

**Interest Groups at Transnational Negotiation Conferences:
Goals, Strategies, Interactions, and Influence**

Marcel Hanegraaff

forthcoming *Global Governance* (2015)

Abstract. Interest groups partake in transnational negotiation conferences at mass. This is surprising given that the chances for influencing policymaking at these venues appear to be slim while the costs of participation are high. Thus far no satisfactory explanation for this puzzle has been provided, because systematic research regarding the activities of interest groups at these conferences is lacking. This paper offers the first systematic study of the activities of interest groups at transnational conferences. It analyzes the goals, strategies, interactions, and influence of various types of interest groups at two transnational conferences, namely the WTO Ministerial Conference (2011) and the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (2012). The data was collected by conducting 349 interviews with interest group representatives and 129 interviews with government delegates who participated in these conferences.

INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt that more interest groups¹ are active at the transnational level than ever before.² When entering the transnational political arena, interest groups are confronted with a wide variety of political venues.³ For instance, interest groups can interact with other interest groups in so-called advocacy networks⁴, they can lobby international organizations directly⁵, and they can lobby foreign governments.⁶ While these types of activities have been studied quite extensively in recent decades, much less is known about the activities of interest groups at transnational conferences, i.e. conferences at which negotiations between countries are held under the flag of international organizations. This is surprising as interest groups themselves seem to value these conferences highly. For instance, since 1995, almost 2,000 different interest groups have attended at least one of the World Trade organizations' (WTO) eight Ministerial Conferences (MCs), its highest decision-making body.⁷ For the Conferences of the Parties (COPs), the principal negotiation forum of the United Nations Climate Change Conferences (UNFCCC), the numbers are even more striking. Since 1997, more than 6,500 organizations have attended at least one of the COPs that have been held.⁸

These numbers are even more intriguing when one considers that, at first glance, it does not appear particularly productive for interest groups to attend transnational conferences. To start, the chance of having an impact on transnational decision-making is probably limited. International negotiations are conducted first and foremost by states, which makes lobbying at the national level seem far more productive.⁹ As Betsill and Corell argue with respect to international climate negotiations,

International environmental negotiations are a particularly interesting arena in which to consider NGO influence since treaty making is the domain of states. As UN members, only states have formal decision-making power during international negotiations. They establish rules for who may participate and the nature of that participation ... and ultimately it is states that vote on whether to adopt a particular text. In contrast, NGOs participate as observers and have no formal voting authority. This makes it difficult for NGOs to influence the negotiating process.¹⁰

While the chance to effectively influence international decision-making seems to be rather slim, the costs of transnational advocacy are certainly high. That is, in order to lobby at this level, groups need to network with policymakers and advocacy groups from all over the world, they need to rally constituents in a multitude of countries, they need to attend transnational conferences which are held in every corner of the globe, and, given that transnational decision-making is slow, they need to maintain these activities over long periods

of time. These activities are a significant drain on organizational resources in the long run.¹¹ These observations amount to an interesting question: why do so many interest groups attend transnational conferences, and, consequently, what do they exactly do when they are there?

This paper addresses this question by analyzing the goals and activities of the interest groups which attended two important transnational conferences: the WTO-MC in Geneva (2011) and the UNFCCC-COP in Doha (2012). The WTO MCs are meetings of the highest decision-making body in global trade negotiations, and the UN COPs are meetings of the highest decision-making body on climate change. More specifically, we interviewed 348 interest group representatives and 129 government delegates from these two conferences. During these interviews we asked about four main issues. First, we asked participants about their *goals* in attending these conferences. Did they try to influence decision-making or did they participate for other reasons such as monitoring or networking? Second, if respondents indicated to have actively lobbied at the conference, we asked about the specific *strategies* they used. For instance, did they apply in or outside strategies? Third, we asked both interest group representatives and government delegates with whom they had *interacted* at the conference. Finally, we also asked interest group representatives whether they believed that they had an *impact* on decision-making at the conference. Combined, the interview data gives us the first systematic insight into what interest groups want, do, and expect when attending these transnational conferences.

The paper is structured as follows. In section one, we embed the four focus areas of our interviews into the broader literature on interest groups and global advocacy. We discuss the cases and our data collection strategy in section two. In section three, the results are presented. We summarize the most important outcomes and suggest some avenues for future research in section four.

INTEREST GROUPS AT TRANSNATIONAL CONFERENCES

Transnational conferences are negotiation forums in which country delegates negotiate deals about important policy issues under the umbrella of international organizations. While negotiations between countries are as old as the state itself, since the end of the Second World War international negotiations are increasingly held under the flag of international organizations.¹² At first these conferences had a closed character and only government delegates attended. But since the beginning of the 1990s these conferences have become increasingly open for interest groups as well. The rise of new media, which increased the visibility of transnational negotiations to a wider public, and the explosion of interest group

activity within a wide variety of political domains, lead to a new structure in the early 1990s in which international decision-making became more transparent and legitimate for a wider public.¹³ As a result, since the 1990s a wide variety of interest groups have been allowed to participate, although to a varying degree, at transnational conferences.¹⁴ While there remain questions about the actual openness of many of these transnational conferences, one fact is undisputed, namely that interest groups massively make use of these opportunities. Yet, while interest groups apparently value these conferences highly, there has been little scholarly attention towards this participation. As a result, we have little systematic knowledge on what interest groups actually do at these conferences. As Dana Fischer argues,

[W]e must develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between participation (in terms of the numbers of NGOs and the size of the delegations) and influence in agenda-setting and decision-making [at UNFCCC-COPs]. Also, research is needed to look more carefully at the role that social movements play in global environmental politics, both inside and outside of international negotiations.¹⁵

This paper picks up on this challenge and aims to provide a more systematic understanding of interest group activity at two transnational conferences, namely the WTO-MC in Geneva (2011) and the UNFCCC-COP in Doha (2012). To gain a broad understanding of interest group behavior at these two conferences the paper is structured around four aspects of interest group activity— goals, strategies, interaction with policy-makers, and influence— which have received attention in the broader literature on interest group politics. While, much of this research has been developed in the EU and the US, this isn't necessarily a problem. That is, scholars are increasingly devoting their energy to systematic comparisons between the systems of interest intermediation in the EU and the US.¹⁶ As a result of these developments in the last decade, interest group scholars now often work from a common theoretical toolbox consisting of a number of interlocking mid-range theories to study the dynamics of interest group politics in a variety of political systems. While governmental context still matters, scholar across the Atlantic now increasingly work from a common core of such mid-range theories that apply, if sometimes in different ways, to most political systems. Moreover, several scholars are now using these theories to explain patterns of transnational advocacy.¹⁷ These studies show that there many commonalities between different levels of governance as well. For these reasons I see many advantages in using rather similar perspectives to explain the activity of interest groups at transnational conferences.

Goals

The first part of the analysis deals with the objectives of interest groups at transnational conferences. To conceptualize the goals of interest groups at transnational conferences, we rely on the description of interest group activity by Anthony Nownes.¹⁸ He describes in detail how lobbyists, in Washington, allocate their time and makes a distinction between *direct* lobby activities and *indirect* lobby activities. Direct lobby activities are directed towards politicians, bureaucrats, the public, and other interest groups in order to have an impact on specific legislation. Indirect lobby activities include efforts such as monitoring, networking, and learning.

This characterization of interest group activity is useful when aiming to explain lobbying at transnational conferences as well. Given that MCs and COPs are the highest decision-making bodies of the WTO and the UNFCCC, and that agreements in the fields of international trade and environment have a big impact on many interests in society, we expect at least some forms of direct advocacy to occur at these conference.¹⁹ Yet, given that negotiations at these conferences generally progress slowly, we expect that a lot of lobby activity is also of the indirect type, such as monitoring, learning, and networking.²⁰

Advocacy strategies

Two types of strategic choices by interest groups are analyzed that, given the specific nature of transnational conferences, seem especially relevant. First, a distinction is made between *in- and outside* strategies. With an inside strategy, interest organizations try to influence policy directly, for instance through contacting policymakers via email exchange, telephone calls, face-to-face meetings, and informal talks at lunches and dinners. With an outside strategy, interest organizations seek instead to influence policymaking through the media or by protest activities.²¹ At transnational conferences, interest groups are likely to prefer an inside strategy as it seems a more beneficial strategy given a general lack of a transnational public sphere and the insider game character of international negotiations.²² Nonetheless, there is extensive literature which suggests that interest groups engaged in transnational advocacy also use outside lobbying.²³ The relative extent to which these types of strategies are used remains rather elusive though. Taking into account research on in- and outside lobbying in other political domains, citizen groups are likely to use more outside strategies than business groups at transnational conferences.²⁴

Another strategic choice interest groups need to make is at which *venues* they lobby.²⁵ From a generic perspective, there are two possibilities. The first possibility, often referred to

as the “boomerang model”, claims that interest groups mainly advocate within transnational politics because they lack domestic access opportunities.²⁶ When groups face an unresponsive domestic government, they thus engage in transnational mobilization, build transnational advocacy networks, and seek support from foreign governments and international organizations in order to put pressure on their domestic government. A second perspective suggests that powerful domestic organizations are also likely to dominate within transnational politics. This “positive persistence” model suggests that most interest groups do not just seek beneficial political venues, but try to dominate as many (relevant) political venues as possible. Groups that enjoy strong domestic access and/or display a wide range of domestic activities may thus be inclined to also expand their lobby attempts to the international level. While various studies suggest that the persistence hypothesis holds more explanatory power²⁷, no study thus far has studied these patterns at transnational conferences.

Interactions

The third aspect of interest group activity deals with the interactions of interest groups with delegates at transnational conferences. Looking at these contacts is important for two reasons. First, one of the interesting aspects of transnational conferences is that many relevant actors are present at one location, at one particular moment in time. This allows interest groups to communicate with both domestic *and* foreign policy-makers at once.²⁸ At this point, however, it is unclear to what extent interest groups make use of these opportunities, while this is important for how we conceptualize transnational conferences and global advocacy at these venues.²⁹ That is, the extent to which interest groups lobby either domestic or foreign delegates is an important indicator for how transnational these conferences really are, and whether they are cases of transnational advocacy or rather cases of domestic advocacy “on location”. Second, a deeper understanding of the interaction between policy-makers and interest groups at transnational conferences also provides an indication of the pluralist or captive nature of transnational politics.³⁰

Looking at the interaction of policy makers with interest groups at other political venues, our initial expectation is that business actors in general have more contacts with policy-makers than citizen groups. Business actors possess, on average, more technical information about policy issues³¹, which seems more pertinent for the technical nature of transnational negotiations.³² In contrast, citizen groups normally have more political information, for instance regarding constituent support³³, which we expect is less valuable at transnational conferences because the distance between constituents and policy-making is

nowhere more extensive than at these conferences. Furthermore, we expect that interest groups from developing countries are also less likely to have frequent contacts with policy-makers than interest groups from developed countries, because they are less integrated in the policy process and therefore have less access to delegates at transnational conferences.³⁴ Regarding the difference between contacts with domestic and/or foreign policy-makers we have one expectation, namely that interest groups which are included in country delegations are more likely to interact with domestic policy-makers. While not all country delegations include interest groups, most do, and we expect this to have a profound effect on their ability to interact with domestic policy-makers at these conferences.³⁵

Perceived influence

The fourth aspect of interest group activity concerns the perceived influence interest groups have on decision-making at transnational conferences. Although, as argued, decision-making at these conferences progresses very slowly, this does not automatically mean that interest groups have not been influential. As Baumgartner et al. show for the US, lobbying in favor of the status-quo is often more successful as, in general, policy does not usually change that much.³⁶ Thus, it might be precisely because interest groups have been so successful that both trade and climate negotiations have been in a deadlock for quite some time.³⁷ Moreover, while general negotiations on trade and environment have been rather unsuccessful, in some sub-areas agreements have nevertheless been made. For instance, at the last MC in Geneva (2011) an agreement was made on government procurement between a group of wealthy countries. At the Doha COP in 2012, there was an agreement on the extension of the Kyoto protocol for a selected group of countries. Hence, interest groups have had a chance to influence decision-making directly at transnational conferences, and, as some studies suggest, they effectively had an impact.³⁸

We investigate two aspects of interest group influence. First, we assess the *perceived influence* of different types of actors on decision-making at the two conferences. Although perceived influence is not a perfect measure of actual influence, it is a common strategy for measuring actual influence, especially when aiming to provide an explorative outlook on actual influence.³⁹ Second, to assess the validity of self-reported influence, we also look at the *perceived openness* of these transnational conferences. The openness of transnational political institutions is important for the long-term potential of interest groups to have a long-term structural impact on decision-making which goes beyond ad-hoc influence on specific issues.⁴⁰ We expect that although citizen groups have had a proven impact on international

environmental⁴¹ and trade negotiations⁴², business groups are more likely to have had an impact on international negotiations at transnational conferences. This is expected because business groups, generally, have a surplus of resources and access opportunities to policy-makers.⁴³ Moreover, given the current power constellation in world politics, we expect organizations from developed countries to be more influential than interest groups from developing countries.⁴⁴

DATA

In this paper we use data from interviews with 348 interest group representatives and 129 government delegates at three transnational conferences, namely the Geneva WTO Ministerial Conference held in 2012, and the UNFCCC COPs in Doha 2012. At each conference we randomly asked attendees to participate in an interview of around 30 minutes regarding their objectives for attending the conference, their lobby strategies, the issues they are interested in, their expectations regarding the conference, the amount of staff working on advocacy, and so on. Additional information regarding the structure of each interviewed attendee's organization, the type of members it has, and the sector in which it is active, was retrieved from the respective website.

MCs and COPs are extremely suitable venues to study the behavior of a wide variety of actors as both trade and environmental policy attracts many different types of interest from across the globe, including business associations, firms, citizen groups, labor unions, research organizations, and institutions. In addition, because these conferences are meetings of the highest decision-making bodies on global trade and climate change, interest groups are inclined to use these venues to advocate. Moreover, given that interest groups participate over the course of days, they were lenient towards being interviewed as indicated by a response rate of 46 percent for the interest group representatives, and 51 percent for the country delegates. Moreover, given that we talked to respondents face-to-face and used the Durban COP in 2011 to test the questionnaire, we had very few cases in which the interviewee failed to respond to any of the questions. This allows for a rigorous comparative test of different advocacy activities by a wide variety of actors.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Table 1 provides some background information about our respondents. The left column first shows for interviewed representatives the type of organization they were working

for. Business groups are organizations who defend the interests of certain business sectors. They can be associations, professional groups, or firms. Citizen groups lobby for a societal interest, such as the environment or social development. Labor unions represent the interests of workers. Research organizations are primarily funded by the government with the primary goal of doing research. Among our respondents, 79 were from business organizations, 166 from citizen groups, 14 from labor unions, and 89 from research organizations. The left column also shows how many of these organizations were national or global, a global organization being an organization that collects resources from at least two countries, such as Greenpeace International or the International Chamber of Commerce. If an organizational representative indicated that he or she operated in only one country, we treated her as representing a domestic organization, even if the organization is part of a wider network such as Oxfam. In total 80 representatives we questioned came from global organizations and 268 from domestic organizations. In addition, the third column first shows for the representatives from domestic interest groups that we interviewed, the level of *development* of the country according to the World Bank's classification. In total 163 of our respondents represented interest groups from developed countries, and 115 interest groups from developing or LDC countries. Of the delegates we interviewed 27 from developed countries and 97 from developing countries. Finally, because much more interest groups participated at the COPs compared to the MC we have an overrepresentation of interest groups that participated at COPs (280 versus 68).

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Goals

This first empirical section deals with the goals of interest groups to partake at the two TCs, and we distinguish between short-term advocacy objectives as well as non-direct forms of advocacy. For this we asked participants to identify two of the most important reasons to attend the conference from among five choices: to advocate, to inform participants (both short term goals), to monitor negotiations, to network, and to learn (all three long term goals). Figure 1 summarizes the answers. The results show that all types of goals were mentioned by participants, but that advocacy was most important. A total of 185 respondents indicated advocacy as one of their two main objectives. Informing other participants, the second type of direct influence was mentioned least often (70 times). Of the non-direct lobby goals, monitoring and networking were mentioned almost an equal number of times (149 and 150,

respectively), while learning was mentioned 106 times. These findings indicate that both short-term and long-term advocacy goals triggered attendance by interest groups, yet that neither of these objectives was substantially more important than the other.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

While one out of two participants mentioned advocacy as a primary goal to attend the TC in question, for a proper understanding of attendance we also wanted to know whether the other half advocated at least occasionally or whether they refrained from this entirely. Therefore, we also explicitly asked participants about the extent to which they had lobbied at the conference (results not included in figure 1 or table 2). Respondents could indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being never, and 5 being very often) how much they had lobbied delegates at the conference. The answers revealed that almost *all* respondents had lobbied at the conferences, although to a different extent. In fact, only 29 respondents (or 8.3 percent) indicated to have not lobbied at all, which means that 91.7 percent of the respondents did advocate at least occasionally at the conference. Both observations indicate that advocacy is the most important reason for interest groups to attend transnational conferences.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Finally, how do these findings relate to different categories of interest groups? Table 2 provides an overview of the objectives of the three group categories identified in table 1 — that is, according to type, level of mobilization, and level of development. If we compare the answers, we find some interesting patterns. First, there is remarkably little difference between the activities of different *types* of interest groups at these two TCs. Only research organizations lobbied significantly less than the other groups (48 percent), which given their direct link to government actors is not surprising. Yet, business groups, citizen groups, and labor unions advocated to a similar extent (respectively 56, 60, and 64 percent). Also interesting is that business actors networked more often than other groups (52 percent) at these two TCs, where we might expect citizen groups to do this more often (44 percent). Much research on social movements has emphasized the importance of networking by citizen group actors in order to compensate for the dominance of business actors domestically.⁴⁵ These findings, however, suggest that business actors networked more at these conferences. Also interesting is that citizen groups monitored much less than other groups (26 percent

versus 42, 42, and 50 percent). This might be because they have fewer resources than other groups, which does not allow them to spend as much time on activities that generate no direct effect. Regarding the level of mobilization we find that transnational groups spent slightly more time advocating and becoming informed than domestic groups (60 and 26 versus 54 and 18 percent), whereas domestic groups spent more time learning and monitoring at these conferences (36 and 48 versus 26 and 42 percent). Finally, if we look at the countries domestic organizations came from, organizations from developed countries advocated more directly than groups from developing countries. Groups from the latter countries did network more. In short, with the exception of research organizations, all types of interest groups and from every corner of the world, attend the conferences predominantly to have an impact on its decision-making process. While other activities, such as monitoring or networking, are certainly not flouted, lobbying, despite the apparent limited opportunities to exert influence at transnational conferences, is still the number one reason for interest groups to attend these political venues.

Advocacy strategies

The former analysis revealed that interest groups significantly used the two transnational conferences to lobby. The second analysis builds on these findings and analyzes which specific advocacy strategies they used. We first focus on the use of in- and outside strategies. We asked respondents to indicate the percentage of time that was spent on outside and inside lobby activities at the conference in question. The left column in table 3 summarizes the answers. The results show, as expected, that the use of inside strategies was more common, as 62 percent of the mentioned strategies fell into this category, whereas only 38 percent of the activities related to outside strategies. However, the outcomes do reveal that most respondents extensively combined the two types of strategies. That is, only 60 organizations indicated to have used only inside (40) or outside strategies (20).

Table 3 breaks down the data into the different categories of groups, and we see quite some variation. First, there is a remarkable difference between the different types of groups. Business actors used inside strategies (77 percent) far more frequently than citizen groups (52 percent), labor unions (62 percent), and research organizations (67 percent). This is consistent with findings in other political arenas that show business actors rely more on inside strategies and, especially, citizen groups more so on outside strategies. Second, domestic interest groups used outside lobbying more frequently at the two TCs than global organizations (40 versus 35 percent). This might not be surprising given that domestic groups have a more direct link to

constituents, the primary recipients of outside strategies. Finally, interest groups from developing countries used outside strategies more frequently (42 versus 35 percent). This could be explained by the fact that that in wealthier states, interest groups are more embedded in policy networks and have closer contact with policy-makers. In contrast, in less developed countries this link is usually not as evident, which more often leaves them no other option than to use outside strategies.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

A second strategic effort we investigated concerns venue shopping. A crucial questions within the literature on global advocacy is whether or not interest groups primarily make use of the transnational domain to compensate for domestic losses, or whether groups that are dominant within a domestic context are also more dominant within a transnational political context. In the latter case, venue-shopping strategies are interpreted as part of a more comprehensive strategy to secure influence at as many political venues as possible. To analyze this we asked participants to note whether they agree with how their governments handle the issue on a scale from 1 through 5 (1 is completely agree, 5 is completely disagree). Because we asked about the level of agreement with domestic governments, we only look at domestic interest groups in this regard. The results are presented in the right column of table 3. The outcomes show that on average both compensation and persistence strategies were used almost equally often (52 versus 48 percent). Yet, if we break down the use of these strategies by different groups, we find rather interesting variation. At the two conferences, business actors used persistent strategies far more often than citizen groups and labor unions. Only 25 percent of the business actors said they disagreed with the position of their domestic governments at the conferences, whereas 72 and 71 percent of the citizen groups and labor unions disagreed with their governments. This finding could suggest two things. First, it could mean that citizen groups and labor unions participate at these types of conferences to compensate domestic deprivation, whereas business actors use them more for supporting the domestic status quo. Second, it could also suggest that government actors generally decide much more in favor of business groups, indicating the hold over domestic politics by business groups. The latter would mean that the findings are not so much a result of strategic behavior by interest groups, but rather the result of the structural inequality between these actors in domestic settings. The limited data here does not allow drawing an overall conclusion, but this remarkable observation does provide for an important avenue for future research.

Furthermore, if we look at the countries in which the organizations operate, we also see a big difference between those from developed and developing countries. The interest groups from developing countries far more often tried to compensate for a lack of agreement with domestic policy (63 percent did not agree with their country's position at the conference), whereas interest groups from wealthy countries more often agreed with their government at the conference (55 percent). What could this mean? First, this could be a result of the fact that more wealthy countries are generally much more successful in international negotiations than developing countries, which would make interest groups from these countries also more satisfied with the outcomes. Given the high costs of attending transnational conferences, however, the data could also suggest that an interest group from a developing country might be more inclined to not attend the conference in case the government already agrees with them. In contrast, interest groups from wealthy countries can more often afford to attend the conference, even if they already support their government. Yet, again, this data does not allow for testing these claims, and more research is needed to shed light on this issue.

Interactions

So far, we have shown that interest groups lobby extensively at transnational conferences, and use a wide pallet of strategic options in these cases. In this section we delve deeper into on one of these strategic options, namely when interest groups resort to inside lobbying, what type of interactions do interest groups and policymakers engage in? We tackle this question from two perspectives. First, we asked interest group representatives to indicate with whom they had interacted at the conference in question. Second, we asked country delegates to indicate the extent to which they had interacted with a variety of interest groups at the conference. A selection of the answers is presented in tables 4 and 5.

First, we asked the domestic interest group respondents the percentage of interaction during the conference that was directed towards domestic and foreign delegates. For instance, respondents could indicate that they had talked 20 percent to domestic delegates and 80 percent to foreign delegates. The answers are summarized in table 4. The results show that, on average, domestic delegates were the preferred target; nevertheless, a substantial amount of effort was also directed towards foreign delegates. In fact, if we look at the answers more closely, we see that only 35 respondents, or 14.9 percent of all domestic organizations, indicated that they had not talked to foreign delegates at all. This is a clear indication that most interest groups use these conferences for transnational advocacy purposes.

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

Looking at the different categories in table 4, we do see some interesting variation. First, business actors talked to foreign delegates much more often than any other group. On average they spent 49 percent of their time talking to foreign policy-makers, while this average is only 41, 39 and 30 percent for citizen groups, research institutions, and labor unions, respectively. In other words, business actors acted more as transnational actors at these conferences than other types of interest groups. By looking at the country of origin category we see much less variation. While interest representatives from developed countries talked slightly more to foreign delegates, the difference is rather small (43 to 41 percent).

Next, we asked government participants, on a scale from 1 through 5 (1 is very often; 5 is never) to indicate the extent to which they had participated with a variety of interest groups at the conference. First, as can be seen in table 5, delegates interacted with many different types of interest groups at the two transnational conferences. All groups score, on average, lower than 4, which means that they interacted with delegates at least occasionally at the conference. If we look at specific group types, citizen groups, in contrast to what the perspective from interest groups indicated, were talked to the most, while business groups were contacted the second most, and labor unions the least often. The reason for this deviation probably lies in the different distribution of the two samples. Where in the case of interest groups we interviewed more representatives from developed countries, in the case of delegates we interviewed more representatives from developing countries. That this is the reason that we find different results in interaction is confirmed if we look at the difference between developed and developing countries. Delegates from developed countries talked more to business actors (2.85 versus 2.69), which is in line with the answers from the interest group representatives, whereas delegates from developing countries talked much more to citizen groups (3.11 versus 2.65).

INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

Regarding contacts of delegates with either domestic, foreign, or global organizations, we see that there is not much of difference with the perspective from interest group representatives. Overall, delegates indicated to have interacted slightly more often with global organizations than with domestic organizations, yet this difference is rather small (a mean of

3.80, 3.98, and 3.72). There is however one important exception. If domestic groups were included in a delegation, this increased the chance they interacted with policy-makers by a significant extent (mean score is 2.49). If we distinguish between the levels of development of the countries that delegates stemmed from, the results remain rather similar. This shows the importance for interest groups to be included in delegations at transnational conferences⁴⁶, and emphasizes the importance of more research into this issue.

Finally, if we combine group type (i.e. being a business, citizen group, or labor union) and the level of mobilization (i.e. whether they are domestically or globally organized), we get a slightly more nuanced picture (see figure 2). The results show that delegates from developed countries interacted the most with the domestic business organizations (see light bar), whereas delegates from developing countries talked the most to domestic and global citizen groups (see dark bars). The interaction of delegates with domestic labor unions or global business organizations was rather equally divided between developed and developing country delegates. Combined, the answers from the interest groups and the delegates reveal a consistent pattern, namely that policymakers from wealthier countries interacted more with business actors, and preferably with business representatives from their home country, while policymakers from less wealthy countries interacted more with citizen groups from both their home country as well as global citizen groups.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

Perceived influence

In this last section we look at the results of the advocacy strategies we discussed so far. That is we analyze the perceived influence on decision-making at and openness of the transnational conferences. First, for measuring perceived influence, we asked respondents to indicate on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 is no, 4 is much) whether they believed they had an impact on decision-making at the conference they attended.⁴⁷ The left column in table 6 gives an overview of the answers to this question. Interestingly, more economically oriented groups, namely business organizations and labor unions, believed to have had more influence than citizen groups and research organizations at the two conferences. More precisely, business actors reported, on average, an influence score of 2.32 and labor unions an influence score of 2.50, whereas citizen groups and research organizations reported influence scores of respectively 1.97 and 2.01. These differences are substantial and consistent with most empirical research on interest group influence in which economic actors are generally found to be more dominant.⁴⁸

INSERT TABLE 6 HERE

Next, we asked participants whether or not they thought the TC in question had become more open to their input in the last few years (1 is declined, 2 is stable, 3 is increased). In total, 190 respondents answered this question; others felt they could either not judge this because they, for instance, attended the conference for the first time. The right-column in table 6 provides an overview of the answers to this question, and show that the former conclusions regarding influence might is a bit more nuanced because the data shows that the two types of actors who responded to have had the least influence on decision-making, perceived the conference to have become more open to their input. To be more precise, business and labor unions believed the conference had become more closed to their input (a mean of 1.81 and 1.75 respectively), whereas citizen groups and research organizations were more optimistic about the openness of the conference in question (a mean of 2.13 and 1.92). This latter finding could indicate that the propensity to influence delegates has become more even over the years, yet more research is needed to really validate these hypotheses.

INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

Finally, we also asked government delegates to evaluate the participation of interest groups at the conference (see figure 3). Respondents could indicate on a scale from 1 through 5 (1 is crucial, 5 is obstructive) the importance of allowing interest groups to participate at transnational conferences. Subsequently, they could also specify why. In total 138 country delegates answered this question. In general delegates had a rather positive outlook on the participation of interest groups at the conferences. The mean score is 2.24, which indicates that in general policy-makers leaned more towards a positive evaluation regarding the participation of interest groups. Yet, we find a big difference between the evaluation of delegates from developed and developing countries. Delegates from developing countries were more positive about the attendance of interest groups (i.e. important was the most frequent answer), than delegates from developed countries (i.e. they qualified the attendance the most as useful). To gain more insight this issue, delegates were also asked to indicate *why* they appreciated or rejected the input of interest groups. Most delegates who were positive mentioned the representational legitimacy of interest groups. To give an example, a delegate

from the Dominican Republic responded that “civil society actors represented the people.” Several others mentioned the importance of informational input, such as a delegate from the Philippines: “Citizen groups provide information on constituents directly from the grassroots.” Or, as a delegate from Eritrea responded: “They assist us and create awareness on developed countries to hurry up.” On the side of more moderate respondents most indicated concerns about the size of the interest group community at these conferences. For instance, a delegate from Sweden responded: “I do not mind they attend the conferences, but I feel it has grown a bit out of proportion. This makes it problematic to be responsive to all of them.” Other delegates were not necessarily against the presence of interest groups at these conferences, but question the extent to which these actors should be allowed to intervene in the negotiations. For instance, a Nigerian delegate responded that “participation is ok, but they should not decide anything.” In a similar way, a delegate of Thailand responded: “It could be obstructive because many individual preferences outweigh the collective good.” In short, overall the participation of interest groups was quite positively evaluated, although in some instances delegates questioned the number of participants, and the role they fulfilled at the two conferences. Moreover, delegates from developing countries were more positive about the participation of interest groups compared to delegates from developed countries.

CONCLUSION

This paper has made a first attempt to systematically characterize the activity of interest groups at transnational conferences. What are the main findings? First, we showed that most interest groups use transnational conferences to advocate. Over 50 percent of the respondents indicated it as one of their main goals in attending the conferences, whereas more than 90 percent of the organizations indicated that they, at least, lobbied occasionally. Yet, advocacy was not the only goal for interest groups in participating. Other important reasons in attending the conferences that respondents mentioned include monitoring and networking.

Second, we showed that interest groups to a large extent used conventional advocacy strategies at these conferences. For instance, we found that interest groups use in- and outside lobbying quite extensively. In addition, we found that, in contrast to what many other studies have implied, interest groups attended these conferences more if they agreed with policy-makers at home rather than to compensate for a lack of domestic success.

Third, we showed that most interest groups did not only use these conferences to lobby domestic politicians, but that most interest groups also lobbied foreign delegates. This means that we can characterize this COP and this MC as having been opportunities for

interest groups to be engaged in transnational advocacy. We also found that it was a huge advantage to be a member of a country delegation, as it increased the likelihood of talking to politicians substantially. This finding also warrants more attention as it is quite unknown at this point how countries select among interest groups to participate in a delegation, while the consequences of these procedures are apparently high. Moreover, the outcomes reveal that delegates from developed countries interact the most with domestic business organizations, whereas delegates from developing countries interacted the most with both domestic as well as global citizen groups. This finding clearly warrants our further attention as skewed interaction patterns between interest groups and policy makers could potentially lead to skewed policy outcomes.

Fourth, interest groups clearly felt that they had an impact on decision-making at the two conferences, yet business and labor unions were more optimistic in this regard than citizen groups and research organizations. In contrast, however, citizen groups and research organizations were more optimistic about the increased openness of the conferences over the past years. This finding is an indication that times may be changing somewhat, and that citizen groups and research organizations might become more influential in the future. From the perspective of policy-makers, the input of interest groups was mostly appreciated. Most mention the expertise and legitimacy these actors bring to the table, although some delegates felt that the number of participants has maybe become too large.

In general this study has shown the importance of studying interest groups at transnational conferences. Given that representatives of interest groups also value these conferences greatly, we therefore urge scholars to study interest group behavior at these political venues even further.

¹ I use the term interest group somewhat differently than others working in this field. The reason is that many of the theoretical perspectives that I use in this paper are derived from the literature on interest group politics. Here an interest group refers to the set of (1) organizations that (2) seek political influence, yet (3) have no interest in gaining executive or legislative power themselves (see Beyers, Jan., Rainer Eising, and William Maloney. 2008. Researching Interest Group Politics in Europe and Elsewhere: Much We Study, Little We Know? *West European Politics* 31(6): 1103-28).

² Zürn, Michael. 1998. The Rise of International Environmental Politics: A Review of Current Research. *World Politics* 50(4): 617-49;

Keck, Margareth and Kathryn Sikkink. 1998. *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Bexell, Magdalena, Jonas Tallberg, and Anders Uhlin. 2010. Democracy in Global Governance: The Promises and Pitfalls of Transnational Actors. *Global Governance* 16(1): 81-101;

Jönsson, Christer and Jonas Tallberg. 2010. *Transnational Actors in Global Governance: Patterns, Explanations, and Implications*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan;

Tallberg, Jonas, Thomas Sommerer, and Theresa Squatrito. 2013. *The Opening Up of International Organizations: Transnational Access in Global Governance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;

-
- Tallberg, Jonas, Thomas Sommerer, Theresa Squatrito, and Christer Jönsson. 2014. Explaining the Transnational Design of International Organizations. Forthcoming in *International Organization*.
- ³ Alter, Karen and Sophie Meunier. 2009. The politics of International Regime Complexity. *Perspectives on Politics* 7(1): 13-24;
- Murphy, Hannah, and Aynsley Kellow. 2013. Forum Shopping in Global Governance: Understanding States, Business and NGOs in Multiple Arenas. *Global Policy* 4(2): 139-49;
- Risse, Thomas, Stephen Robb, and Kathryn Sikkink. 1999. *The Power of Human Rights. International Norms and Domestic Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;
- ⁴ Betsill, Michele and Harriet Bulkeley. 2004. Transnational Networks and Global Environmental Governance: The Cities for Climate Protection Program. *International Studies Quarterly* 48: 471-93;
- Keck and Sikkink 1998.
- ⁵ Tallberg et al. 2013; Tallberg et al. 2014.
- ⁶ Evans, Peter, Harold Jacobson, and Robert Putnam, eds. 1993. *Double-Edged Diplomacy: International Bargaining and Domestic Politics*. Vol. 25. Berkeley: University of California Press;
- ⁷ AUTHOR
- ⁸ AUTHOR
- ⁹ Fisher, Dana and Jessica Green 2004. Understanding Disenfranchisement: Civil Society and Developing Countries' Influence and Participation in Global Governance for Sustainable Development. *Global Environmental Politics* 4(3): 65-84;
- Zahrnt, Valentin. Domestic Constituents and the Formulation of WTO Negotiating Positions: What the Delegates Say. *World Trade Review* 7(2): 393-421.
- ¹⁰ Betsill, Michelle and Elisabeth Corell. 2001. NGO Influence in International Environmental negotiations: A Framework for Analysis. *Global Environmental Politics* 1(4): 65-85.
- ¹¹ Tarrow, Sidney. 2005. *The New Transnational Activism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ¹² Charnovitz, Steve. 2000. Opening the WTO to Nongovernmental Interests. *Fordham International Law Journal* 24(1): 173-216;
- Keck and Sikkink 1998; Tallberg et al. 2013b; 2014.
- ¹³ Charnovitz, Steve. 2001. WTO Cosmopolitics. *NYUJ International Law & Politics* 34: 299-354;
- Nanz, Patrizia, and Jens Steffek. 2004. Global Governance, Participation and the Public Sphere. *Government and Opposition* 39(2): 314-35.
- ¹⁴ Tallberg et al. 2013; 2014.
- ¹⁵ Fisher, Dana. 2010. COP 15 in Copenhagen: How the Merging of Movements Left Civil Society Out in the Cold. *Global Environmental Politics* 10(2), 12-17, pp. 16.
- ¹⁶ Mahoney 2007; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2008; McGrath 2005; Thomas 2004; Thomas and Hrebentar 2009; Woll 2012
- ¹⁷ Bloodgood, Elizabeth. 2011. The Interest Group Analogy: International Non-Governmental Advocacy Organisations in International Politics. *Review of International Studies*, 37(01), 93-12; Tallberg et al. 2013, 2014; Bloodgood 2012; AUTHOR.
- ¹⁸ Nownes, Anthony. 2006. *Total Lobbying: What Lobbyists Want (and How they Try to Get it)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 43.
- ¹⁹ O'Brien, Robert, Anne Marie Goetz, and Jan-Aart Scholte. 2000. *Contesting Global Governance. Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;
- Friedman, Elisabeth. 2003. Gendering the Agenda: The Impact of the Transnational Women's Rights Movement at the UN Conferences of the 1990s. *Women's Studies International Forum* 26(4): 313 -31;
- Schroeder, Heike, and Heather Lovell. 2012. The Role of Non-Nation-State Actors and Side Events in the International Climate Negotiations. *Climate Policy* 12(1): 23-37;
- Banerjee, Subhabrata. 2012. A Climate for Change? Critical Reflections on the Durban United Nations Climate Change Conference. *Organization Studies* 33(12): 1761-86;
- Charnovitz 2000; Betsill and Corell 2001.
- ²⁰ Reimann, Kim. 2006. A View from the Top: International Politics, Norms and the Worldwide Growth of NGOs. *Political Science Faculty Publications*. Paper 4;
- Hjerpe, Mattias and Björn-Ola Linnér. 2010. Functions of COP Side-Events in Climate-Change Governance. *Climate Policy* 10(2): 167-80;
- McGregor, Ian. 2011. Disenfranchisement of Countries and Civil Society at COP 15 in Copenhagen. *Global Environmental Politics* 11(3): 1-7;
- Fischer 2010; Banerjee 2012; O'Brien et al. 2000; Nanz and Steffek 2004.

-
- ²¹ Kollman, Ken. 1998. *Outside lobbying: Public Opinion and Interest Group Strategies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- ²² Betsill and Corell 2001; Fischer 2010.
- ²³ Bob, Clifford. 2005. *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;
- Srivastava, Jayati. 2005. NGOs at World Trade Organization: The “Democratic” Dimension. *Economic and Political Weekly* 40(19): 1952-57;
- Sell, Susan and Aseem Prakash. 2004: Using Ideas Strategically: The Contest Between Business and NGO Networks in Intellectual Property Rights. *International Studies Quarterly* 48(1): 143-77;
- Betsill and Corell 2001; Friedman 2003; McGregor 2011; Fischer 2010; Banerjee 2012.
- ²⁴ Beyers, Jan. 2004. Voice and Access Political Practices of European Interest Associations. *European Union Politics* 5(2): 211-240;
- Kollman 1998.
- ²⁵ Alter and Meunier 2009; Murphy and Kellow 2013.
- ²⁶ Keck and Sikkink 1998.
- ²⁷ Kriesi, Hans-Peter, Anke Tresch, and Margit Jochum. 2007. Going Public in the European Union Action Repertoires of Western European Collective Political Actors. *Comparative Political Studies* 40(1): 48-73.
- Beyers 2002; Talberg 2014.
- ²⁸ Evans et al. 1993.
- ²⁹ Muñoz Cabré, Miquel 2011. Issue-linkages to Climate Change Measured through NGO Participation in the UNFCCC. *Global Environmental Politics* 11(3): 10-22;
- Fischer and Green 2004; Fischer 2010.
- ³⁰ Munoz-Cabre, Miquel. 2011; Steffek and Ehling 2007; Fischer 2010; AUTHOR.
- ³¹ Bouwen, Pieter. 2002. Corporate Lobbying in the European Union: the Logic of Access. *Journal of European Public Policy* 9(3): 365-90.
- ³² Banerjee 2012.
- ³³ Chalmers, Adam. (2011). Interests, Influence and Information: Comparing the Influence of Interest Groups in the European Union. *Journal of European Integration* 33(4): 471-86.
- ³⁴ Nanz and Steffek 2004; Green and Fischer 2004; Fischer 2010.
- ³⁵ Schroeder, Heike, Maxwell Boykoff, and Laura Spiers. 2012. Equity and State Representations in Climate Negotiations. *Nature Climate Change* 2: 834-36;
- Banerjee 2012.
- ³⁶ Baumgartner, Frank, Jeffrey Berry, Marie Hojnacki, David Kimball and Beth Leech. 2010. *Advocacy and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- ³⁷ Depledge, Joanna 2004. *The Organization of Global Negotiations: Constructing the Climate Change Regime*. London: Earthscan.
- Banerjee 2012
- ³⁸ Arts, Bas. 1998. *The Political Influence of Global NGOs: Case Studies on the Climate and Biodiversity Conventions*. Utrecht: International Books;
- Sell, Susan 2003. *Private Power, Public Law: The Globalization of Intellectual Property Rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;
- Zürn 1998; O’Brien et al. 2000; Friedman 2003; Betsill and Corell 2001; Sell and Prakash 2004; Reimann 2006; Fischer 2010.
- ³⁹ Dür, Andreas. 2008. Interest Groups in the European Union: How Powerful are They? *West European Politics* 31(6): 1212-30;
- Tallberg, Jonas, Lisa Dellmuth, Hans Agné and Andreas Duit. 2013. Transnational Influence in International Organizations: Information, Access and Exchange. *Paper presented at ISA conference*, April 2013.
- ⁴⁰ Van den Bossche, Peter. 2008. NGO Involvement in the WTO: A Comparative Perspective. *Journal of International Economic Law* 11(4): 717-49;
- Charnovitz 2001; Tallberg et al. 2013; AUTHOR.
- ⁴¹ Arts 1998; Betsill and Corell 2001.
- ⁴² Sell 2003; Sell and Prakash 2004.
- ⁴³ Srivastava 2005.
- ⁴⁴ Nanz and Steffek 2004; Banerjee 2012.
- ⁴⁵ Keck and Sikkink 1998.
- ⁴⁶ See for instance Schroeder and Lovell 2012.

⁴⁷ For this survey our main concern was to analyze strategic actions of interest groups. In a follow-up survey I intend to focus on influence more extensively in which I corroborate self-perceived influence with other means to measure influence (i.e. process tracing and preference attainment).

⁴⁸ Lowery, David. 2013. Lobbying Influence: Meaning, Measurement and Missing. *Interest Groups & Advocacy* 2: 1–26.