

## CHAPTER

# INTEREST GROUPS: MOVING BEYOND STATE-CENTRIC MODELS

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State-centric Anglo-American studies continue to dominate the interest group landscape (Baumgartner and Leech 1998, Jordan and Maloney 2007, Truman 1951). As a commanding ‘outside-in’ pressure on French scholarship, a long debate on defining France on the pluralism-corporatism spectrum has ensued (Keeler and Hall 2001, Wilson 1987, 2008). The exceptional nature of interest representation in France has inspired a plethora of state-centric modeling. This chapter argues that an ‘inside-out’ influence is gaining momentum, whereby French political sociological accounts underline the primacy of group behaviour (Courty 2006, Offerlé 2009, Mathieu 2009). Active in Europeanization research (Saurugger 2009), and social movement theory (Fillieule and Tartakowsky 2014), French scholars are leading the way in bringing the debate on interest representation beyond Anglo-American state-centric models.

Keywords: Interest representation; comparative politics; political sociology; Europeanization; social movement theory

The study of interest groups often revolves around various notions of the state in contemporary comparative politics (Baumgartner and Leech 1998, Beyers *et al.* 2012).

An interest group, after all, seeks to exploit influence and power within the corridors of government (Jordan and Maloney 2007, Truman 1951). From such an Anglo-American dominated viewpoint, the government is thus more or less open to such exploits, leading to a plethora of state-interest models based upon pluralist or corporatist national traditions. Hitherto underappreciated, the French contribution to this literature has largely been to emphasise the role of non-state sociological-based explanations for interest group behaviour (Courty 2006, Duriez 2004, Fillieule 2010, Jacquot and Woll 2008, Mathieu 2007, Offerlé 2009, Saurugger 2008). This approach moves us away from narrowly defining such groups in relation to the state. Inspired by a wide variety of French, and associated non-French, scholarship this chapter argues that such a political sociological approach offers significant potential.

The first section of the chapter begins with an introduction to *the study of interest groups* in comparative perspective. It outlines some key definitions on what constitutes an interest group, as well as reflecting upon its relation to social movements and social movement theory. I then introduce Europeanisation as an emerging influence on national interest groups, with some definitional reflections. Lastly, this section presents mainstream understandings of interest group and state relations in comparative politics.

The next section details *the study of interest groups in France*. It proceeds with historical and contemporary accounts of theorising the specific nature of French state-group relations. I then identify the main ‘outside-in’ pressures in this field from Anglo-American scholarship, which prioritises state driven accounts. I expand further with an assessment of mainstream state-centric accounts of inclusion and exclusion (Cole 2008, Keeler and Hall 2001, Wilson 1987, 2008). Their necessary dilution, in order to fit the French case, has resulted in a search for more appropriate models. The protest and

policy network models have been forwarded as potential approaches to state-group relations in France (Thompson 2003, Cole 2011, Vassallo 2010). However, even these models have not avoided criticism for their relative inapplicability to French state-group relations (Epstein 1997, Elgie and Griggs 2000, Woll 2009).

The third part of the chapter presents the main ‘inside-out’ pressure from French based literature, inspired by political sociological accounts. I locate such a pressure firstly in Europeanisation literature where ties with the nation state are broken (Grossman 2003, 2004, Jacquot and Woll 2003, Saurugger 2009, 2007). I argue below that the real novelty in French literature is the emphasis on ‘*group-centric*’ accounts of interest representation. Drawing equally from related non-French accounts, it is argued that social movement theory provides an opportunity to further solidify a more ‘group-centric’ approach. Associated more traditionally with social movements, it offers a series of analytical tools, which allow us to explore the role of interest groups independent – but mindful of – the state (Fillieule and Tartakowsky 2014, Mathieu 2009, Offerlé 2009). Above all, it provides an opportunity to unleash ‘interest group’ studies from the straightjacket of ‘state-centric’ conceptual frameworks.

## **THE STUDY OF INTEREST GROUPS**

This section covers the main definitional questions surrounding interest group research. It argues that interest groups and social movements (rather than the concept of ‘new social movements’) are not as distinct as they are often portrayed in the literature. Moreover, social movement theories offer significant potential for expanding our understanding of interest groups. It concludes with some introductory reflections on the influence of Europeanisation and the state on interest groups.

## ***Interest groups and social movements***

Much of the literature on interest groups is based on case studies or cross sectional examinations of collective action. This has resulted in little reflection on the definition of an interest group, or indeed the field of study. The oft-cited Truman version concentrates on organisations, which make “certain claims upon other groups in society for the establishment, maintenance, or enhancement of forms of behaviour that are implied by shared attitudes” (1951: 33). In following, an interest group seeks to influence policy on targeted shared issues on the basis of its membership without any wish to govern. The study of interest groups is dominated inherently by the exploration of influence, exploitation and, above all, power. An interest group is, after all, “organized *only* for a specific collective political end... (without) seek(ing) to form a government, merely to influence public policy” (Jordan and Maloney 2007: 29). As a result, interest group studies have developed most notably within the field of comparative politics (Baumgartner and Leech 1998).

The political science origins of this field lead, most notably, to an intellectual enchantment with the state. Indeed, the *raison d'être* of an interest group within such definitions is predicated on its relationship to government or formal policy-making processes. Within an Anglo-American context, the phrase ‘interest group’ is regularly interchangeable with the Truman rhetoric of ‘pressure groups’. The object of such pressure has invariably been the state apparatus. The first dichotomy of such an approach rests upon exploring ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ interest groups. The exploration of interest groups in the US has tended to focus on the traditionally ‘insider’ powerful organisations. Outsider groups have become more recently the focus of studies in the

UK based literature (Grant 2001). Binderkrantz (2005) reveals, for example, how interest groups in Denmark slip in and out of the political system. Her comparative analysis of strategies reminds us that such groups are dynamic entities.

In one of the few attempts to differentiate between social movements and interest groups, Sydney Tarrow defines interest groups as “*formal organisations, which activate already defined constituencies, often with dues paying or institutionally determined membership, in mainly non-contentious interaction with authorities*” (1995: 228-229). This definition is similar to mainstream political science versions (such as Truman or Jordan and Maloney above) whereby an interest group is a formalised grouping with a collective membership seeking to influence government and policy. Social movements are alternatively referred to as “*collective challenges by groups with purposes and solidarity in sustained and mainly contentious interaction with elites, opponents and authorities*” (1995: 229). However, recent work (e.g. Binderkrantz 2005) calls into question the validity of differentiating along the lines here of contentious versus non-contentious action. It is argued, therefore, that we need to accept significant crossover between interest group and social movement studies.

### ***New social movements and social movement theory***

We *do* need to differentiate between New Social Movements (NSM) and Social Movement Theory (SMT). Largely attributed to Habermas, NSMs are a response to “the colonisation of the lifeworld” and “cultural impoverishment” (Crossley 2003: 290). These phenomena have taken the form of politics ceasing to address issues of truly public concern. In following, NSMs have arisen in response to this colonised and impoverished context. These NSMs consisted of “those who traditional institutions had

forgotten or excluded” (ecologism, antinuclearism, feminism, consumerism and postmaterialism (Fillieule and Meyer 2001: 52). The concept of NSM refers specifically to the apparition of movements during the 60s/70s. It has been equally argued that the rise of the human rights or counter-globalisation movement represents examples of new NSMs.

Social Movement theory provides, rather, a framework for studying group behaviour while allowing us to generate questions on how and why social mobilisation takes place (Kriesi 2004). In fact, a range of social movement theories has emerged over the past thirty years: Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT), Political Opportunity Structures (POS), Social Psychology (SP) and Social Networks (SN). This largely stems from different approaches and methodological choices from political scientists (mostly RMT and POS) and sociologists (often SP and SN). Similarly, European (SP) and American scholars (RMT) have built up particular approaches to social movement theory. It is argued that a combined approach to these theories has the ability to shed light on how and, to an extent, why not only movements – but *also interest groups* – are mobilised.

### ***Broadening our understanding of interest groups***

In general terms, there are two major groups of interest representation. Firstly, the ‘occupational’ groups (trade unions, business, farmers etc.) are seen to be the most active, with sophisticated networks of power and influence with government. Such groups are often central to the study of interest groups (Baumgartner and Leech 1998). The ‘promotional’ groups (environment, feminist, consumer groups) have evolved quickly in recent years, but remain less influential in interest group studies. In

presenting a further interpretation of collective action, these ‘promotional’ groups are explicitly linked within to the notion of NSM. The origins of these ‘promotional’ groups are found in the emergence of new social movements (NSM) from the student protests of 1968 (Escafre-Duble 2010). The student movement of 1968 provided the motor for a variety of NSM (ecologism, antinuclearism, feminism, consumerism and postmaterialism).

Promotional groups (feminists, anti-racism, environmentalism etc.) have, nevertheless, had little success on imposing their will on government. Whereas single-issue groups wreaked havoc in UK or Germany, the French political system remained impermeable (Cole and Harguindeguy 2013). As is common among organisations that find their origins in the NSM of the 1970s, promotional groups have been largely forced into state relations based on pre-emption, incorporation, contestation and direct action. State-group relations have been impeding to such groups. We should, however, not irrevocably tie promotional groups to the study of NSM. Interest group studies have much to offer on understanding promotional groups. This new reality for national interest groups is most evident in the development of Europeanisation research.

### ***Interest groups in Europeanisation frameworks***

A key distinction in the literature that only appears hitherto implicitly is between the ‘Europeanisation *of* interest groups’ and ‘Europeanisation *and* interest groups’. While the former presents a clear linkage between EU *pull* and interest group behaviour, the latter positions interest groups within a broader context of EU *pressure* that is transforming domestic institutions and policies. From the former perspective, the multi-institutional nature of decision-making at the EU level creates a number of targets and

opportunities for interest groups (bottom-up approach). UK business groups found that they could access EU-level policy-makers through direct contact with EU officials, EU-based groups as well as other national groupings that are in contact with EU officials (Fairbrass and Jordan 2003).

In stark contrast to the former perspective, the application of Europeanisation *and* national interest representation is defined primarily as a top-down pressure that brings about changes in the domestic arena for non-governmental organisations (Exadaktylos and Radaelli 2009, Ladrech 1994). The EU is conceptualised as a motor for the potential transformation of the objectives, strategies and operating environment of a domestic actor. Therefore, Europeanisation refers to changes in national institutions and policy-making, which consequently influences the behaviour of national and sub-national non-governmental organisations. This process is, therefore, expected to bring a certain level of change in the traditional forms of interest articulation with the state.

### ***Models of Interest Group-State Interaction***

The state remains, overall, *the* central focus for interest group studies. Indeed, it is argued throughout this chapter that the primary ‘outside-in’ influence of Anglo-American literature on understanding interest groups in France remains most observable in debates surrounding the insider/outsider dichotomy in relation to the nation-state. As explored below, comparative political accounts of interest groups in France were captured by a US disciplinary obsession with pluralism – or as termed here ‘state-centric systems of interest representation’. Authors such as Truman (1951) argued vehemently that the rise of interest groups in the US symbolised a new modern



theory of political pluralism. A divisive normative reflection on interest groups led to the marginalisation of the field in the US until the 1990s (Tichenor and Harris 2005). American and British political scientists viewed France as an intriguing non-pluralised system of interest representation (Keeler and Hall 2001, Wilson 2008).

The pluralist model defines power as being shared among multiple groups that represent social and political forces in society. According to Wilson, “these groups confront government and each other in constant but shifting patterns of competition and cooperation that determine public policy...(while) the state moderates among the(se) conflicting demands... as it determines official policy” (1987: 18). The pluralist perspective no longer views the state as a formidable dominating force overpowering a weakly divided civil society (Beyers *et al.* 2012). Corporatist accounts have, on the other hand, concentrated on the tripartite relations between the state officials and the two key areas of capital and labour (Lavdas 2005).

There has been a retreat among supporters of a pure corporatist stance to a ‘meso-corporatist/neo-corporatism’ viewpoint. This form of corporatism acknowledges that state-group relations changes from one policy sub-system to another. Given the weakness of labour in certain policy systems, French corporatism, for example, is considered to be sectoral (Goyer 2008). Meso-corporatists define the policy-making process as being a closed negotiating process between government and privileged interest groups. These groups exercise an exclusive monopoly on access to policy formulation, while providing expert information and advice. As Shain comments, “corporatism is more than a model of policy-formulation, it is a model of social control...(where) open conflict is channeled into limited bargaining” (1980: 191).

Both pluralist and corporatist models have been applied (to the case of France as explored in the section below). They do not, however, offer an exhaustive account of state-group interaction. The state regularly calls upon a variety of devices and structures in order to rebuff the demands of even the most powerful interest groups. Similarly, interest groups enter into a range of relationships with the state in accordance with the sensitivity of the particular issue. Interest groups and government are constantly readjusting to changing political circumstances, in order to better achieve their objectives (Beyers *et al.* 2012). This observation has resulted in a plethora of comparative and France specific state-group modeling as explored in the next section.

## **THE STUDY OF INTEREST GROUPS IN FRANCE**

The ‘exceptional’ nature of interest group behaviours in France has captured the attention of notably Anglo-American and French scholars in political science and political sociology. The perceived exclusionary approach of the French state towards interest representation has resulted in an explosion of state-group relations theorisation, from new ‘French-only’ models to the tailored application of mainstream accounts. It is argued below that French scholars are at the forefront of a new agenda, which frees the ‘group’ from overly state-centric understandings of interest groups.

### ***Historical understandings of interest groups in France***

As an idea that can be traced back as far as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, interest group pressure is seen, historically, as being illegitimate (Thomas 2001: 48). Following the traditional French conception of democracy, Cohen-Tanugi (1991) underlines that

lobbying or interest groups represent an attempt to prioritise particular interests to the detriment of the general public. In the French Republican tradition, the state has been held to be superior to the total of competing interests: groups exist in a subordinate relationship with the state. The traditional role of the French state is classified as Jacobin, which stipulates that elected governments are mandated with the will of the people directly, without the mediation of other interests (Hazareesingh 2002).

The traditional Jacobin distaste for interest groups is only partly relevant for contemporary state-group relations. Firstly, a transformation has occurred mainly through the loosening of state control of civil society. Secondly, there has been a modernisation of public administration that has ensured freedoms of access to information. More recently, the multi-faceted influence of the EU has been largely accredited with this change. Although French pressure group activity would appear to be weaker in France than in the northern European democracies, the traditional image of France as a state that pays no attention to associational life is becoming increasingly irrelevant to understanding the reality of French politics.

### ***Models of French exceptionalism***

With regards to conceptualising a relevant theoretical model, this mixture of a traditionally exclusive and an increasingly open state reinforced the 'exceptional' status of French state-group relations among Anglo-American scholars. Models of French 'exceptionalism' may be defined as the situation where the policy-making style in France is different from the equivalent style in any other country. It was, therefore, contended that the French case cannot be easily fitted into the mainstream pluralist or corporatist models of state-group relations.

Two theoretical models of exception that have been applied to the French case are termed the ‘domination-crisis’ model, and the ‘endemic and open conflict’ model. The former concentrates on French attitudes towards authority and change. This analysis heavily relies upon traditional Jacobin feelings of suspicion and fear with regards to the validity of interest group existence. Accordingly, interest groups are poorly represented and highly fragmented under a highly authoritarian state. With very similar conclusions, the latter model shares the same authoritarian notion of the state, but it focuses on the importance of political institutions. It refers to the decreasing influence of Parliament and a generally hostile institutional environment for interest groups as the reasons for growing demonstrations, direct action and violence. Both models have also failed to adequately capture contemporary state-group relations (Elgie and Griggs 2000).

The Marxist model is another longstanding ‘exceptional’ account of French state-group interaction. This standpoint has been further developed partly as a critique of pluralist perspectives in this area. The core argument concentrates on the inability of interest groups to influence government. Capitalist groups can manipulate a larger resource base, and ensure a well-organised and professional lobby of government. From this perspective, the Marxist/neo-Marxist approach to explaining state-group relations in France centres on the exclusion of any intermediate group between society and the capitalist elite. In light of certain ambiguities surrounding the definition and role of these capitalist groups, the main criticism of this model points to its highly idealist stance. Following such an argument, it ignores privileged links between some societal groups (such as agriculture) and government (Wilson 1983).

The failure of the above models to adequately capture contemporary state-group relations in France led to the creation of the “untidy reality model”. Associated

originally with Vincent Wright (in his *Government and Politics of France*), this approach underlines the infinite variety of potential state-group interaction. The model highlights the divisions within governmental institutions, resulting in a competitive environment unable to present one voice. Moreover, interest groups enter into a multitude of relations with different organs of government. Knapp and Wright (2006) deal with four models (the 'domination-crisis', the 'endemic and open conflict', 'corporatist' and 'pluralist' models of state-group interaction), and concludes by dismissing the validity of their findings.

### ***Mainstream state-centric models and France***

There has generally been an explicit debate between viewing state-group relations in France as pluralist (championed by Wilson 1987, 2008), and considering them as primarily corporatist (supported by Keeler and Hall 2001). French state-group relations capture some of the distinctive features within pluralism and corporatism, while presenting a number of unique traits. Corporatist accounts have concentrated on the tripartite relations between the state officials and the two key areas of capital and labour (Lavdas 2005). Pluralist studies have emphasised the multiplication of non-state actors in technical and non-technical deliberations with the state (Chafer and Godin 2010). Various empirical/theoretical studies are outlined below in order to demonstrate supporting and opposing evidence for these models.

#### **Pluralism**

Wilson (2008) comments that the interest group universe in France is largely pluralist, but with a more active role played by government. It tries to structure the wide-ranging interests that are represented by using subsidies to reward allies and punish foes. By shaping policy process largely above the demands of competing interest group actors, the French case is often referred to as “state pluralism” (Elgie and Griggs 2000: 151). A range of group interests has been represented on approximately 5000 councils, committees and commissions at the national level, as well as double that figure at the local level, since the 1960s (Chafer and Godin 2010). The most well-organised and powerful groups (business, agriculture, industry) demand the attention of government representatives. The FNSEA (agricultural interest group) has benefited from a privileged partnership with government over agricultural matters (Thompson 2003).

By attempting to create the most favourable balance of power, the French government also accords greater official recognition to certain interest groups than others. During the 1960s and 70s, the government purposefully disadvantaged the most powerful trade union (CGT) (Keeler and Hall 2001). From this perspective, a purist pluralistic standpoint is alien to the institutional and philosophical framework of the Fifth Republic (Woll 2009). All interest groups in France are not playing on a completely level playing field, as the state determines which players are legitimate. Contemporary French policy-making now reflects a rather uneasy compromise between Jacobin ideas and pluralism (Cole and Harguindeguy 2013).

However, the recognition that French pluralism is different to the standard form of pluralism leads to possibly concluding that pluralism *à la française* may not be pluralism at all. The continued existence of privileged state-group partnerships underlines a major weakness in the assertion that the French case is pluralist. Not only do many of the privileged state-group relations still remain, they have been partly

expanded into new areas where the government confronts new intractable policy problems (Elgie and Griggs 2000). Moreover, the public officials in the various consultative bodies have the choice to accept or decline the advice given to them by interest groups. Many less-well organised interest groups bemoan the failure of officials to heed their opinion. French interest organisations rarely feel involved in policy-making, despite the recent proliferation of consultative bodies (Le Queux and Sainsaulieu 2010). Pluralism cannot adequately explain the existence and impact of such well-defined privileged relations.

### Corporatism

Industrial relations (employers' organisations, trade unions and government) in France are cited as the core element to applying a corporatist viewpoint to French state-group relations. Neither the state, nor employers' confederations have, however, been willing to grant trade unions the recognition of institutionalised power. In comparison to trade unions, employers' organisations have sometimes managed to ensure a well-organised and professional lobby during industrial negotiations, which are considered in a more favourable light by government than presenting a poorly organised and fragmented voice. In fact, the state and employers' federations have encouraged the isolation of trade unions by offering alternative institutional arrangements (Fitch 2007).

There is one dominant employer's interest group (MEDEF) that enjoys a privileged position in governmental relations. Presenting a study into educational policy-making and interest group structure in France and the US, Baumgartner and Walker (1989) find an inherent bias in the French system in allowing for intimate relations between the largest interest groups and state institutions and officials. In

contrast to the US, many decisions are made at the national level (as opposed to the local levels) almost exclusively by civil servants within the Ministry for Education in this particular case. The small size, poor resources and younger educational interest groups have resulted in a highly competitive and ideologically divergent environment. This has encouraged the government to maintain a structured and corporatist style of, in this example, educational decision-making in France.

Wilson (1983, 2008) presents a series of arguments against the dominance of a corporatist standpoint on state-group relations in France. In contrast to other Western European countries, there has, firstly, been a feverish resistance among French trade unions to personal relations with government (Le Queux and Sainsaulieu 2010). Loyalties to syndicalist traditions have maintained an open unwillingness to participate in any corporatist practice. (Labbe 1994). Secondly, the existence of numerous trade unions and employers' associations make it more difficult than in other European countries to present a united voice. In no country in Europe is the level of fragmentation comparable (Beyers *et al.* 2012). In trade unionism alone there are over twenty major interest groups with an additional myriad of approximately fifty to a hundred smaller organisations. Outside a handful of policy areas, it is indeed difficult to demonstrate corporatist patterns in state-group relations in France.

### Alternative state-centric models

Both corporatism and pluralism have not proved to be entirely relevant or accurate for studying state-group interaction in France. Both models ignore the on-going concern for maintaining a certain level of autonomy, which is crucial for group members and governmental officials. Similarly, interest groups enter into different types of



relationships with the state on particular issues. Changing venues for power render previously influential and efficient policy-making coalitions irrelevant. These models also do not appreciate that state-group interaction can represent only one priority for either entity. Indeed, the importance of these relations for interest groups depends on their individual objectives (Wilson 2008). In referring to the French case, Wilson underlines that “a theory of interest-group/government relations must thus include recognition of external actors beyond the object of the theory and the activities and priorities of both groups and government that may detract from their interaction with each other” (Wilson 1987: 410).

An attempt to apply a more relevant model has been the introduction of ‘policy network theory’ to French politics. In stark contrast to Britain, policy network theory had been “rarely, if ever, explicitly evoked in the French literature” (Cole and John 1995: 92). This theory posits that decision-making is seldom limited to a group of key actors in certain organisations. Instead, a range of bargains is struck through negotiations between numerous bodies and organisations. In stark contrast to Baumgartner and Walker (1989), contemporary educational policy includes a wide range of actors within a policy network perspective, particularly in the implementation of an agreed policy. A deeper concentration on local level educational decision-making reveals a complex environment of policy networks (John and Cole 2000).

A more longstanding competing approach applied to the French case is referred to here as the ‘protest model’. It alludes to an alleged inclination towards protest behaviour among French citizens and groups. Accordingly, organisations are formed in order to defend very narrow interests (Wilson 2008). Many high profile cases have managed to successfully influence government policy. Sustained pressure from a wide range of anti-waste incinerator interest groups led to the abandonment of several waste-

to-energy plants throughout France (McCauley 2009). There has also been a long list of protests from excluded agriculture groups against certain objectives of the CAP (Thompson 2003), cross-interest anti-GM food protests (Joly and Marris 2003, McCauley 2011, 2015) and indeed an even wider set of groups in the anti-globalisation protests (Fougier 2002, 2004, Le Queux and Sainsaulieu 2010).

***French contributions to moving beyond state-centric models***

From a notably Anglo-American standpoint, understandings of interest group relations in France are entrenched in mainstream comparative politics state-centric models (see table 1 below) of *inclusion*<sup>1</sup> and *exclusion*<sup>2</sup>. The traditional Jacobin distaste for interest groups and the weakening of the ‘exception’ thesis have led to several attempts (Chafer and Godin 2010, Grossman 2009, Knapp and Wright 2006, Wilson 2008, Woll 2009) to theorise this relationship. This chapter argues below that we need to move beyond understanding French interest groups as simply locked within such state-centric models. Interest groups often participate in both including and excluding models. Policy processes also emphasise that these associations can be involved in both including and excluding models *at the same time*.

*Table 1: State-centric models of inclusion and exclusion*

<i>State-Centric Models</i>	<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>
	(neo-, meso-) Pluralism	(neo-, meso-) Corporatism
	Policy Networks	Protest

**Source:** Keeler and Hall (2001), Cole (2008), Wilson (2008), Vassallo (2010)

In response, the major contribution of French writings on interest groups is the emphasis on political sociology (Courty 2006, Duriez 2004, Fillieule 2010, Jacquot and Woll 2008, Mathieu 2007, Offerlé 2009, Saurugger 2008) above comparative or mainstream political science. It is evident above that the French contribution is most notable in the less conventional ‘protest model’ as well as new ‘sociological perspectives’ on Europeanisation. The inside-out influence of French scholarship on interest group studies begins with a rejection of the assumption that interest group behaviour is tied to state action. As Saurugger puts it, “the specificities of sociological approaches...lie in the spheres of ontology and epistemology...reject(ing) research designs and logics based on a strict unidirectional causality principle” (2009: 938). This inside-out influence challenges researchers in the field to embrace sociological approaches – even, as argued below, social movement theories.

The distinctly sociological perspective in French literature has challenged researchers to examine bottom-up (i.e. Europeanisation *of* interest groups) Europeanisation through understanding processes of ‘usage’, introduced by Jacquot and Woll (2003). This is a call-to-arms for scholars to reflect upon how local or national interest groups ‘use’ opportunities that arise in a multi-level system – especially at the supranational level. Non-French writers have sought to emphasise the lack of bottom-up Europeanisation taking place. Rootes (2005) and Warleigh (2001) has found that interest groups throughout Europe are not substantially Europeanising – in his view defined as relocation to Brussels – their activities. McCauley (2011) presents a more nuanced picture from a wide variety of interest representations of sporadic examples of bottom-up Europeanisation among French interest groups.

In French writing, bottom-up Europeanisation is most associated with economic interest groups in France. Grossman (2003, 2004) demonstrates that French interest

groups involved in financial services are able to employ EU specialists and consultants while establishing offices in Brussels. The focus of such interests groups in France has “necessarily shifted towards Brussels” (Thomas 2001: 46). Privileged with substantial resources, they have learnt how to side-step the state’s traditional monopoly on economic affairs. The EU has increasingly served to alter the traditional balance in French state-society relations by allowing greater access and influence at the European level to French societal interests at the policy formulation stage. However, the ability of non-economic interests groups to follow suit is empirically less proven (Saurugger 2007). Saurugger and Grossman (2006) emphasise the ‘*contrainte financière*’ (financial limitation) of such French groups to benefit from supranational opportunity structures. Interest group-based research should focus, therefore, on the role of organisations rather than the state.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDAS: A ‘GROUP-CENTRIC’ APPROACH**

The third section proposes the development of a new research agenda, which builds on ‘group-centric’ notions of interest groups behaviours. The ‘inside-out’ pressure of French scholarship reorients our understanding of the state and the group. Building on French and related non-French research, I propose below a more fluid account of the state than in mainstream pluralist or corporatist accounts. In addition to re-conceptualising the state, we also need to find better ways of reflecting the abilities of interest groups. Due to space restrictions, I limit this investigation to focusing on resource capabilities of the group. This section ends with the development of a new ‘group-centric’ framework for interest group analysis.

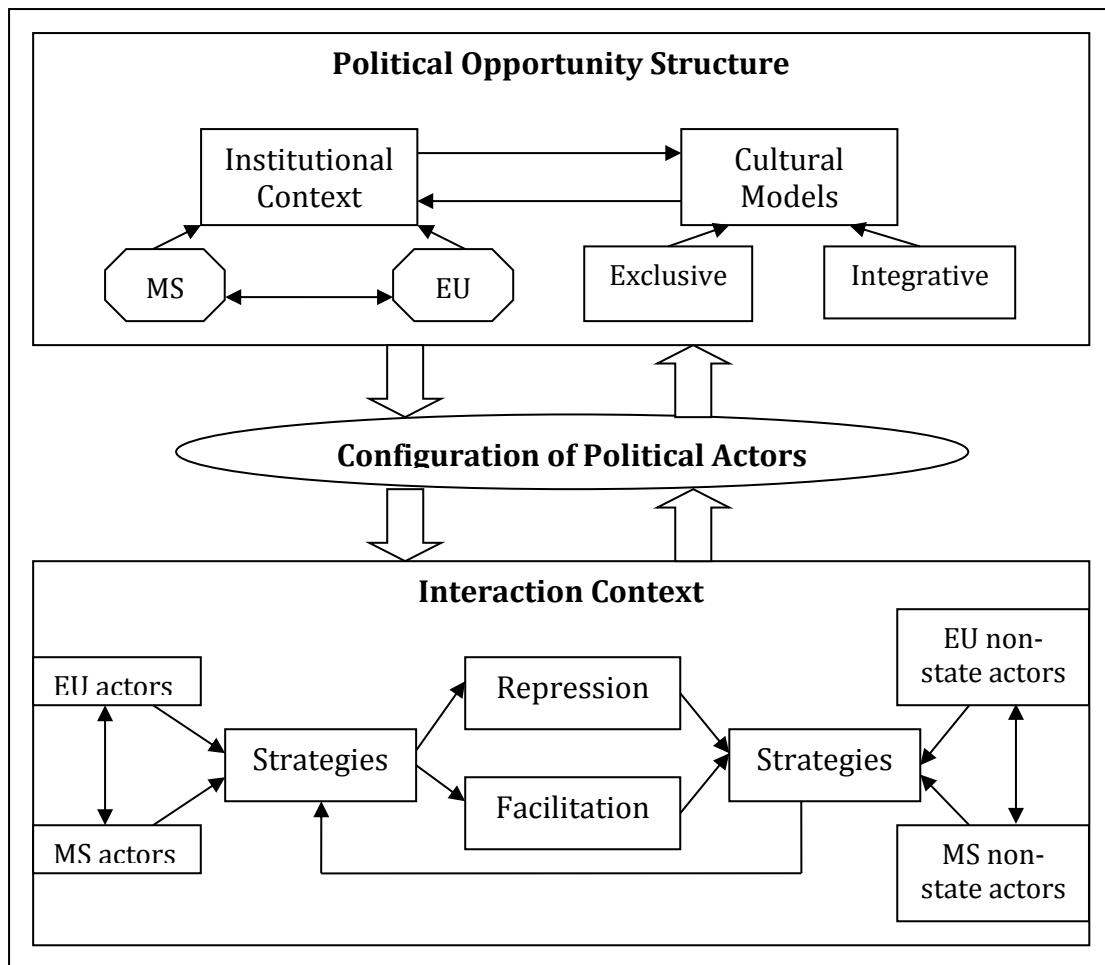
## ***The State as multiple opportunities and constraints***

The presence of sympathetic elites increases opportunities for interest groups to maximise the political system. Jacquot and Woll (2008) reveal that interest groups tend to engage in more conventional lobbying activities when there are discernable allies in the political process. With fewer or no allies, they are more likely to concentrate on protests and demonstrations. Political parties are especially important potential allies for challenging groups or movements. The SOS Loire Vivante, an interest group in opposition to a dam at *Serre de la Fare*, benefited from the support of local politicians. Although the dam project was originally a socialist party project, many PS local figures came out in opposition to the programme after a series of municipal elections (Hayes 2002, Hayes and Ollitrault 2014).

The EU has multiplied both restrictions and opportunities for various movements (Grossman 2009, Saurugger 2009). McCauley (2011) underlines that future research on interest groups in France should involve at least the inclusion of European level opportunities (bottom-up Europeanisation). He finds that political opportunity holds out promise for the analysis of the inter-, supra- and trans-national level. Tarrow elaborates further, “Europeans are beginning to realise more and more that the sources of many of their claims...are increasingly found in Europe’s integrated market and institutions...(with) open opportunities for coalitions of actors...to exploit its (Europe’s) political opportunities” (2001: 237, 243). There has been a substantial increase in interest group activity at the EU level throughout the last two decades. Groups have now begun to see the European Commission in greater terms as an opportunity structure.

The following model (Figure 1) is primarily derived and adapted from Hayes (2002), and Kriesi (2004). It is essentially a three-pronged model with political opportunity structures set alongside the configuration of political actors and within the specific context of interaction. It analyses the ‘receptivity of political elites to collective action’ through examining how the actors are structured, as well as their interaction patterns. Opportunity structures represent the first level of analysis of the political opportunity model. The core of the structures consists of the formal political institutions, which can be considered as either ‘open’ or ‘closed’. Kriesi’s model (2004) holds that increased decentralisation and the separation of power results in wider formal access and opportunities for groups to exploit. This model emphasises rather the key role of EU institutions and actors in determining the level of access for non-state actors.

*Figure 1: An Enlarged Model of the State*



**Source:** Inspired by Hayes (2002) and Kriesi (2004)

Cultural models refer to the adoption of either ‘exclusive’ (repressive, confrontational) or ‘integrative’ (cooperative and inclusive) strategies that are usually rooted in a country’s political system. Additionally, they refer to cultural or symbolic opportunities that determine the ideas that are visible and resonate with the public. Full access to political opportunities is ensured if both institutional and cultural/symbolic integrative opportunities are readily available. EU institutions influence both the institutional structures and the cultural models. Firstly, EU level institutions provide a different supranational institutional and cultural setting for non-state actors. Secondly, the involvement of national institutions in EU level decision-making can lead to domestic institutional or cultural transformation.

Actor configurations, the second level of analysis, represent what we know about the actors at a given point in time and the extent to which their interests are compatible with each other. The configuration of actors is essentially the result of processes of actor and coalition formation (Kriesi 2004). This represents the starting point for the examination of any strategic interaction between non-state actors, their allies and its adversaries, i.e. the interaction context. The third level of analysis (the interaction context) systematises the interaction between strategies adopted by both national and supranational non-state and state actors. Interaction among and between the non-state and state actors modifies in turn the larger political context, re-configuring the relevant actors, and facilitates/represses further political opportunities for non-state actors.

In addition to acknowledging an enlarged conceptualisation of the state (defined here as the political opportunity model), interest group scholarship must equally appreciate the ever-changing nature of political structures, the configuration of actors and patterns of interaction. Shifts in actors and interactive patterns may increase political opportunities for particular groups. Power between groups is often redistributed in favour of the previously excluded or currently powerful. Change is best understood within the policy-making process (Hayes 2002). It consists of three distinct phases: agenda-setting, decision-making and policy implementation. Each phase can mobilise different actors in a wide range of multi-level venues. This idea is termed as '*policy opportunity windows*'. Irrespective of policy cycle, opportunity windows provide a series of timeframes (agenda-setting, decision-making/policy translation and implementation) for analyzing interest group behavior.

### ***Resources and interest groups***



Resource mobilisation theory posits simply that *sufficient levels of resources are needed for initial and sustained mobilisation*. In other words, “the group can do no more than its resources...permit” (Freeman 1979: 167). Accordingly, the behaviour and existence of a group depends on a variety of resources. This theory emphasises the key role of rational incentives for collective action (Offerlé 1998). The principal hypothesis posits that the activity of any group is increased when it acquires more resources. As a result, the groups with more resources can exert more effort for all types of political action. Dalton *et al.* (2003) reiterates, indeed, that poorer resourced interest groups are more likely to concentrate on more confrontational activities. In contrast, better-resourced associations are more able to enact a wider series of cooperative and confrontational activities.

Resource mobilisation theory emerged in the late 1960s with Olson’s “The Logic of Collective Action”, in response to the shortcomings of classical collective behaviour theories. It sought to develop an understanding of what makes collective action possible. Although it does not systematically evaluate different resources, his work introduces the relationship between group size and the effectiveness of the group (Olson 1965). Obershall (1973) used this theory to identify and define potential resources for individual actors in reacting against the state. Tilly (1978) introduced the importance of internal organisation for interest groups.

The size of the organisation is a resource that can play a crucial role in its overall strategy. Dalton *et al.* (2003) found that groups with large staffs were more likely to be involved in all forms (both conventional and non-conventional) of political activity. Often vital for civil society organisations is the size of their voluntary and membership base. However, the level of funding is often cited as the most significant material

resource for mobilising collective action (McCauley 2015). Two factors in the funding issue of civil society associations are identified as particularly significant. Firstly, the *origin of funding* can sometimes determine the potential remit of the association while limiting its overall agenda (Woll 2007). Secondly, the *level of funding* can often control the life span of an association.

Experience can often act as a critical resource for interest groups. Sometimes the experience of individuals becomes the most important resource for certain organisations (Fillieule 2012). Igoe (2003) revealed that the lack of experienced individuals in a lands right movement in Tanzania resulted in the future of member groups hinging on one individual's decision. In addition to personal or individual experiences, the experience of the particular organisation can also represent an essential resource. Dalton (1994) demonstrates that older organisations tend to partake in conventional forms of behaviour (lobbying, consultation), largely due to a legitimacy and knowledge base built up throughout time. The less experienced younger organisations were often found to concentrate on protests and demonstrations. Many organisations decide to concentrate on the national arena because they have already experienced the "habits of action" necessary to operate effectively in the national system (Ollitrault 2001).

Interest groups frequently seek to form and join various umbrella organisations at both the national and European levels (Duriez 2004). In an EU context, the Commission has often displayed a preference for dealing with European-wide umbrella organisations. The growth of MNNPE (Multi-National Non-Profit Enterprises) has created multiple opportunities memberships for smaller associations (Woll 2006). These associations can take advantage of the superior resources wielded by the 'parent' group (Beyers and Kerremans 2007). In both cases, there is always a trade off between

gaining resources while maintaining independence. Involvement in umbrella organisations, larger parent organisations, and national and transnational networks often increases mobilisation through benefiting from a *heightened sense of legitimacy*.

Cole and Harguindeguy (2013) underline the pivotal role of a common philosophy and ideology to the mobilisation of direct action on language rights in France. A sense of *solidarity between activists* ensured the long-term survival of loosely formed organisations or movements. Moreover, their *shared belief structure* became as important as other resources in stimulating collective action (Fillieule and Meyer 2001). *La Goutte d'eau* campaign<sup>3</sup> is an example of how sustained mobilisation can be ensured through shared ideology alone (Doidy 2004). Moreover, memberships and networks (see above) often provide resources to local environmental groups through a strong ideological collective belief in a shared philosophy (Ollitrault 2004). These shared belief structures can both differ between groups and influence the form of mobilisation. It is acknowledged that treatment of this resource category cannot cover such issues in any real depth. As a result, particular attention should be accorded to examining the core issue of a group's ideology *vis-à-vis* the state.

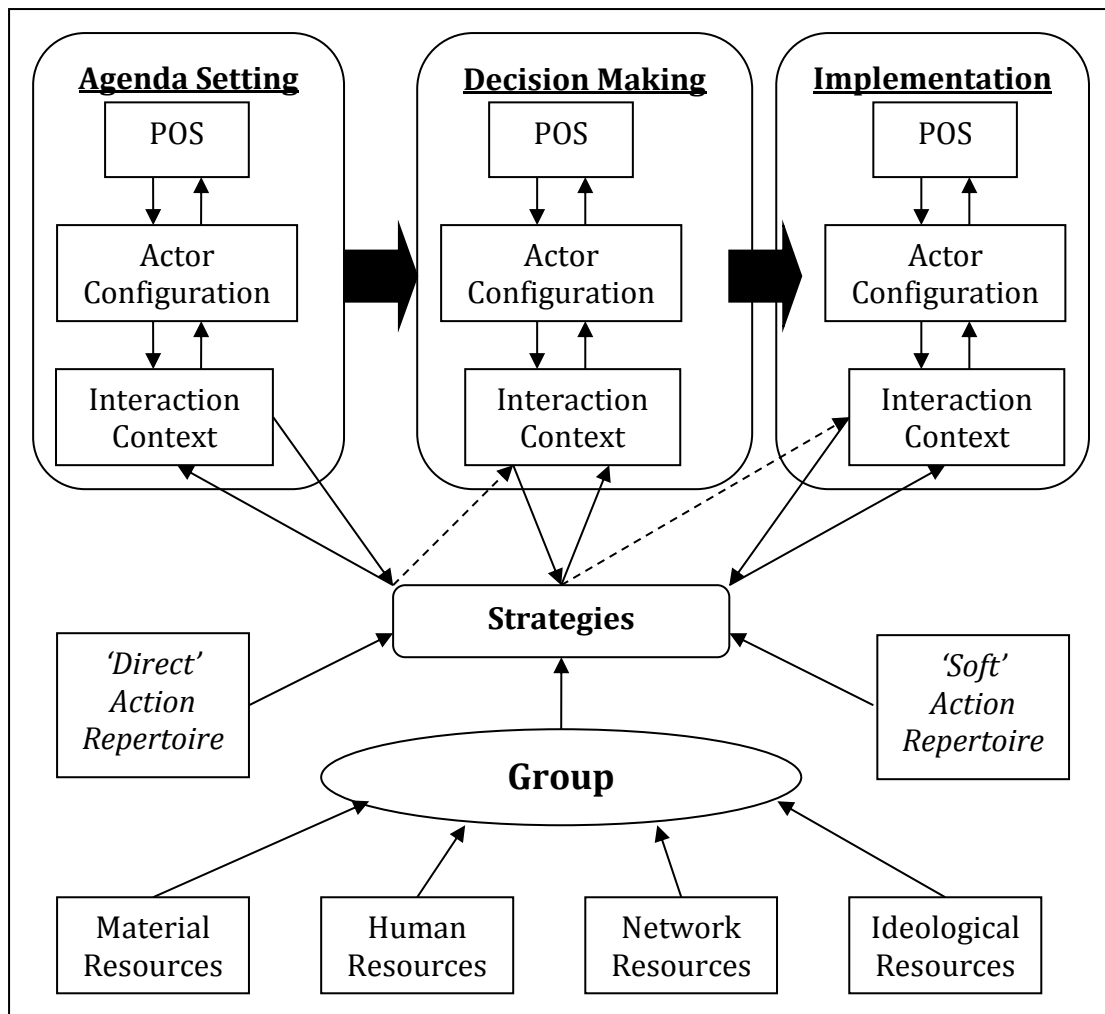
### ***A New group-centric framework for interest group studies***

Commentators continue to struggle with the nature of state-group relations in France. The seemingly exceptional circumstances posed by the French case have led numerous authors to elaborate specific frameworks. Domination-crisis, endemic/open and Marxist models have all been unsuccessful in fully explaining the relationship between the French state and interest groups. Perhaps the 'untidy reality model' is the embodiment of this failure. It admits overtly that the best description for such relations

would simply be ‘complex and untidy’. However, a myriad of authors maintain that this complexity is best understood as variations on both traditional comparative politics models and more recently applied approaches in this area. It is argued here that these attempts have also failed to adequately describe state-group relations in France. We still find ourselves unsatisfied with both traditional ‘exceptional’ accounts as well as more recent ‘mainstream’ comparative politics attempts to understand French state-group relations. This chapter has argued that we need to include concepts found in social movement theory to our understanding of state-group interaction.

Inspired by French political sociological accounts, figure 2 sets out a proposed new theoretical framework for analysing interest groups. It assesses the dynamics involved in a group’s decision to exploit shifting opportunities in light of the size and composition of its resource base (*resource-opportunity usage*). There are three distinct *opportunity windows* located within any policy development: agenda-setting, decision-making/policy translation and policy implementation (Hayes 2002). Different institutions, cultural models and actors are more/less involved according to the specific policy opportunity window. From this perspective, political opportunity structures, the configuration of political actors and the interaction context can all differ according to the particular opportunity window. As a result, this framework outlines three separate (and potentially distinct) policy windows in accordance with the three phases of policy development. Above all, this group-centric model analyses the strategies of civil society groups within shifting opportunities.

*Figure 2: Resource-Opportunity Usage for Interest Groups*



**Source:** Inspired by Hayes (2002), Kriesi (2004) and McCauley (2011)

The four main resource categories (material, human, network and ideological) all feed into the particular group in question. It is argued that the specific size and composition of their resource base largely defines the group's ability to employ both proactive and reactive strategies over the life-span of the policy process. Strategies are essentially defined as the employment of particular forms of action (action repertoires) at certain points in the development of a policy (defined according to the particular case study). As groups are not restricted to being labelled as either 'fundamentalists' or 'pragmatists', the group has a choice between a wide collection of activities that are described in the model as "direct"<sup>4</sup> (most associated with the former) or "soft"<sup>5</sup>

(connected with the latter) action repertoires. The particular strategy (one or more direct and/or soft action repertoires) targets the interaction context. More precisely, the group attempts to influence the collective/individual strategies of both EU and domestic policy actors. The resulting ‘facilitation’ or ‘repression’ of the group can lead to a shift in the future strategic decisions of the group *within* or *between* policy phases.

The ‘group’ is considered in the resource-opportunity usage model to be a rational actor that responds to its resource capacities and operating environment. It selects from a broad list of either ‘soft’ or ‘direct’ action repertoires as a reaction to facilitatory or repressive opportunity structures. As a result, there are three important limitations found with the explanatory and predictive value of this model. It does not, firstly, provide a detailed account of the collective moral imperative driving the overall movement. The model largely concentrates on individual accounts of resource and opportunity exploitation. Secondly, there is insufficient space to explore individual moral imperatives. The ‘ideological’ resource type is capable of only modest contributions to understanding psychological reasons for mobilisation. This approach does not, thirdly, seek to offer non-resource/opportunity explanations for mobilisation activities. The limitations stated above are a necessary discipline for exploring a resource-opportunity account of why only certain interest groups mobilise when others do not.

## **CONCLUSION**

The state should not take precedence in the study of interest groups. To revise Truman’s interpretation (1951), the “corridors of power” are not uniquely associated with government – but also Oxfam, WWF, Transparency International, as well as newer

organisations such as Wikimedia Foundation or FrontlineSMS. In the study of government, we are increasingly ready to accept that power is dispersed throughout a myriad of local, regional, supranational, international and horizontal networks of power. We must adopt a similar understanding in the study of interest groups. Groups allocate as much time to ‘lobbying’ each other than the, now, many guises of the state. We should, therefore, adopt, adapt and apply research frameworks that are sensitive to this new reality.

French scholarship offers a significant contribution to broadening our understanding of interest groups in line with these new realities. A transformed French state, within an ever-changing multi-faceted European and decentralisation context, has inspired a deep exploration of interest group activities. Above all, a distinctly sociological outlook emerges from the resultant literature. Whilst acknowledging the role of the state, French scholars have theorised more on when, how and why interest groups act, or indeed, do not. This presents a more fluid understanding than the static modeling undertaken on French politics by largely Anglo-American scholars. It offers, moreover, new research agendas for interest group studies beyond France.

This chapter has, finally, proposed a ‘group-centric’ approach to the study of interest groups in and beyond France. Research on interest groups is at an exciting moment in time. The multiplication of organisations, types of activities, *loci* of power, challenges researchers to find new ways of exploring the many ‘truths’ (from a social science ontological perspective) of interest group reality.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Inclusion is defined from the perspective of interest groups as participation in formal decision-making processes.

<sup>2</sup> Exclusion is also defined from the perspective of interest groups as the prohibition of such groups from formal decision-making processes

<sup>3</sup> This is a mountain ranch that was occupied by Eric Petetin on the site of a proposed European road project. It became the venue for concerts, festivals, public debates and general assemblies arranged by local groups. Throughout a 10-year period, *la Goutte d'eau* created a loosely knit network of environmental groups, ecologists and sympathisers (Doidy 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Various forms of protests, aggression and disobedience represent 'direct' forms of action repertoires.

<sup>5</sup> Lobbying, publishing reports, providing expertise (and generally non confrontational activities) is basically characterised as 'soft' forms of action repertoires.



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