

Organized Business Interests in Changing Environments

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Series Standing Order ISBN 978-0-333-79238-4 (Hardback) 978-1-4039-1906-9 (Paperback)
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Organized Business Interests in Changing Environments

The Complexity of Adaptation

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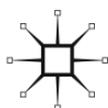
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Editorial matter, selection and introduction © Jürgen R. Grote, Achim Lang and Volker Schneider 2008

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2008 978-0-230-21665-5

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First published 2008 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN 978-1-349-30358-8 ISBN 978-0-230-59491-3 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9780230594913

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Organized business interests in changing environments : the complexity of adaptation / edited by Jürgen R. Grote, Achim Lang, and Volker Schneider.

p. cm. — (Globalization and governance)

Includes bibliographical references.

1. International business enterprises—Political aspects. 2. Business and politics. 3. International organization. 4. Complex organizations. 5. Organizational change. I. Grote, Jürgen R. II. Lang, Achim. III. Schneider, Volker, 1952—HD2755.5.O746 2008 658'.049—dc22

2008029982

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08

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Preface and Acknowledgments

There is a pre-history to this book to which all of us feel very much obliged. This pre-history and the story of the book itself can hardly be told other than in network analytic terms. These networks, within which both editors and authors are still moving in some respect, are spanning time and space and consist of an older and a younger generation of scholars.

Let us start with describing the scholarly communities before turning to the spaces they come from and to which some of them still continue to be attached today. Although possessing a pre-history itself, the first network of scholars was set up in the early 1980s when Philippe Schmitter and Wolfgang Streeck assembled dozens, if not hundreds, of researchers from all over the world to study the organization of business interests. Many others have occupied key positions within this network, but Gerhard Lehmbuch is certainly the one person completing a triumvirate whose reign ended toward the late 1980s and from which many guidelines for investigating that area have emanated over the years. Partly caused by changes in empirical reality, partly by an increasingly unmanageable field of study, but partly also due to the limited appeal of familiarizing oneself with the problems of dairy producers in small Swiss villages, the heyday of research into corporatist practices and associations producing an immense amount of literature both of a gray and a more accessible type ended toward the close of the decade. In the early 1990s, a network of younger scholars then started to draw attention to seemingly more acute problems of business associability essentially caused by processes of Europeanization, of internationalization, and by the end of the cold war. It could be said that, throughout the 1990s, the study of organized collective action by business, but also by labor, was much concerned with territorial levels and functional domains that had been left off the agenda of the earlier initiative. European-level arrangements of business (and labor) and global forms of private governance were studied to an extent that almost eliminated the issue of domestic forms of interest intermediation once so central to the concerns of the older generation of scholars. The two networks remained connected to each other of course, partly overlapped, and eventually created quite some multiplexity and synergy. Members of the first network, the above triumvirate in particular, remained active in that field of inquiry and, occasionally,

bothered younger scholars with much finger-wagging about the stickiness of domestic institutions and the inertia of organizations that often had hardly changed very much since the eighteenth century or so. The role of bridges or cut-points between the two research structures, however, was filled by an intermediate generation of scholars, of which two of the editors of this volume form part to some extent. Although later active in studying international collective action, Schneider has been more deeply involved in the first network with a number of important contributions to the flagship series on corporatist research (Sage), while Grote has been more concerned with European issues right from the start, with the problem of size, and with territorial forms of interest intermediation.

This present volume is a second attempt to put the issue of domestic business associability back on the agenda (for the first attempt see Streeck *et al.*, 2006). It springs out of a research project funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG), first devised, with the help of Philippe Schmitter, at the European University Institute and then carried out by Schneider and Grote at the University of Konstanz. This is where space comes in. Although we do not wish to downgrade the relevance of other institutions both at home and abroad, the more centrally positioned knots connecting both the older and the more recent network of scholars can in fact be counted on one hand. This spatial network is made up of the EUI, the University of Konstanz, the Social Science Research Center in Berlin (WZB), the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPI), and the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES). Schmitter and Streeck, before moving back (or forward) to the MPI and the EUI respectively, had started their project on the Organization of Business Interests at the WZB, while Gerhard Lehbruch, at that time, held a chair in political science at the University of Konstanz. Schneider and Grote had been at the EUI – by now the European PhD machine par excellence – for quite some time before moving back (or forward) to the MPI and the MZES respectively. In that latter institute, another key person active in the study of organized collective action was Beate Kohler-Koch, with whom Grote collaborated in the mid-1990s although on a slightly different topic. After completing his habilitation at the University of Mannheim, Schneider then took up the Lehbruch chair at the University of Konstanz, while Grote later joined him as assistant professor, research associate, and stand-in chair. While both had Schmitter among their supervisors in Florence, they now started to draw younger colleagues into the network. Most of these, after having obtained their doctorates at the University of Konstanz, the EUI,

or the MZES, have contributed to this present volume. Achim Lang, after some time spent at Darmstadt University – a place being least approximate to the MZES both geographically and in terms of further network connections – is now assistant professor at Konstanz. Claudius Wagemann, having graduated from Konstanz and having spent some time at the MPI, obtained his PhD at the EUI and is now employed by the Italian Institute of Human Sciences (SUM) in Florence. Arndt Wonka, after having worked in Konstanz on the European lobbying strategies of British and German associations, then moved to the MZES where he completed his dissertation. Hans-Jörg Schmedes also obtained his PhD at Konstanz before moving into the heart of interest conflicts, the German Bundestag. Another PhD holder of the University of Konstanz, Marc Tenbücken, also worked and published on European lobbying and then moved into consultancy. It is, in particular, Achim Lang, Hans-Jörg Schmedes, and Arndt Wonka who have for many years helped to get the project off the ground, collect the information, process the data, and come up with the results.

Yet, the spatial network story does not finish here. Raymund Werle, who has for many years collaborated with Schneider at the MPI, is still working at that institute and has paid frequent visits to Konstanz both on a personal and a professional basis. The same is true of Karsten Ronit, together with Johannes Bauer the only non-national in this group of business interests fanatics. Whether they are less teutonic, though, is questionable. Ronit spent several years at the University of Konstanz as assistant professor and, before and after, co-edited more than a couple of volumes with both Schneider and Grote.

Finally, to complete this brief network-analytic account, it should be said that the ties connecting most of us, as well as the members of the older and the more recent network, are strong, not weak. Paraphrasing the title of Marc Granovetter's seminal article, we are convinced that our network can be characterized by a 'Strength of Strong Ties'. Such ties, habitually, are thought to result in encapsulation, incestuous breeding, and a loss of information, thus ultimately resulting in gridlock of all sorts. By opening up the field of collective action research and including insights from organization theory, theories of evolution, and network analysis – or, in other words, by engaging in a process of varying our analytical lenses and then selecting the most appropriate ones – we have hopefully avoided the sort of inertia of which the study of business associability has sometimes been accused.

Many people and institutions have helped to make this endeavor possible. Institutionally, we have been assisted by a generous grant received

from the German Science Foundation (DFG). The Fritz-Thyssen Foundation has supported us with funds used to organize workshops and conferences from which our first volume originated. The MPI has granted us hospitality for several of our meetings and the same can be said of the Institute of Advanced Labour Studies in Amsterdam. The University of Konstanz has co-financed another workshop taking place in the most Mediterranean place Germany has to offer – the castle of Meersburg, overlooking the lake of Konstanz. Grote, in particular, wishes to mention the support of the Marie Excellence Grant program of the European Commission and the support received by colleagues at the Centre for Social and Economic Strategies (CESES) at Charles University in Prague.

Personally, we owe a lot to the doyen of modern interest group research, Philippe Schmitter. Remaining in the shadows – though not (always) of hierarchy – he has actively encouraged us to embark on our project, has contributed first important thought pieces that have guided us in the initial steps of inquiry, and has always followed up the progress we have made during all these years. Special thanks also go to colleagues who have joined us during phases of our project. Dirk Lehmkuhl contributed much to our discussions on the adaptation of interest systems to the challenges of Europeanization and has even presented papers on that issue. Although not directly involved in this more Konstanz-based network, Wolfgang Streeck has critically accompanied our progress in the various Florence, Köln, and Amsterdam meetings. Most of all, however, we wish to thank the representatives of members in our samples: hundreds of CEOs of business associations visited by us in Washington DC, London, Brussels, Frankfurt and Berlin, Bern and Vienna. More than a handful of leading representatives of the German VCI even visited us at our Meersburg workshop, wondering how stimulating a discussion could be that directly concerned their everyday business. Most wholeheartedly, we wish to thank our co-editor, Achim Lang, who, after Grote's departure to Central Europe, has been particularly active in carrying out most of the editing tasks and bringing the data into line in such a way that it is comprehensible to the interested reader. Without Achim, this volume might never have seen the light of the day.

Contributors

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