

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

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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).

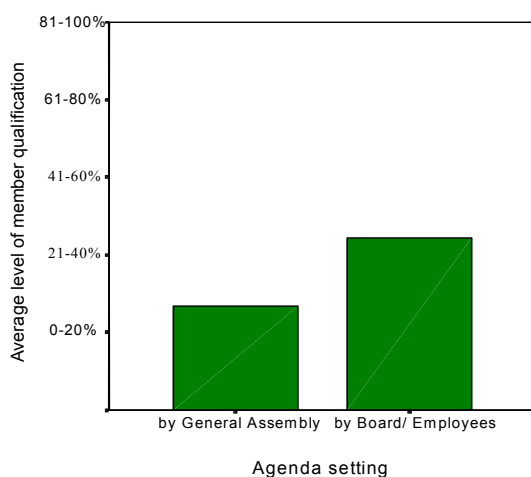


Fig. 1. Setting of the Agenda according to the average member qualification

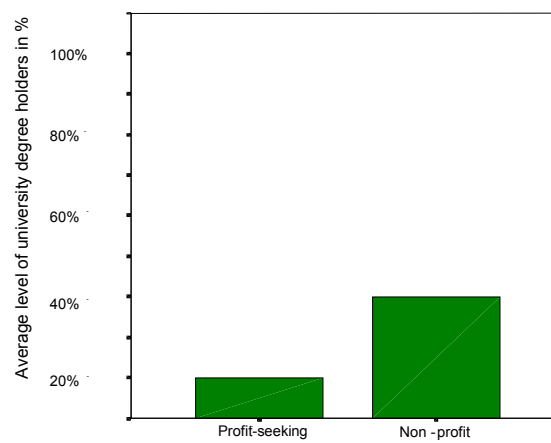


Fig. 2. Share of university-degree holders by interest group

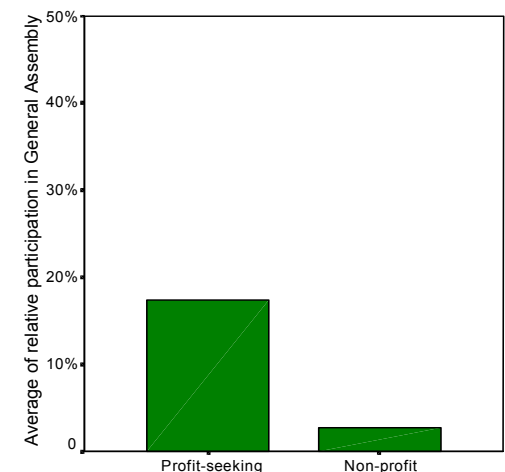






Fig. 3. Relative participation in the General Assembly by interest group

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.

Decision-making / Share of university graduates	Through participation in the General Assembly	Through participation in the Agenda-setting	Expected organizational conditions
High (main tendency in non-profit groups)	 High (development democracy)	 Low (competitive elitist democracy and protective democracy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expressive power - Strong competition - Weak cohesion in crises - Restricted intervention by the Board - Chances for all the members (also for disadvantaged) - Professionalization
Low (main tendency in economic groups)	 Low (competitive elitist democracy)	 High (participative und developmental democracy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Higher acceptance of the strategic priorities - Susceptibility to manipulation and to external conflicts - Ignorance/indifference in the organizational issues and policy

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