Democracy models in non-profit and economic interest groups involved in rural-environmental policy: a quantitative analysis

Nikolas D. Hasanagas, Technological Education Institution of Kavala, Hellas, nikolashasanagas@yahoo.com
Alejandra Real, University of Goettingen, Germany, areal@gwdg.de
Eleni Rigaki, University of Bochum, Germany, elenirigaki@yahoo.de

Research question: Which democracy models appear in environment-related interest groups when analyzing the internal decision making process and member qualification?

Hypothesis: The higher the education level of the members, the higher their participation in the decision making process of their organization

Methodology: Standardised survey throughout 2002 involving 91 interest groups (economic or non-profit-groups) from 8 European countries

Introduction: Purpose is to contribute to a better understanding of the democracy models found in interest groups as well as of the role of member educational level. Interests groups should be as “democratic” as possible with their members, namely if the interests they express find the widest possible acceptance and do not serve only the political elites or industrial monopolies.

Finding: (1) The education level influences the participation of the members in the decision-making process (fig. 1). (2) Non-profit groups have more members with university degrees than economic (profit-seeking) groups (fig. 2). (3) In the former ones, the members participate more extensively in the General Assembly but less in the Agenda-setting, while the inverted behaviour is observed in the latter organizations (fig. 3).

Conclusions: Members of interest groups present different organizational behaviour, depending on their level of qualification. The non-profit groups present characteristics of developmental democracy and protective/competitive elitist democracy in participation in the General Assembly and the Agenda-setting respectively, while the economic (profit-seeking) groups competitive elitist democracy and participative/developmental democracy respectively (table 1).

Table 1. Expected organizational condition according to the participation in the decision-making process and to the share of qualified members of the interest groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share of university graduates</th>
<th>Decision-making through participation in the General Assembly</th>
<th>Expected organizational conditions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong> (main tendency in non-profit groups)</td>
<td>High (development democracy)</td>
<td>- Expressive power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (main tendency in economic groups)</td>
<td>Low (competitive elitist democracy)</td>
<td>- Strong competition</td>
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Fig. 1. Setting of the Agenda according to the average member qualification

Fig. 2. Share of university-degree holders by interest group

Fig. 3. Relative participation in the General Assembly by interest group