The Agenda Setting Power of Organized Interests:

Linking Interest Groups and Policy Agendas Research

Joost Berkhout, University of Amsterdam; d.j.berkhout@uva.nl

Caelesta Braun, University of Utrecht; c.braun@uu.nl

Arco Timmermans, University of Leiden; a.timmermans@cdh.leidenuniv.nl

ABSTRACT

Since the early days of scholarly work on political agenda setting, a central premise is that some organized interests see their concerns translated into policy agenda issues whereas others do not find that their issues get formally recognized and prioritized. Interest representation creates bias in arenas of decision making, affecting the policy decisions of governments. The notion that some interests are better heard than others becomes problematic when the topic list on the political agenda shows low correspondence with the 'total' agenda of interest groups. Thus far, estimates of such representation bias are mostly anecdotal, involving specific policy issues that may be revealed by journalists, but more systematic data are lacking. One conceptual challenge is the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the policy agenda and the agendas of interest groups. That is, governmental agendas simultaneously produce 'demand' for representation, while interest group pressure creates a 'supply' of policy agenda issues. The dynamics of this simultaneous process is central in our presentation of a research agenda for integrating the existing theoretical and empirical work. We discuss the potential for an integrative approach to understand the agenda-setting power of interest group by reviewing common theoretical assumptions in both the policy agenda and interest group literatures. We formulate several key challenges and opportunities to enhance empirical research and our understanding of the role of interest groups in the selective nature of agenda setting.

WHY THE LOBBY AGENDA AND THE POLICY AGENDA ARE STILL UNCONNECTED

Why do some organized interests see their concerns turned into policy agenda issues whereas others find that their issues fail to be recognized and prioritized? Agenda setting power is one of the most central notions in political science. Much of what happens in politics is not only about opposing positions and competition over these positions, but first of all about the selection, definition and prioritization of problems that may enter the scope of attention of government. As famously noted by Bachrach and Baratz (1962, 948), politics works largely through the limitation of 'the scope of political process (...) to only those issues that are comparatively innocuous' to powerful actors. Similarly, Schattschneider (1960, 66) argues that 'the definition of alternatives is the supreme instrument of power'. Cobb and Elder (1973, 12, 4-6) highlight that 'pre-decisional processes often play the most critical role in determining what issues and alternatives are to be considered and the probable choices that will be made' and that this works via the reduction of the scope of conflict into 'systems of limited participation' to which only some actors have access. Any political process starts with agenda-setting and any influence exerted at later stages in the policy process is conditioned by the contours of the political agenda. In the works cited, interest groups, in addition to political parties and journalists, are among the most important actors controlling the agenda.

To really understand what happens during agenda setting as a selective stage in the policy process, it is necessary to consider *what* is at stake, *who* is involved, and, crucially, what is the *connection* between these *what* and *who* questions. The connection between stakes and actors is central to expressed concerns about bias in democratic representation, and about what interests are taken up and make it to policy decisions and which ones are left aside or remain unheard. But thus far, despite the impressive theoretical and empirical status quo of both the interest group and agenda-setting literatures, we cannot readily tell how the issues at stake are linked to the interest groups involved. So, why is it that, despite the strong empirical and normative relevance of this question linkages between interest groups and policy agendas research have hardly been developed further since they were introduced already long ago? (For exceptions see: e.g. Kingdon, 1984: 49-56; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 175-92; Baumgartner, 2010.). This is not due to mutual disinterest on the part of researchers active in these fields, as there is even some personal overlap with scholars being involved in both. It also does not seem to be a problem of empirical data, as considerable progress had been made in the construction of large and comparable datasets on interest organizations and policy agendas. Nor is the development of concepts and theory in the

two fields of research a problem of incompatible perspectives. Instead, the fundamental challenges we observe arise from integrating complementary theoretical lenses and wisely integrating existing data designs. In what follows we identify two commonalities in the two strands of the literature, a system's perspective and information-processing, and use these two perspectives to identify core challenges and opportunities to develop a policy and lobby agenda helix.

TOWARDS A LOBBY AND POLICY AGENDA HELIX

The crucial challenge that haunts scientific discovery more generally is also one of the most important drivers of the evolution of the parallel universes of the policy agenda and interest group research agendas. To know more about an important matter one has to dive deep, and thus, by implication, narrow the scope of investigation. At the bottom of the sea one can experience great discoveries but is hindered by the darkness that prevails at great depths. Yet, to understand the uniqueness of the abundant and complex life forms near the surface of the ocean, one needs the narrow yet detailed perspective of the deep dive. So, to understand the process of agenda-setting as a selective mechanism of interest representation, we need a connection between the extensive insights of interest groups mobilization and policy agenda composition, which are hitherto developed in relative isolation.

In the current scholarly literature, agenda-setting studies mostly focus on the first element, policy topics and issues of all kinds. Research on interest groups deals with the second element, actors more or less systematically in pursuit of a material or purposive interest. This specialization in the literature enables agenda researchers to identify the patterns of issue attention of political institutions and group scholars to specify the policy interests of social or economic groups.

Policy agenda scholars across countries find 'punctuated' patterns of change in policy agendas and show that long-term patterns of attention shifts between issues are similar in kind To examine this, the policy agenda field has developed impressive large-N databases to demonstrate over-time shifts in policy agendas and mainly focused on how bottlenecks in information processing, among which, institutional features of political-administrative systems, could explain the variation and similarities across policy agenda composition over time and across cases (e.g. Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Green-Pedersen and Walgrave, 2014; Alexandrova et al, 2012; Baumgartner et al, 2009; Breunig et al, 2005; John and Margretts, 2003; Jones et al, 2009).

Likewise, recent advancements in the study of interest group mobilization and activity have developed similarly impressive large-N databases enabling scholars to demonstrate variation of group mobilization and activity over time and across cases (Lowery and Gray, Berkhout et al 2015, REF). The main explanatory factors in the theoretical toolkit concern population-ecology dynamics, i.e. how competition over scarce resources determines survival patterns as well as how policy-makers demands and institutional characteristics (political opportunities) determine the likelihood of mobilization and organizational maintenance (Leech et al 2005; Coen and Katsaitis, Rasmussen and Carroll 2012).

As a net result we have a fairly good indication of the variation in issue attention across policy agendas (which topics gain most attention and why) and variation in patterns of mobilization (i.e. in which issue areas are groups mostly active and why). Scholars of interest groups may know which interests are politically organized and which are only latently present (e.g. Gray and Lowery, 1996; Lowery, Gray and Halpin, 2015). But they do not know how this precisely translates into the agendas of government and other political institutions where authoritative decisions are taken and policies are programmed, implemented and monitored. Likewise, policy agenda researchers may know which issues are on the agenda of the public, media, government and parliament, and they may have mapped the patterns of attention over time with rise and fall in the level at which issues are recognized and addressed. So, we cannot identify well what actors drive attention towards some issues rather than to others, how organizations alone or in coalition push for priority or avoidance of a matter nor can we tell how such interest organizations and groups secure that issues go through the legislative process or achieve that issues never reach this process. It is time to build a solid bridge between the two distinct waters of policy agenda and interest group research.

Yet, at this point we are not very well in doing so, although there are some crucial theoretical arguments and empirical evidence that certainly merit such an endeavor. One of the few studies integrating the two strands of research, for instance, shows that the major issues on group agendas and those on more formalized policy agendas are sometimes quite low in correspondence (Baumgartner et al., 2009 16-17). Likewise, a study comparing the lobby agenda and public opinion points to similar asymmetry (Kimball et al, 2012). And, finally, both fields of study indicate a typical 'feast or famine' pattern. Some issues on the policy agenda attract a lot of attention at the cost of others, so-called 'cascading processes' (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; 2012). In a same vein, we observe bandwagoning patterns among interest groups, some flock together in great numbers for a given policy issue, while other policy domains are characterized by just a few players. Multiple

likely candidates for explanation of this issue variation in mobilization patterns include policy makers' demand for information, mutual monitoring processes of groups ride the wave of a policy problems, the media as cue giver (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Baumgartner et al 2001; Boscarino 2009; Halpin 2011).

The explanations that connect the phenomena of bandwagons and issue attention suggest that both fields of research lack a key element that the other can provide. They need each other in order to get a better understanding of the selective process of policy making, before we actually know how much concerns about bias in interest representation and in the lobby agenda are justified, and know what causes bias whenever it occurs. Such integration at the theoretical and empirical front may add significant value. Interest group scholars would be helped in identifying which interest organizations are able to set the agenda, or at least benefit from attention or inattention to certain issues. Since political institutions can address only a limited number of policy topics at once, explaining access and influence of interest organizations in the policy process must include institutional information processing, agenda capacity, and competition for priority. In explaining stability and change in the set of issues addressed by governments, agenda-setting scholars can extend their scope of analysis to the diversity of interest groups and their respective activities.

While there is still much to be done in order to understand the construction of the lobby agenda, a basis of theoretical commonality is present in the literatures on interest groups and policy agendas. The two fields of research share (1) a macro-level evolutionary perspective on long term developments and cross-sectional differences in the group and policy system, and (2), at lower levels of analysis, a view on the role of information in political exchange and in organizational design and processes. In the following, we outline these similarities. We follow a distinction commonly made in the field of interest group studies between the 'population' and 'strategy' phases of the so-called influence production process (Lowery and Brasher, 2003, 18; Lowery and Gray, 2004; Lowery, Poppelaars and Berkhout, 2008). From the side of agenda-setting studies, this distinction more or less matches what Dowding, Hindmoor and Martin (2015, 2) label the 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' dimensions of the comparative policy agendas project. Here we present this distinction as a system's perspective and the information-exchange perspective on the lobby and policy agenda. We conceive of the lobby agenda as the issues shared by the set of interest groups already mobilized and the policy agenda as the constellation of formal institutional agenda's, in particular the congressional/parliamentary agenda, and executive agenda.

THE SYSTEM'S PERSPECTIVE: INTEREST GROUP POPULATIONS AND POLICY AGENDAS

Both literatures are successful in macro- and aggregate level mapping, either of groups (e.g. Lowery et al, forthcoming) or policy agendas (e.g. Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Baumgartner and Timmermans, 2012). This macro level also is the sphere at which an important potential connection exists between the two strands of research.

Population dynamics: competition and institutional demand for interest groups

In the field of interest groups studies, population ecological models are especially well-developed in aggregate level analysis of head-counts of interest organizations active in the policy process. The key underlying proposition of such approaches is that the number of interest organizations in a given environment is constrained, relatively independent of mobilization rates and dependent on the pre-existing density of organizations (Gray & Lowery 1996 40-41, Halpin & Jordan 2009). Population ecologists focus on environmental factors in conjunction with distinct growth patterns of sectors ('density dependence') to explain differences in numbers of organizations in a given sector or polity. The approach is well-developed within organizational sociology and applied to a wide variety of organizations (Aldrich & Pfeffer 1976, Hannan & Carroll 1992, e.g. Hannan & Freeman 1989), and has developed as a distinct literature within studies of interest groups. Selective pressures ensure that not all interest organizations survive, and such pressures increase when populations become more crowded. The population ecology approach in political science posits that survival of interest organizations depends on the 'energy' available in the organizational environment (e.g. policy making) and the 'area' or potential size of the environment on which the organization relies (e.g. potential constituents) (Lowery & Gray 1995).

The population ecological or demographical study of interest organizations is increasingly popular (Halpin & Jordan 2012, Lowery & Gray 2015), also in Europe (Berkhout 2015). It has also proven to be relatively successful in explaining the numbers of groups in US States (Gray & Lowery 1996 137-58, Lowery & Gray 1995), economic sectors in the EU (Berkhout et al. 2015, Messer, Berkhout & Lowery 2010) and changes in numbers of groups over time (Fisker 2013, Nownes 2004). Two key factors that determine the density of groups across economic sectors and policy domains (or in population-ecology parlance, interest guilds) include the number of potential constituents (the 'area' term in Lowery and Gray's ESA model) and policy makers' demand for interest group involvement (the 'energy' term in Lowery and Gray's ESA model). First, the number of potential constituents determine the number of groups capable of surviving. Simply put, the size of the car industry determines the number of car lobby organizations. Organizations specialize because of

competition for similar members and, hence, specialize in specific domains, or organizational niches. So, in this case, the selective environment (competition among equals) determines variation of mobilization pattern across groups (see also Boscarino 2009). Some regard institutional factors as much more decisive in explaining issue specialization of groups. They consider organizational niches as a matter of organizational reputation determined by a policy makers' demand for valuable and high-expert input (e.g. Brown 1990; Heaney 2004). This demand-driven explanation of organizational niches relates to a second key factor of interest group density, and that is policy makers' or institutional demand for interest group involvement. By developing policy proposals, governments create a demand for input, which in turn stimulates interest group mobilization. Such demand factors are shown to determine the number of active groups in policy sectors as well (Coen and Katsaitis 2013, Carroll and Rasmussen 2012).

A system's perspective to interest group communities points at important variation at the policy domain or economic sector (guilds) level. The crucial question is whether these processes are much more deterministic in nature, i.e. a matter of natural selection or more strategic in nature and therefore a matter of organizational adaptation (Braun 2015; Halpin 2014, Halpin and Djaugberg 2009).

Policy agendas: Leptokurtosis across cases and over time

As regards the study of agendas, in their theory of punctuated equilibrium, Baumgartner and Jones (1993; 2015; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005) show how bottlenecks in information processing lead to disproportionate amounts of attention to issues, following a 'feast or famine' pattern. Among other findings, comparative studies on policy agendas shows that across a range of different countries, long term patterns of attention shifts between issues are similar in kind (e.g. Baumgartner et al, 2009). Major shifts in policy agendas tend to occur as often mid-way during incumbency of governments and parliaments as after elections when political parties in office announce new plans and topics of concern (Mortensen et al, 2011; Jennings et al, 2011). Also, governments expanded their scope of attention with the construction of the welfare state, but they also seem to have reached a limit of the number of different topics addressed, and the scope even is seen to narrow down either as a trend in the last two to three decades or more episodically, as in the EU (Alexandrova et al, 2012; John et al, 2013; Green-Pedersen and Walgrave, 2014; Baumgartner and Jones, 2015). The aggregate mapping of policy agendas clearly indicates a non-incremental pattern of change in attention to issues over time and a skewed distribution of attention across issues at single moments in time. An additional and relevant empirical finding

from the emerging comparative work on policy agendas with high relevance for lobbying is that agendas at the input side show more adaptation and 'normal' distributions of attention change between time intervals (year to year, month to month etc.), while those at the output side containing laws, budget allocations and other policy decisions with political endorsements are more sticky and display less frequent but more intense changes. Such episodic major changes occur statistically in a leptokurtic frequency distribution, with its typical slender peak around the 0 (no or very small change) and fat tails at both ends representing large change (a minus 100 percent, or a plus 100 or much higher percentage of change). A system's perspective to policy agendas highlights consistent non-normal distributions of issue attention across venues and over time.

Common ground and challenges

A couple of recent studies connect the composition of the interest group population with that of the policy agenda. This may be in terms of (1) structural similarity, (2) substantive correspondence, (3) cause or (4) consequence. First, there is an explicit linkage of interest group population research and analysis of policy agenda composition in the similar evolutionary perspective, in which agenda dynamics and lobbying dynamics are part of the same process. This is where bandwagon effects on some issues occur (Halpin, 2011), and conversely where many other issues remain unattended at least for some time, a phenomenon discussed further in the next section. More specifically, Baumgartner and Leech (2001) find that groups are distributed over issues in a skewed manner, with a small number of issues attracting a large number, a 'bandwagon', of lobbyists. This skewed distribution mirrors the distribution of attention of policy makers that produces the policy punctuations. Second, as regards correspondence, as part of their mapping exercise, Baumgartner et al. (2009 16-17) note that 'the agenda of lobbying is significantly different from the congressional agenda overall or from the public's list of major concerns'. This is similar to the degree of correspondence of the lobby agenda to the agenda of the media and public opinion. Recent work done on this theme indicates that agenda correspondence sometimes is quite low (Kimball et al, 2012; Breunig and Klüver, 2015). Third, as cause, Kluver (2015) shows that changes in the number of environmental groups lobbying the German Bundestag increases the attention to environmental issues on the parliamentary agenda. Bevan and Rasmussen (2015) find that the US government (Congress, President) is more responsive to change in public opinion on issues where interest groups are active, compared to issues on which only a low number of groups lobby. Fourth, interest groups scholars indicate that governmental agendas produce 'demand' for interest representation (e.g. Leech et al, 2005; Gray et al, 2005; Mahoney, 2004; Baumgartner, Lowery and Gray, 2009). They do this because policy makers constantly look for constituencies and future public and private

endorsement of the policy decisions they make. Also, a given policy agenda, once set, attracts interest group activity seeking to influence decisions in the policy process following this initial agenda. These are all examples of linkages between macro-level studies of group populations and policy agendas.

As follows from this discussion, one of the challenges is designing research that accounts for the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the policy agenda of government and the agendas of interest groups. As noted, governmental agendas produce 'demand' for interest representation (e.g. Leech et al, 2005). At the same time, interest groups provide a 'supply' of issues for inclusion on the policy agenda (or for exclusion from it), which subsequently connects to the previous point about policy makers seeking constituency. Whether 'supply' responds to 'demand' or vice versa depends on various, contagious conditions and circumstances.

Another challenge is the assessment of institutional, country-level differences (Lowery, Poppelaars and Berkhout, 2008; Berkhout, 2014). Comparative research on the US and EU done by Mahoney (2008) indicates that setting the lobby agenda and influencing the policy process varies as systems, or policy subsystems, provide many or few ways for compromise and amendment, and for preventing issues to be placed on the agenda or kill bills that already made it there.

As research on lobbying is moving to a larger N in the policy issues included in single studies (Hojnacki et al, 2012), a next step is to analyze lobbying and policy agendas at large. Such analysis not only may be on the construction of the lobby agenda, but also consider how a given policy agenda, as in the perspective of the aforementioned ESA model, produces lobby energy and activities across a range of different topics. This works two ways: on the one hand, certain interest guilds may be more sensitive to changes in the policy environment than others. In the terminology of the ESA this means that the explanatory power of the 'energy' term of the model varies across guilds (at least relative to the 'area' term). And that this is caused by factors related to the interest guild such as its diversity rather than the nature of the policy energy or institutional environment. On the other hand, the institutional environment is likely to impact, 'produce energy', in different ways, depending on the institutional venue or system involved. In countries with coalition governments for example, comprehensive policy agreements negotiated by political parties taking office together not only serve as a base line for mutual expectations and establishing trust, but the policy statements in these agreements also are pointers for interest groups to promote or attenuate issues on the governmental policy agenda. In such cases, more comprehensive coalition agreements are likely to trigger more extensive group mobilization. Likewise, agencies dealing with

implementation and monitoring increasingly are becoming a target of lobbying, as much of the policy fine print and its consequences is created by them. Further below we will point out that the relationship between the lobby agenda and the policy agenda involves some problems of measurement and causal inference that need to be addressed in empirical research.

Analysis of the properties of interest populations in policy domains using conditions stipulated in the population ecological ESA model and the flow of attention to problems with its selective effects on prioritization by policymakers can reveal more systematically how actors and agendas connect.

INFORMATIONAL PROCESSING: IDEAS, FRAMING AND EXPERTISE

A core theoretical assumption that underpins the macro-level variation in issue attention and group mobilization is the notion of bounded rationality and limited information processing by both individual policy experts and organizations (Baumgartner et al 2009; Jones and Baumgartner 2012). Ideas on the how the ideal world should like look, and hence, framing, play a key role in connecting the macro-level of patterns of attention and activity to meso-level patterns of strategic behavior (cf. Baumgartner and Mahoney 2008) and explain major policy shifts (Baumgartner 2013). Illustrative in that regard is the following quote by Johnson and Kwak (2010, 5-6) on the political influence of the financial industry: "Campaign contributions and the revolving door between the private sector and government service gave Wall Street banks influence in Washington, but their ultimate victory lay in shifting the conventional wisdom in their favor, to the point where their lobbyists' talking points seemed self-evident to congressmen and administration officials." The way policy makers interpret, digest and prioritize information to feed into legislative proposals and how interest groups strategically present their arguments is a key connecting link that may explain shifting issue attention and policy agenda influence over time and across cases.

Interest group strategies: the exchange of ideas and expertise

Central theoretical perspectives on the behavior of interest groups are the resource exchange and resource dependency perspectives (e.g. Berkhout, 2014; Braun 2015; Binderkrantz, Christiansen and Pedersen, 2015; Bouwen, 2004; Beyers and Klandermans, 2007). In both organization-theoretical perspectives, the behavior of interest organizations is assumed to be driven by their need to survival (Pfeffer and Salancsik, 1978). This assumption also underlies the population ecological perspective (Hannan and Freeman, 1977, 1989). For their survival, interest groups depend on several types of resources which they acquire through engaging in mutually beneficial

exchange relationships with other types of actors, most notably policy makers and their members, but also, among others, journalists (on the latter: Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993).

This has been 'classically' posited by Schmitter and Streeck (1999 19-30) who identify two logics of exchange. These lead to an external structuration of the interest organization and, in that way, produce typical behavioral patterns on the part of interest groups. On the one hand, as also central in earlier group theories (Olson 1965; Salisbury, 1969), interest organizations offer their members incentives, such as favorable government policies, voting rights on internal decisions or information services to persuade them to stay or become members (logic of membership). Organizational features such as branches, membership rights and open or closed membership are part of this exchange relationship (Schmitter & Streeck 1999 45-75). On the other hand, leaders of organizations offer compliance or support of their constituents to government actors in exchange for favorable regulation and access to the policy process (logic of influence).

This resource exchange view on organizational structure and behavior has the benefit that it 'forces' upon the researcher the inclusion of both 'sides' of any exchange. In other words, we find that quite some conceptual thought is given to the demands of members, policy makers, and, sometimes, other actors, in their relationship with interest groups. For instance, Bouwen (2004) indicates that the European Parliament is more interested in broader political support and the European Commission more interested in specific (technical) information about the sector and members of interest organizations. He explicitly includes characteristics of both the interest groups and the political venue lobbied. Similarly, Coen and Katsaitis (2013) point out that the variation in information needs on the part of the different DG's of the European Commission explains the presence of groups. And Braun (2012) demonstrates that the demand by policy makers is constrained by the number and type of groups capable of providing a particular policy good.

As early as 1960, Schattschneider (1960) pointed to the strategic incentives that follow from these differences in the political needs of policy environments: 'losers in any conflict have an interest in shifting venues to bring new allies and activate friendly audiences.' Following this argument, Baumgartner and Jones (1991, 1050) identify the strategy of 'shopping' for the most 'receptive political venue' relying on 'well-placed allies', and with the aim of breaking down, in Cobb and Elder's (1983) words, 'systems of limited participation'. However, while researchers have been broadly aware of distinct institutional differences and strategic incentives to shape the agenda, there is only a relatively recent set of agenda-setting-oriented studies that conceptually notes and empirically compares lobby behavior across institutional venues (e.g. Pralle, 2003, 2010),

sometimes at multiple levels (Beyers and Kerremans, 2012; Miller, 2007; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Princen and Kerremans, 2008). This is exactly where there is a concrete shared interest of agenda and group scholars. Below we further explicate the theoretical commonalities and possibilities for strengthening the connection. This mainly involves a specification of the types of 'exchange goods' policymakers seek to extract from interest groups, and the types of 'goods' sought by interest groups. In a more fundamental sense, this refers to the ways in which organizations deal with information.

Actors of any kind must act within the constraints of bounded rationality, which make them navigate in ways that often look similar to their past course of action. Pralle (2006) for example points out how venue shopping for agenda access often is much more limited than a 'pluralistic shopping mall model' may suggest. Such a limited scope of navigation comes as a relevant factor in lobbying behavior, in the same way as money resources, information access and public legitimacy come in different portions as lobbying assets.

Policy agendas: serial and limited information processing

Public organizations responsible for preparing and taking policy decisions are similarly limited by institutional and cognitive boundaries, and thus no matter how broad the supply of interests and claims from business to associations to NGOs and social groups, they must select. As is well-known, the bounded-rationality thesis assumes instrumental or rational decision-making confined by human cognitive boundaries. Human beings allocate attention in a serial way, significantly influenced by emotion and a limited cognitive attention span (Gavetti et al, 2007; Jones, 2003; Simon, 1985; 1997[1947]). Further, rather than having to face a lack of information, policy makers have to cope with political systems characterized by an abundance of policy expertise, given the highly-expert nature of contemporary policy communities. The main challenge faced by policy makers is thus how to interpret and sift through the oversupply of policy information and expertise (Baumgartner et al, 2009; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Workman et al, 2009). Given the sequential and at best partially-complete nature of human information processing, the over-supply of policy expertise within policy communities and institutional lock-in mechanisms, policy makers will only pay attention to a limited number of policy problems and consider only one or a few favored policy options at a maximum. In other words, the selected few issues policy makers prioritize and how they are dealt with tend to dominate the policy process for an extended period of time. For a given period of time, changes will be of a marginal nature while major changes are resisted by institutional forces reinforcing the boundedly-rational nature of political decision-

making and the human tendency to resist revisiting their decision-premises. This leads to patterns that deviate from the incremental model: stability and smooth adaptation are interrupted by drastic shifts. Or, agenda change, and policy dynamics more generally, are characterized by 'stick-slip dynamics', as Jones and Baumgartner (2012, 8) put it.

Results from the work done on policy agendas thus far shows that properties of political systems and the policy making institutions within them do not in themselves determine attention or policy change rates, but they do channel the processes in which choices about attention, priorities, and policy change take place. In a systems perspective, institutions digest all kinds of inputs, and possible (and observed) variation in policy outputs may be explained by rules and procedures typical to specific institutions. A comparative approach to policy agendas research thus may help us to better understand how similar kinds of input to policy-making institutions may lead to different output decisions due to variation in rules and procedures. This does not mean that such policy choices all follow from policy agendas set by governments in the 'planning' mode. They also may occur by way of reaction to events and new information not at all foreseen. In fact, comparing the development of policy agendas across countries may show under what conditions governments are able to respond in proportion to such events and news, appear incapable to timely response, or even collapse.

Common ground and challenges

Institutional structure of specific policy making bodies and organizations may allow for large or rather limited agenda capacity, in that organizations may be designed for parallel processing of information, considering many issues at a time, while others must operate within the confines of a limited agenda capacity and issues are addressed serially, one or just a few at a time. In that case, issues – and thus also lobbying organizations – must engage in tougher competition for attention. This difference is not just one of two separate systems of issue signaling and agenda setting. They are connected, as matters with a low key profile addressed in parallel administrations (government departments, the multiple even more specialized units of administration, etc.) are addressed there relatively routinely *until* they are propelled to a higher sphere of attention and acquire prominence. Interest organizations seeking such expansion will play on focus events and use their mobilization and outside lobbying repertoire. This is where lobby bandwagons emerge and press policymakers to points of decision (Halpin, 2011). Conversely, issues that feature in the priority lists and involve high levels of conflict and political or public drama will not stay in that sphere as bandwagon lobby sound bites fade, matters are got under control and other issues are moved to the forefront. In

short, not only macro conditions such as political and policy making system properties and developments in the scope of government set the stage for lobbying the policy agenda. Also information processing capacities of policymaking organizations have implications for agenda setting attempts and the level of competition in seeking access and influence.

In addition, remember that patterns of issue attention diverge from the policy-input to the policy-output phases. What this means, is that in a policy making system's perspective, the lobby pressure needed for a shift in attention is much lower at the input side, where agendas consist of news coverage in the media (the media agenda), hearings and consultations (parliaments, government departments, directorates, etc). By contrast, all lobbying directed towards the output side of the policy making system where authoritative decisions occur involves higher political transaction costs. When political majorities are close to being definitive, and external credibility is at stake, changing voting intentions and administrative or political decisions will be extremely hard to accomplish.

These costs and pressure levels needed to reverse a policy process also are a main reason why influencing the lobby agenda is of such strategic importance. Once in the policy pipeline, reversion thresholds rise with each next stage, and this also means that preventing an issue from being addressed and be prominent on the initial policy agenda is, likewise, a first point of victory to lobbying actors seeking issue avoidance and maintenance of the status quo.

Finally, as said in the previous section on lobby populations and agenda composition, the sequence not only follows from some unorganized set of latent or manifest issues via lobbying to a policy agenda, it also happens vice versa, when a policy agenda, once set, attracts lobbying activity as stakeholding actors may see their interests threatened or estimate that an agenda issue can provide a window of opportunity for them. Thus interest organizations may mobilize against a budget cut set on the agenda by one or more parties taking office, or they may seek to push an issue onwards to promote a decision from which they can reap the benefits. The significance of this sequence of agenda setting and lobbying is that identified issues, and certainly prioritized ones, are seen to be more likely to lead to interest group mobilization and competing lobby strategies over the path and content of political decision making on these issues (Baumgartner et al, 2009).

Thus, the theoretical lens on the nature of information processing, with pressure and critical mass needed to be built up before significant attention shifts occur and lobby agendas change is very well

compatible to the view on the population of interest groups and the density within specific domains. Such domain specific properties set the stage for the flow of information and pressure that leads all lobby agendas to change from one time to the next. Specific characteristics of policy-making institutions can stretch the scope of attention for addressing many issues at once, but this is possible only as long as some issues are not pushed to high levels of attention. But when this happens, also the lobby agenda is likely to display punctuations that can be better understood when using an integrated theoretical perspective on long term dynamics in interest representation and the issues on which such representation takes place.

Any future research endeavor will have to deal with a number of important research design issues. The core issue is that policy agendas are the result of diverse sources of pressure. Not only interest organizations and groups make their way into venues of agenda access. Also political parties carry their promises and claims onto agenda setting stages, as do experts signaling problems in need of more systematic attention, and agenda content selection further happens through effects of the media as a venue of attention and problem portrayal, in which focus events can propel issues to higher spheres of concern.

Furthermore, the focus usually is on what is already on the agenda, but the hidden face of power is about those issues that do not appear on the agenda as a result of interest group preference and activity. We may have a relatively well-developed idea about the composition of the policy agenda, but our understanding of the lobby agenda is still limited. One reason why our view on the lobby agenda may be blurred is that some issues signaled by interest groups may be directed towards their memberships rather than aimed at setting the policy agenda. So even if we construct an idea of the 'lobby agenda', it is not at all clear which parts of this agenda are signaling issues for membership and constituencies, and which parts are actually brought along to set the policy agenda of political decision-making institutions. Finally, also activities of government organizations and agencies themselves can be seen as pursuit of interests, vis- à-vis other government organizations or those at a higher or lower level of governance. It is thus quite a task to distinguish and empirically unravel interest groups from these other actors and venues that play their part in setting the policy agenda. Controlling for the influence of all these actors and simultaneously accounting for structural, institutional factors may seem practically impossible. Yet, we believe there is a way to link the research programs on interest groups and policy agendas more closely and also think that such integration can help us in understanding the key classic puzzle of value allocation in politics.

WORK AHEAD AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

We think that there are at least three directions of future research at the nexus of agenda and interest group research.

First, we believe that linking existing datasets will provide opportunities for addressing research questions on the interrelationship of interest groups and policy agendas. This is at the macro level of aggregate numbers of interest groups and aggregate levels of government attention. In part, this is a continuation of on-going research cited earlier There is still a lot of merit in studies engaged in mapping differences between agendas and countries. One of the key potential contributions is the identification of the lobby agenda. That is, current population ecological studies have a clear idea of the numbers of groups on a given topic. But such studies do not identify precisely which issues groups care about: what do they write about in their monthly magazine? What is on their 'wish list' when it comes to policy changes? What do they spend time and energy on? Population densities need to be translated into actual interests in topics. A next step then is help the mapping of the degree of correspondence between the lobby agenda and the policy agenda. And even further in the future is the explanation of variation in the correspondence between these agendas, based on expectation derived from both population ecological theory and punctuated equilibrium theory.

Second, at lower levels of aggregation, we think that quite some questions remain regarding the specific interaction between groups and policy makers. This probably requires research designs that focus on specific issues, as done in the INTEREURO project (Beyers et al 2014) and the Lobbying and Policy Change project (Baumgartner et al). But this is not enough. That is, in these projects the variation in institutional venues is definitively too low compared to the strong theoretical expectations on the effect of needs or demands on the part of policy makers, as may be derived from studies of venue shopping. Comparative or multi-geographical level research designs that focus on low number of well-selected issues could move the field further. Also, such designs could help identify the mechanisms that underlie the 'bandwagon' phenomenon (or 'feast or famine' pattern of policy change): who cues whom? Which circumstances produce chain-reactions across policy subsystems?

Last, and eventually most important, the critical research task then is to empirically and theoretically link the macro- and issue-level analysis. At the minimum, this involves the selection of cases. That is, macro-level findings may provide pointers to 'typical' or 'deviant' cases. For instance,

when assessing bandwagoning, issues may be selected that are at the extreme ends in terms of group density / attention (ie a 'crowded' and 'quiet' issue), and/or in terms of policy attention or change. More ambitiously, the macro- and issue-level analysis are integrated into a single mixed-methods, comparative research project.

While for an important part interest groups and policy agendas research speak the same theoretical language, they could speak much more to each other. Strengthening the connection in theory, integrating elements that are similar but stand apart in actual research work, also can help to shine a clearer light on the aforementioned problems of empirical complexity of the traffic of interest organizations, issues, and political institutions.

REFERENCES

Alexandrova, Petya, Marcello Carammia, and Arco Timmermans. 2012. "Policy Punctuations and Issue Diversity on the European Council Agenda." *The Policy Studies Journal* 40 (1): 69-88.

Bachrach, P. & Baratz, M.S. (1962) Two Faces of Power. *American Political Science Review,* 56(4).

Aldrich, H. E. and Pfeffer, J. (1976) 'Environments of Organizations', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 2 (1), 79-105.

Bachrach, P. & Baratz, M.S. (1962) Two Faces of Power. *American Political Science Review,* 56(4).

Baumgartner, F. R., & Jones, B. D. (1991). Agenda dynamics and policy subsystems. *The journal of Politics*, *53*(04), 1044-1074.

Baumgartner, F.R. & Leech, B.L. (2001) Interest Niches and Policy Bandwagons: Patterns of Interest Group Involvement in National Politics. *Journal of Politics,* 63(4): 1191-1213.

Baumgartner, F.R. and C. Mahoney (2008), 'The two faces of framing. Individual-level framing and issue definition in the European Union', *European Union Politics*, 9(3): 435-449

Baumgartner, F.R. & Timmermans, A. (2012) Analyzing Patterns of Government Attention and what Drives them: The Comparative Agendas Project. *Perspectives on Europe,* 42(2): 7-13.

Baumgartner, F.R. (2010) Interest Groups and Agendas. Maisel, L.S., J.M. Berry and G.C. Edwards (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Parties and Interest Groups.* , Oxford University Press.

Baumgartner, F.R. 2013. ‚Ideas and Policy Change. *Governance. An international journal of policy, administration and institutions,* 26(2): 239-258

Baumgartner, F.R., Berry, J.M., Hojnacki, M., Kimball, D. & Leech, B. (2009) *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses and Why*, Chicago University Press, Chicago.

Baumgartner, F.R., Breunig, C., Green-Pedersen, C., Jones, B.D., Mortensen, P.B., Neytemans, M. & Walgrave, S. (2009) Punctuated Equilibrium in Comparative Perspective. *American Journal of Political Science,* 53(3): 603-620.

Baumgartner, Frank R., David Lowery, and Virginia Gray. 2009. Federal Policy Activity and the Mobilization of State Lobbying Organizations. *Political Research Quarterly*, 62, 3: 552-567

Berkhout, J. (2013). Why interest organizations do what they do: Assessing the explanatory potential of 'exchange' approaches. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, *2*(2), 227-250.

Berkhout, J. (2014). Comparing populations of interest organizations: Skating on thin ice?. *Available at SSRN 2431609*.

Berkhout, J. (2015) '3. Organization Demography Research in Europe' in D. Lowery, V. Gray and D. Halpin (eds). *The Organization Ecology of Interest Communities: An Assessment and An Agenda.* Palgrave, .

Berkhout, J., Carroll, B., Braun, C., et al. (2015) 'Interest Organizations across Economic Sectors: Explaining Interest Group Density in the European Union', *Journal of European Public Policy,* .

Bevan and Rasmussen, When does Government Listen to the Public? Interest Groups & Dynamic Agenda Representation in the United States, Paper prepared for presentation at the workshop "Interest Group Populations in Comparative Perspective", Hamburg University. 8-9 May 2015

Beyers, J. & Kerremans, B. (2007) Critical Resource Dependencies and the Europeanization of Domestic Interest Groups. *Journal of European Public Policy,* 14(3): 460-481.

Beyers, J., & Braun, C. (2014). Ties that count: explaining interest group access to policymakers. *Journal of Public Policy*, *34*(01), 93-121.

Beyers, J., & Kerremans, B. (2012). Domestic embeddedness and the dynamics of multilevel venue shopping in four EU member states. *Governance*, *25*(2), 263-290.

Binderkrantz, A. S., Christiansen, P. M., & Pedersen, H. H. (2015). Interest group access to the bureaucracy, parliament, and the media. *Governance*, *28*(1), 95-112.

Bouwen, P. (2004) Exchanging Access Goods for Access: A Comparative Study of Business Lobbying in the European Union Institutions. *European Journal of Political Research,* 43(3): 337-369.

Braun, C. 2012. The captive or the broker? Explaining public agency-interest group interactions. Governance: An international journal of policy, administration, and institutions 25 (2):291-314.

Braun C., Lobbying as a Leveraged Act: On Resource Dependencies and Lobby Presence, in D. Lowery, V. Gray and D. Halpin (eds). *The Organization Ecology of Interest Communities: An Assessment and An Agenda.* Palgrave.

Breunig, Christian. 2006. "The More Things Change, the More Things Stay the Same: A Comparative Analysis of Budget Punctuations." *Journal of European Public Policy* 13(7): 1069-85.

Chamberlain, A. 2009. Population ecology and niche seeking in the development of gay and lesbian rights groups. *Social Science Journal* 46 (4):656-670.

Cobb, R.W. & Elder, C.D. (1983) *Participation in American Politics: The Dynamics of Agenda-Building*, Sec. edn, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Coen, D. & Katsaitis, A. (2013) Chameleon Pluralism in the EU: An Empirical Study of the European Commission Interest Group Density and Diversity Across Policy Domains. *Journal of European Public Policy,* 20(8): 1104-1119.

Dowding, K., Hindmoor, A., & Martin, A. The Comparative Policy Agendas Project: theory, measurement and findings. *Journal of Public Policy*, 1-23.

Fisker, H. M. (2013) 'Density dependence in corporative systems: Development of the population of Danish patient groups (1901–2011)', *Interest Groups & Advocacy,* 2 119-138.

Gamson, W.A. & Wolfsfeld, G. (1993) Movements and Media as Interacting Systems. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* 528(1): 114-125.

Gray, V. & Lowery, D. (1996) *The Population Ecology of Interest Representation Lobbying Communities in the American States*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI.

Gray, V. and Lowery, D. (1996) *The population ecology of interest representation lobbying communities in the American states.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Gray, V., & Lowery, D. (1998). To Lobby Alone or in a Flock Foraging Behavior Among Organized Interests. *American Politics Research*, *26*(1), 5-34.

Gray, V., Lowery, D., Fellowes, M. & Anderson, J. (2005) Understanding the Demand-Side of Lobbying: Interest System Energy in the American States. *American Politics Research,* 33(1): 404-434.

Halpin, D. (2011) Explaining Policy Bandwagons: Organized Interest Mobilization and Cascades of Attention. *Governance,* 24(2): 205-230.

Halpin, D.R. and Djaugberg, C. 2013. 'identity as constraint and resource in interest group evolution: a case of radical organizational change', British Journal of Politics and International Relations, doi: 10.1111/1467-856X.12016

Halpin, D. and Jordan, G. (2009) 'Interpreting Environments: Interest Group Response to Population Ecology Pressures', *British Journal of Political Science,* 39 (02), 243-265.

Halpin, D. and Jordan, G. (2012) 'Estimating Group and Associational Populations: Endemic Problems but Encouraging Progress' in D. Halpin and G. Jordan (eds). *The scale of interest organization in democratic politics: data and research methods.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-23.

Heaney, M. T. 2004. Outside the issue niche - The multidimensionality of interest group identity. *American Politics Research* 32 (6):611-651.

Hannan, M. T. and Carroll, G. (1992) *Dynamics of organizational populations: Density, legitimation, and competition.* Oxford University Press New York.

Hannan, M. T. and Freeman, J. H. (1989) *Organizational ecology.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Hannan, M.T. & Freeman, J. (1977) The Population Ecology of Organizations. *The American Journal of Sociology,* 82(5): 929-964.

Hojnacki, M., Kimball, D.C., Baumgartner, F.R., Berry, J.M. & Leech, B.L. (2012) Studying Organizational Advocacy and Influence: Reexamining Interest Group Research. *Annual Review of Political Science,* 15: 379-399.

John, Peter, and Helen Margetts. 2003. "Policy Punctuations in the UK. Fluctuations and Equilibria in Central Government Expenditure since 1951." Public Administration 81(3): 411-23.

Jones, B.D. & Baumgartner, F.R. (2005) *The Politics of Attention: How Government Prioritizes Problems*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Jones, B.D. and Baumgartner, F.R. (2012), 'From here to there"punctuated equilibrium to the general punctuation thesis to a theory of government information processing', *the Policy studies journal,* 40(1): 1-19

Jones, Bryan D., Frank R. Baumgartner, Christian Breunig, Christopher Wlezien, Stuart Soroka, Martial Foucault, Abel Francois, Christoffer Green-Pedersen, Chris Koski, Peter John, Peter B Mortensen, Frederique Varone, and Stefaan Walgrave. 2009. "A General Empirical Law of Public Budgets: A Comparative Analysis." American Journal of Political Science 53(4): 855-73.

Keck, M.E. & Sikkink, K. (1999) Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics. *International Social Science Journal,* 51(159).

Kingdon, J.W. (1984) *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, Little Brown, Boston.

Klüver, Heike (2013): Lobbying as a collective enterprise: Winners and losers of policy formulation in the European Union, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20(1): 59-76

Leech, B., Baumgartner, F.R., Pira, T.L. & Semanko, N. (2005) Drawing Lobbyists to Washington Government Activity and Interest Group Mobilization. *Political Research Quarterly,* 58(1): 19.

Lowery, D. & Brasher, H. (2003) *Organized Interests and American Government*, McGraw-Hill, Boston.

Lowery, D. & Gray, V. (2004) A Neopluralist Perspective on Research on Organized Interests. *Political Research Quarterly,* 57(1): 163-175.

Lowery, D. and Gray, V. (1995) 'The Population Ecology of Gucci Gulch, or the Natural Regulation of Interest Group Numbers in the American States', *American Journal of Political Science,* 39 (1), 1.

Lowery, D. and Gray, V. (2015) 'An Introduction to the Population Ecology Approach' in D. Lowery, D. Halpin and V. Gray (eds). *The Organizational Ecology of Interest Communities Reconsidered.* Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-22.

Lowery, D., Gray, V. & Halpin, D. (eds) (forthcoming2015) *The Organization Ecology of Interest Communities: An Assessment and an Agenda.* , Palgrave.

Lowery, D., Poppelaars, C. & Berkhout, J. (2008) The European Union Interest System in Comparative Perspective: A Bridge Too Far? *West European Politics,* 31(6): 1231-1252.

Mahoney, C. (2004). The power of institutions state and interest group activity in the European Union. *European union politics*, *5*(4), 441-466.

Mahoney, Christine and Frank R. Baumgartner. 2015. Partners in Advocacy: Lobbyists and Government Officials in the Policy Process. *Journal of Politics* 77, 1: 202–15.

Messer, A., Berkhout, J. and Lowery, D. (2010) 'The Density of the EU Interest System: A Test of the ESA Model', *British Journal of Political Science,* 40 (5), 161-190.

Nownes, A. J. (2004) 'The Population Ecology of Interest Group Formation: Mobilizing for Gay and Lesbian Rights in the United States, 1950-98', *British Journal of Political Science,* 34 (1), 49-67.

Pfeffer, J. & Salancik, G.R. (1978) *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective*, Harper & Row.

Pralle, (2003) "Venue Shopping, Political Strategy, and Policy Change: The Internationalization of Canadian Forestry Advocacy," Journal of Public Policy (September 2003): 233-260

Pralle, S. B. (2006). Timing and sequence in agenda-setting and policy change: a comparative study of lawn care pesticide politics in Canada and the US. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *13*(7), 987-1005.

Pralle, S."Shopping Around: Environmental Organizations and the Search for Policy Venues," in Aseem Prakash and Mary Kay Gugerty, eds., Rethinking Advocacy Organizations (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

Princen, S., & Kerremans, B. (2008). Opportunity structures in the EU multi-level system. *West European Politics*, *31*(6), 1129-1146.

Rasmussen, A., and B. Carroll. 2013. Determinants of upper-class dominance in the heavenly chorus: Lessons from European Union online consultations. *British Journal of Political Science* 44 (2):445-459.

Schattschneider, E.E. (1960) *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, New York.

Workman, Samuel, Bryan D. Jones, and Asley E. Jochim. 2009. "Information Processing and Policy Dynamics." *The Policy Studies Journal* 37(1): 75-92