva (11%)	11	15	5	7.73 p=.0210	8	8	8	21	18.92 p=.0003
4. non-EU PR in Geneva (6%)	8	8	0	8.90 p=.0117	10	21	20	27	14.10 p=.0028

These analyses provide an insight for each separate access-point. We observed that

some venues were more easily addressed than others, but we didn't test to what extent the ranking or the importance of access points is something structural or a pattern that is equivalent for each of the countries. We know that Dutch organizations make less use of multiple access points; that French groups are pretty active; that national intermediaries are important interlocutors; and that labor unions generate, compared to other categories less transnational activities. The question is whether these conclusions can be reproduced and conceived as a more of less stable behavioral pattern which summarizes the seeking of access to different venues into a one-dimensional scale that measures the extensiveness of the multi-level political strategies. It is plausible to assume that on average interest organizations tend to use some (more 'easier') network strategies more readily than other (more 'difficult') networks whereby the targeting of distant venues (such as the WTO secretariat in Geneva) is depends on the condition that venues closer to home are already targeted (for instance national MEPs). The opposite, however, the seeking of access to a venue close home, will not necessarily lead to strategies which seek to address distant venues. Such a cumulative pattern resembles the features of a Guttman-scale, a scaling technique quite regularly used for testing learning abilities, whereby test results for difficult items (e.g. calculus) are a conditional on success with easier test items (e.g. simple geometry), and not the other way around.

We used the *Mokken Scale Analysis or Polytomous Items* (MSP) software in order to test whether the data on the different venues approximate the requirement of a Guttman-scale. An advantage of this procedure is that it combines an overall test with separate tests for the four sub-samples. Because the scaling-procedure results in the most optimal ranking of the access-points in terms of the cumulative properties, we can use the results in order to cross-validate and check whether the scale has similar properties in each of the four countries. If this is the case, we are confident that a summed scale score has an equivalent meaning in all countries. Table 5 shows all venues with their rank in the Guttman-scale and the Loevinger's coefficient of homogeneity, which as a rule of thumb needs to be above .30 in order to have a homogeneous scale. Occasionally we have some small deviations; in 8% the Loevinger's H-coefficient for item scalability is lower than .30, but in most of these cases H lies around .25 or higher. The overall scale coefficients for all the data (N=567) as well as the separate country analyses lies well above .30. Therefore, we can conclude that these 19 items approximate quite well a cumulative structure. When looking at the rank (the higher the score the more frequent the venue is addressed), we can see a distinction in terms of distance whereby access-points located further away (Geneva, other member-states PR…) are least likely to be contacted. The Spearman rank-order correlations between the 19 venues in the

overall scale and the separate scales constructed for each different country of origin ranges between .86 and .97, which means that we can confidently conclude that a combination of these venues has a similar meaning for all four member-states. This allows us to combine the 19 access-points into one overarching scale in which each unit change refers to one extra and more distant venue addressed by a domestic interest group. Or, a high score on this scale indicates more extensive efforts to expand international networks, while a low score implies that actors stick more to venues situated mostly at the national level.

Table 5. The ranking of access-points, Guttman-scaling (rank and Loevinger's H)

	All data, N=567 H=.41	Belgian, n=157 H=.36	Dutch, n=157 H=.42	German, n=134 H=.35	French, n=145 H=.47
PR in Brussels (other member-states)	1	3	1	3	2
	.46	.38	.81	.24	.69
Non-European PR Geneva	2	2	6	.08 5	2
	.39	.33	.46	.31	.44
The Council Secretariat	4	1	6	.04 2	4
	.43	.43	.39	.24	.53
Trade Committee in the EP	4	6	2	2	3
	.40	.33	.46	.32	.47
PR of the EU in Geneva	5	5	6	5	6
	.48	.48	.48	.31	.52
Other committees in the EP	6	5	3	8	8
	.41	.39	.31	.32	.49
The Council Committee 113	8	9	12	9	5
	.31	.28	.31	.27	.46
Secretariat of the WTO	8	7	12	6	9
	.43	.28	.41	.42	.51
Groups in non-EU European states	9	10	7	8	7
	.35	.29	.32	.34	.44
MEPs (other member-states)	11	11	9	13	10
	.41	.45	.42	.37	.40
The national PR in Geneva	11	9	10	10	13
	.42	.32	.49	.38	.45
Commission Cabinets	12	12	9	11	14
	.40	.38	.35	.32	.48
The national PR in Brussels	13	13	13	12	11
	.35	.34	.27	.31	.42
Groups outside Europe (e.g. Canada or the US)	14	14	15	15	12
	.37	.28	.48	.30	.44
International interest groups	15	16	17	15	15
	.37	.43	.46	.26	.37
Interest groups other member states	17	17	14	16	17
	.42	.33	.43	.42	.48
Commission DGs	17	15	16	17	16
	.46	.45	.49	.47	.42
National MEPs	18	18	18	18	18
	.53	.51	.57	.42	.60
Euro-level interest groups	19	19	19	19	19
	.44	.33	.41	.54	.47

Index: the higher the rank, the more frequent the access-point is used.

We summarize this section's main findings by presenting an analysis with organization type, country of origin as independent variable and multilevel network-strategies as dependent variable. In table 6 we compare the average scores, based on an index consisting

of the sum of all venues, an index that ranges between 0 and 19.[8] In general, this overview confirms what the more detailed analyses already demonstrated, namely that French groups seek most access to venues situated at the European and international level. The French are followed by the Germans and the Belgians. The Dutch are least likely to expand their network to various European and international access points. These differences between the four countries of origin are statistically significant ($F=4.60$, $p=.0034$, $df=3$). Yet, not all differences are due to the country of origin and as table 7 suggests we have substantial differences between different types of interest organizations ($F=9.93$, $p<.0001$, $df=2$). In general, business organizations develop the most extensive networks, followed by the NGOs and the labor unions. Nonetheless, within the countries there are large differences between these three categories. Especially the French business organizations are very active, while in Germany the labor unions are more active than the other German interest group types and German labor unions are also much more internationally oriented than the labor unions in the other three countries.

Table 6 Average multi-levelness of seeking access (averages and standard deviations)

	Belgian (n=157)	Dutch (n=131)	German (n=134)	French (n=145)	Overall
NGOs (n=197)	4.73	4.96	4.67	5.45	4.93 (3.85)
Business (n=264)	6.10	4.93	5.77	8.13	6.20 (4.38)
Labor (n=106)	3.78	3.00	6.70	4.41	4.42 (3.04)
Overall	5.08 (3.70)	4.69 (3.89)	5.56 (3.86)	6.37 (4.50)	

Explaining multilevel network strategies

It is clear from the previous analyses that despite the substantial variation between the four countries of origin, this variation does not fit the country differences that are reported in a large part of the literature (see introduction). Although it is difficult to explain why our observations differ from what other authors observe, we can try to explain the observed variation within our own sample.[9] One part of our explanatory efforts will concentrate on the nature of the policy issues to which the lobby-efforts described in the previous section refer. Another important explanation for multilevel venue-shopping concerns the political distance of interest organizations vis-à-vis other relevant in their immediate environment. We

[8] This composite variable has a somewhat skewed distribution with many actors concentrated at the easy part of the scale and few actors at the more difficult side. We also divided this scale in three categories, each consisting of about 33% of the sample, whereby each category corresponds to a rank in terms of venues contacted. A cross-tabulation of this variable with country of origin and organization type yields very similar research outcomes.

[9] One of the factors that might explain the difference between what we and other researchers observe might be related to the fact that our research focuses on specific policy issues in which organizations were politically involved, namely issues in the area of trade.

operationalize this factor by looking at the extent to which group target different types of political parties, more in particular whether these parties belong to a governing coalition or not. Finally, as our own previous research demonstrated the importance of domestic embeddedness, we control for the group's embeddedness within domestic exchange networks.

Lobbying political parties

For all interest organizations we coded the domestic lobby-networks respondents reported in the interviews for each of the issues in which they were involved. Here, we focus on the domestic political parties groups exchanged information with. Most empirical research shows that groups tend to prioritise contacts with like-minded politicians. There are various rationales for this. To begin with, groups lobby like-minded politicians whereby their lobby-efforts function as some sort of legislative subsidy (Hall and Deardorff 2006). Another reason is that interest groups seek access to politicians with opposing policy views (or who are undecided) in order to convince them about the group's viewpoint. If we combine these various mechanisms then parties that are part of governing coalitions will always be more central and gain most attention from interest groups. Ministers who are part of governing coalitions represent member-states in the EU Council. If a group's positions deviate from the views of governing parties, groups may seek to influence these parties. If they agree with governing parties interest organizations may seek access these parties in order to support them with information and expertise. On average, opposition parties will be less relevant for interest groups. Interest groups in agreement with the policies pursued by the governing parties do not need additional support from opposition parties and these groups do not seek to change the position defended by these parties. Consequently, governing parties gain attention from both supporting and opposing interest groups, while opposition parties are more targeted by like-minded interest groups. As opposition parties are generally more distant from the overall status quo, we can expect substantial differences between groups addressing opposition parties and those who ignore opposition parties. The more intense and more closely a group exchanges with parties that are far away from the status quo, the more likely it is that such groups aim to change the status quo. To put it the other way around, status quo oriented groups can limit their lobby-efforts to parties that form governing coalitions while opposition groups will tend to build relations with opposition parties.

In conceptualizing and coding networks with parties, there are several problems that we need to acknowledge. First of all, most governments in Europe are coalition governments, sometimes including both centre-right and centre-left parties. Accordingly, such governments

provide access-point for multiple, sometimes even opposing interests. Second, for similar reasons, governments may invite various, even conflicting, interests to present their point of view. Third, party systems are much more complex than a simple distinction between governing and opposing parties. For instance on specific issues, opposition parties may agree with governing parties. Moreover, opposition parties vary a lot in the sense that some are relevant parties for governing coalitions while others are not that relevant (e.g. because they are ideologically too extreme in order to be acceptable to other parties). Finally, there are large differences between countries in terms of the number of (relevant or non-relevant) parties that supply access to interest groups.

Table 7 presents some of the key differences between the four countries. We divided the data into five mutually exclusive categories. To begin with a substantial number of interest groups do not develop contacts with parties (around 30%). Next, we see indeed that majority parties gain everywhere most attention, namely 64% of the initiated networks are with majority parties compared to 44% for opposition parties. Very few ties are initiated with only opposition parties (only 3%); most lobby-efforts with opposition parties are combined with lobbying majority parties. Regarding exchanges with opposition parties there are substantial differences between the countries, differences that reflect varying domestic circumstances. Two countries, France and the Netherlands, changed their governing coalitions during the period of our research, which makes that for these countries all mainstream parties were coded as being part of a coalition. Both countries differ also strongly from Belgium and Germany in terms of the number of parties, and in particular the number of medium-sized irrelevant parties. The Netherlands had 9 parties in parliament of which 5 never took part in a national governing coalition. For France we counted 11 parties and 7 of these have no government experience at the national level. So, the supply of opposition parties in these countries consists of a relative large number of peripheral parties situated on both the left and the right side of the political spectrum. The situation in Belgium is a bit more complex. On the Francophone side there were 4 parties in the national parliament and only one, the Francophone Christian Democrats, was in opposition during the period of our research. On the Flemish side we had 6 parties and 2 of these, the rightwing populist *Vlaams Belang* and the Christian-Democrats, were during the research period part of the opposition.[10] Germany had five parties; two of these were part of the opposition, namely the FDP and the PDS. In

[10] The situation in Belgium/Flanders is a bit peculiar in the sense that one opposition party, *Vlaams Belang*, is systematically excluded from coalition talks (the so-called *cordon sanitaire*). This, of course, affects substantially the real number of relevant opposition parties and their potential impact.

sum, Belgium and Germany had a much smaller supply of opposition parties and in particular peripheral parties. These results are reflected in our data, namely in France and the Netherlands all oppositional ties are with peripheral opposition parties, while in Germany and Belgium these ties are concentrated with relevant opposition parties.

Table 7. Political exchanges with domestic political parties (column percentages)

	Organization type			Country of origin				Total n
	NGOs (n=197)	Business (n=264)	Labor (n=106)	Belgian (n=157)	Dutch (n=131)	German (n=134)	French (n=145)	
1. no exchanges with parties	30	39	27	39	34	29	33	192 (34%)
2. only with majority parties	22	20	32	33	17	17	23	131 (23%)
3. only with opposition parties	3	3	3	-	5	5	1	16 (3%)
4. with majority and relevant opposition parties	13	18	9	24	-	34	-	83 (15%)
5. with majority and peripheral opposition parties	32	19	28	4	44	15	42	145 (26%)

Table 8 presents the average multilevelness of the network strategies for each of the separate groups; we excluded the category 'only exchanges with opposition parties' because of a low n (16). Generally, the data confirm earlier analyses, namely that, irrespective of the type of party-contact, French organizations are very active and that labour-unions are not very active (compared to NGOs and business-organizations). For other organizations we find substantial differences. The first row presents averages for groups that develop no exchanges with domestic political parties, i.e. groups that are politically inactive. We observe is that such groups are – compared to all other groups – least likely to develop extensive multilevel venues. It depends on the country of origin, but on average these groups will address less than 2.5 (Netherlands) to about 4 (France) venues situated beyond the state level. This finding fits the notion of a persistence hypothesis, namely those who are less likely to engage with domestic interlocutors are not very active on the international or EU-level (see below).

The next rows compare different types of interactions with domestic parties. The second row summarizes the results for those who maintain exclusive contacts with majority parties, i.e. the interest organizations that develop no ties with opposition parties. In all countries we find an increase in multi-level venue-shopping when actors move from no party-contacts to majority; and on average 4.5 to 7.5 venues are addressed. Most interesting is that if groups start to include opposition parties into their network, the number of venues grows quite substantially towards 7.5 to 8 venues on average. In all countries we see that interactions with

opposition parties increase multilevel venue-shopping, but when we differentiate between relevant and non-relevant opposition parties we observe that the latter extends the multilayered action repertoire of domestic interest groups. A more elaborate multivariate analysis of variance demonstrates that this type of connections within the domestic party-system is very robust; the F-value testing the effect of different types of party-contacts on multilevel venue-shopping equals 28.84 (R^2=.16, p<.0001, df=3) and separate analyses within each of the four countries confirms the robustness of this relationship.

Table 8. Exchanges with political parties and multilevel venue-shopping (n, averages and standard deviations)

	Organization type			Country of origin				
groups have exchanges with…	NGOs (n=197)	Business (n=264)	Labor (n=106)	Belgian (n=157)	Dutch (n=131)	German (n=134)	French (n=145)	Overall multilevel venue-shopping
1. no exchanges with parties	3.20	4.08	2.45	3.70	2.66	3.51	4.25	3.56 (3.43)
2. only with majority parties	3.84	6.87	5.35	4.77	4.45	5.17	7.35	5.39 (4.11)
4. with majority and relevant opposition parties	6.72	7.23	5.20	7.32	-	6.42	-	7.70 (4.40)
5. with majority and peripheral opposition parties	6.72	8.71	5.17	7.50	6.31	7.85	7.56	5.43 (3.74)

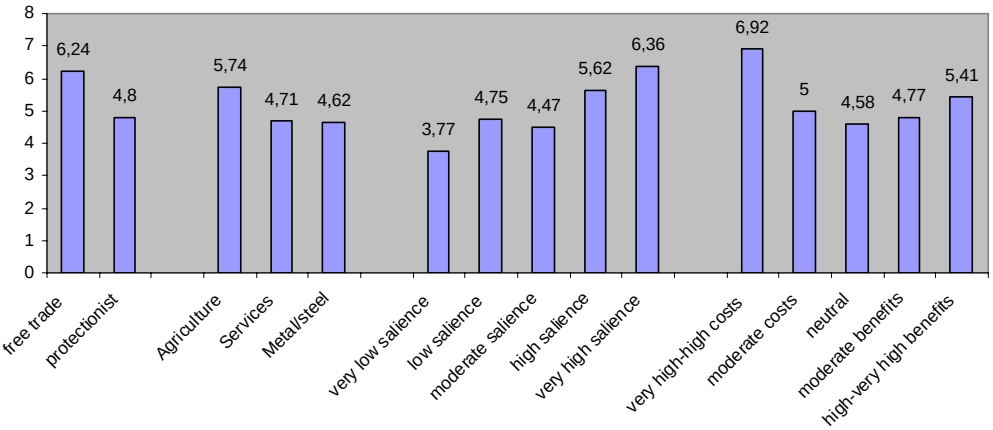
The nature of the political issues

When one talks to interest group officials and asks about their political strategies a common answer is 'It depends from issue to issue'. Our project is unique in the sense that we attempt to control for issue-specific variation. The responses of the interviewees regarding their political strategies concerned one, two or three issues their organizations were involved in. Important is how we define and conceptualize an issue (Princen 2007, 24). Issues were presented to the respondents as a topic or item on the WTO-policy agenda with regard to which actors could have opposing views regarding what needs to be done, the political saliency and the distribution of costs and benefits. All issues where framed as a policy proposal issued by a political institution and were to be understood as a potential outcome that one may oppose or agree with. In total respondents were presented 20 policy issues located in three different sectors (agriculture, services and metal/steel) and they could select one, two or three issues in which they were involved in one way or another. One half of the issues were framed as protectionist and the other half as free trade.

Here, we analyze how multi-level venue-shopping is affected by a) the sector in which issues are situated, b) the salience of the issue for the involved actors, c) the cost-benefit-

structure of an issue and d) whether the issue is protectionist in nature or not. The idea behind these factors is fairly simple, as the saliency and/or potential cost of one issue increases, the efforts to invest in the issue, including the preparedness to develop multi-level venue shopping, growths as well. Cost-structure is measured on a -10 <-> +10 scale whereby a positive value indicates benefits, while salience is measured on a 10-point scale whereby high scores indicate high saliencies. Figure 1 uses recoded and somewhat more convenient scales and confronts these with multilevel venue-shopping.

Figure 1. Average multilevel venue-shopping and issue characteristics



The findings demonstrate the importance of how issue specific features have a substantial and significant impact on multilevel venue-shopping (see figure 1). The relations we find between multilevel venue-shopping and issue characteristics are more or less similar across countries, which make these findings quite robust. To begin with, if respondents were involved in protectionist issues, the propensity to address multilevel access-points ($F=18.16$, $df=1$, $p<.0001$) decreases, a finding which fits into the image of protectionism driven by the veto-power of national governments.[11] Also the sector has some consequences where we see that agriculture attracts more multilevel shopping compared to services and steel/metal ($F=4.06$, $df=2$, $p=.0178$). Interesting is the effect of salience and cost-benefit structure, two findings that confirm the above mentioned hypothesis. When salience grows, the efforts to seek access to more venues almost doubles ($F=8.43$, $df=4$, $p<.0001$), while benefit and, in particular, extreme costs, in contrast to a moderate or neutral cost-structure, trigger efforts at multilevel venue-shopping ($F=5.80$, $df=4$, $p<.0001$).

[11] This finding also confirms an hypothesis put forward by Goldstein and Martin, namely that the growing judicialization of WTO trade policies stimulates the mobilization of pro-trade interests, while anti-trade interests tend to rely on national political venues (Goldstein and Martin 2000).

Prominence in domestic policy-networks

Finally, we examine the effect of domestic institutional embeddedness, measured as the extent to which interest groups are themselves addressees of domestic political exchange networks. For this measurement we relied on social network analysis whereby the respondents indicated exchange relations with all other actors in our survey. The score of each organization is simply the number of times this organization was mentioned by other interest group officials and the public officials we interviewed. In a previous publication one of us demonstrated that domestic embeddedness is positively related to the extent to which groups address multiple venues at other levels of government (Beyers 2002). However, this analysis of the persistent nature of domestic institutional embeddedness remained confined to the Belgian. The current data adds a comparative perspective by inserting three countries to the analysis and, instead of making a rough distinction between diffuse and specific interests, we rely on three separate categories, namely business, labour and NGOs. Moreover, we insert some additional distinctions namely the access groups gain to non-elected bureaucrats and elected officials (party officials or politicians).

Table 9. Reliance on domestic exchange networks and multi-level venue-shopping (Pearson product moment correlations)

	Type of interest group				Country of origin			
	Overall	NGOs	Business	Labour	Belgian	Dutch	German	French
with other groups and public officials								
overall access	.19 p<.0001	.26 p=.0002	.22 p=.0003	.26 p=.0067	.17 p=.0292	.40 p<.0001	.10 p=.2414	.18 p=.0266
with public officials								
to elected officials	.11 p=.0076	.24 p=.0008	.12 p=.0538	.23 p=.0155	.11 p=.1802	.36 p<.0001	.06 p=.5084	.13 p=.1226
to ministerial cabinets (Belgium, France)	.21 p=.0003	.23 p=.0153	.20 p=.0276	.24 p=.0425	.11 p=.1890	-	-	.36 p<.0001
to ministries (Belgium, France)	.24 p<.0001	.25 p=.0089	.30 p=.0007	.14 p=.2578	.19 p=.0154	-	-	.50 p<.0001
to ministries (Netherlands, Germany)	.25 p<.0001	.25 p=.0195	.29 p=.0005	.35 p=.0333	-	.31 p=.0003	.16 p=.0702	

The correlations in table 9 are fairly easy to interpret. The higher the coefficients, the more the involvement within an elaborate domestic exchange network spills over into extensive multilevel venue-shopping at the European and international level. Basically, the positive correlations confirm some earlier findings, namely that a strong inclusion in domestic exchanges energizes the mobilization of multilevel networks. The first and the next three columns demonstrate that this is the case when looking at the complete dataset and also when

distinguishing between different types, namely NGOs, business and labor.

When looking at exchanges initiated by public officials it appears that especially a reliance on non-elected officials (ministries and ministerial cabinets) corresponds with multilevel venue-shopping. Among business a dependence on elected officials has no effect and gaining access to ministries (in Belgium and France) has no effect on the multilevel activities of labor organizations (which are low anyway). When we compare the dependency-relations across countries we observe substantial differences. There is no substantial and significant relationship in Germany, gaining access or a strong involvement in domestic policy-networks bears not relationship with multilevel venue-shopping. The relationship is significant, but rather weak, for Belgium where it is primarily access to ministries that shapes multilevel venue-shopping. The most outspoken dependency relations exist in France and, especially, the Netherlands. In France it is particularly the importance of access to ministries and ministerial cabinets, less parties and MPs, that coincides with multi-level venue-shopping. In the Netherlands access gained to both elected and non-elected officials has a substantial positive relation with the extent of multi-level venue-shopping.

Multivariate regression analyses

The final analysis consists of a multivariate analysis whereby we rely on the results of a stepwise hierarchical regression-analysis. The independent categorical variables were recoded into dummy-variables indicating the absence or presence of a particular condition which needs to be contrasted with the reference category. Table 10 presents the results of this analysis in which we added step-by-step a set of explanatory variables and whereby we report for each step whether the inclusion of additional variables added significantly to the explanatory power of the model. Only parameter-estimates significant at the p-value < 0.05 are reported.

The change statistics confirm that, controlled for issue-features and party-politics, material resources – here measured as the number of FTE employed – bears no effect on the propensity to develop multilevel venue-shopping. There is nothing in our dataset that points to the importance of resources (model 7). Also when we use other proxies such as investments in political advocacy or investments in EU/WTO lobbying we found no significant relationships, even when we controlled for this within the different countries of origin.[12] Also a general

[12] The aggregate numbers even suggest an opposite relationship. For instance, on average French organizations have a higher propensity to conduct multilevel venue-shopping, but at the same time a much lower number of French organizations has specialized staff for political advocacy and the number of staff members in a French

indication of the policy sector in which interest organizations were active does not add significantly to the explanatory power of our model (model 3).

Table 10. Stepwise hierarchical OLS-regression of multilevel venue-shopping (parameter estimates and change statistics)

	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model4	Model5	Model6	Model7
Intercept	3.87	2.93	3.35	3.65	2.93	1.63	1.71
							0
Party exchanges (dummy-coding)							
No exchange (reference)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Exclusively majority	1.59	1.60	1.61	1.55	1.74	1.53	1.51
							.16
Majority + relevant opposition	2.25	1.92	1.82	1.65	1.64	1.64	1.70
							.16
Majority + irrelevant opposition	2.82	2.61	2.56	2.83	3.09	2.80	2.84
							.32
Issue features							
Protectionist (1-0)		-1.39	-1.58	-1.65	-1.52	-1.43	-1.44
							-.18
Costs (-2 to +2)		ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Salience (1-5)		.52	.49	.51	.47	.45	.45
							.16
Sector (dummy-coding)							
Agriculture (reference)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Services			ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Metal/steel			ns	ns	-1.28	ns	ns
Country (dummy-coding)							
Belgium (reference)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Netherlands				-1.65	-1.79	-1.59	-1.60
							-.16
Germany				ns	ns	ns	ns
France				ns	ns	ns	ns
Organization type (dummy-coding)							
NGO (reference)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Business					1.49	1.83	1.80
							.22
Labor					ns	ns	ns
Networks						.05	.04
ties with domestic exchange networks							*.16*
Resources							ns
resources: total number of FTE							
Model: adjusted R^2	.10	.16	.17	.20	.24	.27	.25
F-value, df, p-value	21.12	19.50	15.20	13.59	13.47	14.65	13.86
	3	6	8	11	13	14	15
	p<.0001	p<.0001	p<.0001	p<.0001	p<.0001	p<.0001	p<.0001
F-change, p-value	21.12	16.17	2.08	7.80	10.32	22.98	2.35
	3	3	2	3	2	1	1
	p<.0001	p<.0001	p=.1254	p<.0001	p<.0001	p<.0001	p=.1259

Index: The row with model 7, the full model, has standardized estimated reported in italic.

The most substantial and significant explanatory contribution comes from factors that relate to the ties with different types of political parties, issue features, embeddedness in domestic exchange networks, organization type and country. Controlled for all other variables,

organization is on average half the number in Belgian, German of Dutch organizations. Moreover, when we look at the average personnel we observe that organizations focusing exclusively on governing coalition parties and addressing less venues outside their country of origin have on average two to three times more staff members (about 144 on average) compared to other organizations (between 40 and 80). Finally, labour-unions are not very active multilevel-venue-shoppers, compared to NGOs and business organizations, but the average staff-size of a labour-union is about 6 times the staff-size of NGOs and business organizations (265 versus 40 and 46).

the distance vis-à-vis different sort of political parties has a significant impact whereby the more contacts with peripheral parties, i.e. parties that are further away from the dominant status quo, increases the propensity of multilevel venue-shopping. The more issues are protectionist and lower the salience, the less one seeks access at the European or international level. The bivariate effect of the cost-benefit distribution disappears in the multivariate analysis. Our results on the country or origin show that the weak Europeanization of the Dutch organizations is something unique to Netherlands as this effect does not disappear when controlling for other independent variables. Finally, the importance of exchanges within domestic policy networks demonstrates that a persistence effect remains present even when our controls for compensation strategies result in positive effects.

Conclusion

Generally, we find substantial and significant differences between these four member-states. Some of our observations contradict earlier work in the field. For instance, on the basis case-studies Schmidt concludes that there is a large misfit between the French statist system and the EU system (Schmidt 2002). Schmidt claims that one of the main features is the exclusion of societal input from policy formulation and that this explains the weak European responsiveness of French interest groups. Yet, on the basis of our data, we cannot conclude that French groups are weak in terms of building EU-level strategies. On the contrary, it appears that French interest groups are much more adapted compared to the Belgian, the German and, especially, the Dutch groups. However, much more in-depth research is needed in this regard, especially because we lack an explanation for some of the differences between the four countries.

One explanation could be that analysts overestimate and/or under-specify the effect of neo-corporatism. In a neo-corporatist setting, access is privileged. But it is not just privileged; it is institutionally privileged as it is built on a system of privileged access moderated by government agencies. Therefore, organizations do not have to develop skills to force their entry, or in case they needed to, needed to possess those skills in a time long foregone. Moreover, it is also the government stimulating groups to access, rather than groups just finding an open door. This in itself means that organizations with a neo-corporatist background are not stimulated to develop the skills to compete with other groups for access. This may even have a tranquilizing effect on the ability to compete successfully in a more competitive environment, such a in the case of pluralist modes of interest intermediation, or even more so in a statist mode of interest intermediation. Groups with a statist background

will not only find a government that doesn't stimulate them explicitly for access, it is even a government that is to a certain extent hostile to such access (Wilson 1987). This requires groups to almost literally break-in the system. The outcome is then a confrontational mode of interest representation in which inside lobbying is combined with conventional outside lobbying, and occasionally (even frequently) with disruptive outside lobbying. The investment required in the development of relational sources – itself an important tool for promoting access (Dahan 2005, 15) – is then, large, and the incentives for groups to invest strong. Part of these investments result in the development of generic skills, that is skills that are not just relevant at the national level, but readily relevant at the EU level as well. As such, groups that are forced to invest heavily in such skills because they are part of a statist system, might be much better prepared for the competitive environment in which groups need to act at the EU level.

Second, our empirical analysis shows that instead of one mechanism, two distinct mechanisms simultaneously affect multilevel venue-shopping. On the one hand, we have indications of persistence, namely that groups with weak contacts with parties or groups that are weakly integrated in domestic exchange networks, are less eager to develop multilevel venue-shopping. On the other hand, a compensation mechanism is found whereby those who are in touch with opposition parties, especially peripheral parties, are more likely to address venues at multiple levels of government. One may think that extensive multilevel venue-shopping is simply the result of organizational capabilities or structural conditions as the prevailing domestic mode of interest representation or the sector in which organizations are involved, but not much data suggest such an effect. Importantly, however is that the salience of the policy issues for groups adds an incentive to invest in multilevel venue-shopping. Earlier, we elaborated that trade policies are politically much more sensitive in Belgium and France, compared to the Netherlands (Beyers and Kerremans 2007a). In sum, our results demonstrate that not resources or the nature of the domestic system shapes the propensity of multilevel venue-shopping, but that much has to do with the salient nature of European policies and how organizations are positioned in a political space.

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