P209 / Lobbying and Public Action in the Left Hand of the State: Health and Environment Inside Government

Topic : Interest Groups/Lobbying

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Why do some business demands become law while others quietly die? Research on lobbying has answered this question through several families of explanation. Some stress coalitions and the unity of interest groups (Tilly, 1984; Klüver, 2011; Kluger Dionigi, 2018). Others focus on framing and the capacity to present demands as legitimate (Rasch, 2018; Benoit and Coron, 2019). A third strand emphasises resources, access and proximity to decision-makers (Woll, 2011; Laurens, 2015; Behr and Michon, 2017). A fourth looks at the problem itself: low salience and technical complexity favour business, while noisy politics and opposition from citizens' groups reduce its advantage (Culpepper, 2011; Dür, Bernhagen and Marshall, 2015). Failure, for its part, is attributed to fragmentation, to conflict between groups and to institutional systems that favour the status quo (Baumgartner et al., 2009).

These approaches are productive, but they share a common design. Each factor is identified separately and its effect is assumed to be stable, while the government in which decisions are taken appears as a backdrop rather than as an object of study. The literature has also been tested mainly on the European Union, the United States and economic or trade regulation.

Work on industry tactics in public health and environmental policy is rich: how tobacco, alcohol and food firms build arguments, mobilise scientific doubt and cultivate access (Benamouzig and Cortinas Muñoz, 2019, 2022). But the government side of these battles, the ministries, offices and administrations where demands are received, sorted and turned into law or abandoned, has rarely been reconstructed in its own right. Few studies have examined decisional arenas and how they function (Zittoun & Chailleux, 2021).

This panel proposes to fill that gap. It asks how the social logics of decision-makers in the left hand of the state shape what becomes thinkable in public health and environmental policy, and why some industry positions gain traction while others fail. Rather than adding factors to the lists above, we propose to reconstruct the configurations where decisions take shape: who sits where, who depends on whom, which conflicts between ministries, agencies and advisers are at stake, and how earlier decisions constrain later ones.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Lobbying over public health and the environment is often denounced in public debate, yet its success and failure are rarely explained from inside government. This panel invites qualitative papers that open the black box of the administrations, agencies and cabinets where health and environmental policies are made, and show how industry demands are received, reshaped or set aside.

We welcome qualitative work based on ethnographic fieldwork in ministries, regulatory agencies and advisory bodies; interviews with officials, advisers and expert committee members; process tracing of legislative, regulatory and standard-setting sequences; and close documentary analysis of consultations, amendments and internal memos. Theoretical toolkits may draw on fields, social worlds, configurations, arenas or jurisdictions. No single framework is imposed.

Studies outside France are very welcome, and we particularly encourage comparative and non-European cases. Work on the United States, Latin America, Africa, Asia or Oceania, as well as on Southern and Eastern European countries, can reveal how the left hand of the state is organised under different constitutional arrangements, administrative traditions and political economies.

Each paper should explain why a lobbying effort succeeded or failed, using one or more case studies on a public health or environmental policy object (for example nutrition labelling, alcohol taxation, tobacco packaging, pesticide authorisation, water quality or chemical regulation). The case should be reconstructed from the government side: who decided, in what order, in relation to which earlier and anticipated decisions, and with what internal tensions between health or environmental mandates and economic ones. Papers should state their empirical material and make explicit what their cases allow them to say about the

configurations of government in which decisions are taken.

We are particularly interested in papers that: (a) describe how public health and environmental officials relate to one another, to economic ministries and to interest representatives; (b) show how scientific controversy, media attention or coalition size gain or lose force within specific configurations; (c) analyse how mandates conflict between protecting health or the environment and preserving economic activity.