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You'll never lobby alone

Explaining the participation of sub-national authorities in the European Commission's open consultations

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Abstract. The multi-level system of the EU constrains the institutionalized representation of the regional tier of government. Consequently, sub-national authorities seek to represent their interests through various lobbying practices, including taking part in the European Commission's open consultations. In this paper, we argue that varying levels with which SNAs take part in open consultations cannot be adequately explained by regional-level conditions such as resources or autonomy. Instead, we hypothesize that the specific policy context strongly affects regional involvement in open consultations. We test our hypotheses with evidence of the participation pattern of 296 SNAs in eight online consultations situated in five policy areas: Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Environment Action Program (EAP), Horizon 2020, Cohesion Policy and TEN-T. Our analysis demonstrates that the probability that SNAs take part in open consultations increases significantly when private interests of the same region and/or other SNAs of the same country participate in the same consultation.

Keywords. EU policymaking, sub-national authorities, open consultations, regional interest representation

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Introduction

During the past decades, most European countries faced a bidirectional process whereby states simultaneously transferred power upwards to the European level and downwards to the sub-national level (Hooghe et al., 2010). Both processes led to a situation in which some sub-national authorities (SNAs), on the one hand, became responsible for the implementation of European Union (EU) policies, while, on the other hand, their ability to shape EU policy outcomes remained limited (Jeffery, 2015; Tatham, 2014). To avoid the risk of becoming mere policy-takers without being policymakers, SNAs have a strong propensity to represent their interests in various ways at the EU-level (Knodt, 2011, p. 420). At the same time, various studies demonstrate that SNAs show substantial differences in the extent to which they seek to influence EU policies (Marks et al., 2002; Tatham, 2015).

One increasingly used venue to upload policy preferences is the open consultations process organized by the European Commission (EC). In this paper, we conceive active involvement in open consultations as one specific instance of regional lobbying. More specifically, *we aim to explain why SNAs take part in these consultations*. Previous literature has often sought to explain variation in regional interest representation by testing for regional-level variables such as regional autonomy, resources or political distinctiveness (Blatter et al., 2010; Donas & Beyers 2013; Marks et al., 1996; Tatham & Thau, 2014). By looking at policy-centered contextual variables, such as the simultaneous mobilization of private interests and other SNAs, we will provide additional insights into how and why regional interests take part in EU policymaking.

Studying the participation of SNAs in open consultations is relevant for two reasons. First, consultations are increasingly used by the EC to improve the quality of its policies and, at the same time, enhance the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders – including sub-national interests – to counter-balance the prominent presence of specific interests in EU

lobbying processes (Quittkat, 2011). It is therefore relevant to learn to what extent, why and under which conditions SNAs use open consultations to upload their preferences. Second, despite increased attention for open consultations among interest group scholars, there is only limited attention for the fact that *both* public authorities *and* private interests make use of this channel. Some studies provide broad and descriptive accounts of the number and types of organized interests participating in consultations (Quittkat, 2011; Quittkat & Kotzian, 2011), while explanatory studies mainly focus on the participation pattern of traditional interest groups such as business interests and NGOs (Bunea, 2014; Klüver, 2012). Yet, not many scholars have considered an explanatory approach that accounts for the entanglement of public authorities with other interests during consultation processes. Moreover, existing studies primarily focus on those actors that take part in consultations, and therefore predominantly cover interests that demonstrate a rather substantial level of political activity. The set of identified actors usually does not include those that could have participated, but did not do so. In this article we rely on the entire population of SNAs, including those that did not participate, enabling us to offer a robust assessment of why certain SNAs, at certain occasions, decided to participate in a consultation while others did not.

We propose two distinct sets of explanations. First, we look at regional characteristics that are invariant to the concrete policy issues at stake during an open consultation: economic resources, regional autonomy and the extent to which these regions are embedded in the 'Brussels scene'. We expect that rich and politically powerful regions that are well represented in Brussels are more likely to make use of open consultations. Second, our tests take into account the varying context of concrete policy processes. The main mechanism is as follows. By participating in EU policymaking an SNA sends a signal, not only to EU-level or to national policymakers, but also to other interests such as regional interest groups or other SNAs in the same country. Mobilization is contagious: acts of active participation in a

specific consultation trigger additional participation. In short, SNAs never lobby alone. Hence, we expect that SNAs show a higher propensity to get involved in consultations when sub-national *private* interests of their *region* or other SNAs from the same *country* participate as well.

We test these hypotheses by analyzing the participation pattern of 296 SNAs in eight consultations that are related to policy processes in the domains of agriculture, environment, transport, research and cohesion policy. While our analysis confirms many of our expectations, most predictive power can be attributed to policy-centered contextual factors. The probability that SNAs participate in open consultations increases significantly when private interests of the same region and/or other SNAs of the same country take part in the same consultation. In the next part we briefly review how the literature has studied political-institutional variables to explain SNA participation in EU policymaking. Next, we argue that policy-centered contextual factors can add additional insights to the process of regional mobilization. We subsequently develop hypotheses regarding both sets of variables. Part four presents the research design and data-set, while part five discusses our main results. We conclude by presenting a reflection on the broader implications of our main findings.

Sub-national involvement in EU policymaking

The simultaneous processes of European integration and national decentralization have triggered SNAs to seek policy influence in the EU (Jeffery, 2000, 2015; Jones & Keating, 1995). Scholarly interest in this topic originated in the mid-1990s pointing at regional mobilization as the growing engagement of sub-national governmental actors with the EU institutions and policymaking processes (Hooghe, 1995). Various studies hypothesized that a new pattern of ‘multi-level governance’ (MLG) would increase the number of channels of regional representation and trigger SNAs to seek direct and unmediated access to European policymakers (Bomberg & Peterson, 1998; Hooghe & Marks, 1996; Tatham, 2008). However,

the literature on MLG also agreed that regions do not engage equally in these activities but that ‘there are wide differences in the capacity of regional actors to exploit these channels’ (Hooghe & Marks, 1996, p. 74; see also Beyers et al., 2015). For instance, many studies aiming to explain the varying pattern of regional mobilization have focused on the determinants of establishing a Brussels based office (Blatter et al., 2010; Donas & Beyers, 2013; Marks et al., 1996; Nielsen & Salk, 1998; Tatham & Thau, 2014).

Analyzing why regions establish a Brussels-based presence has some limits. To begin with, whereas a regional office might have been an asset in the 1990s, today it has become such a common practice among SNAs that it tells us little about the variation in regional mobilization. Most scholars would agree with Moore who concludes that ‘the model of a regional representative office has been institutionalized within patterns of regional interest mediation in the EU’ (2008, p. 520; see also Kettunen & Kull, 2009). Second, having an office in Brussels does not necessarily mean that an SNA also actively engages with EU policymaking, nor does it say which concrete policies it monitors or aims to influence. For instance, Marks et al. (2002) demonstrate that regional offices themselves emphasize information gathering more than seeking policy influence through lobbying.

Moreover, most explanatory efforts were situated within an MLG vs. state-centric perspective and focused on regional and state-level variables such as regional resources and autonomy a region enjoys vis-à-vis the central government (see also Jeffery, 2000; Tatham, 2010). Thereby the dominant focus was on vertical interactions, namely whether and to what extent central state governments are bypassed. This focus somewhat underexposes how SNA-activities correspond with the lobbying attempts of regional private interests and other SNAs (but see Greenwood, 2011; Knodt, 2011; Quittkat & Kotzian, 2011). At the same time, interest group scholars who studied consultations usually consider the overall inter-organizational context that surrounds particular policy issues (Bunea, 2014; Klüver, 2012). In

short, a substantial part of the literature shows a considerable neglect of the concrete policy context in which regions operate when analyzing their engagement with EU policymaking. Without disregarding the insights developed in the earlier literature, we believe that a policy-centered approach that controls systematically for contextual factors may significantly add to our understanding of regional mobilization in the EU.

Regional-level and policy-centered explanations for regional participation in open consultations

Combining the literature on consultations with the literature on regional mobilization enables us to develop two accounts of regional participation in open consultations. The first is located on the regional level, emphasizing factors related to SNA characteristics, in particular resources and political autonomy. It primarily considers assets that can be used in exchanges with policymakers. The second is policy-centered and conceptualizes representation as a communication act – not only with policymakers, but also with other stakeholders – in relation to specific policy issues.

The first perspective conceptualizes lobbying as an exchange whereby the EC offers access and attention, in return for policy information supplied by organized interests (Bouwen, 2002, 2004). The EC is faced with a huge challenge to develop and monitor legislation for a highly diverse set of member-states, both in terms of legal traditions and socio-economic circumstances. Open consultations are one tool to collect information regarding the technical adequacy of specific policies as well as the political support these policies may enjoy. At the same time, stakeholders see these consultations as a venue to upload their policy views. Moreover, open consultations are not the privilege of private interests, but, as we will show below, they also attract a substantial number of public authorities.

A regional-level perspective seeks to explain patterns of information supply to the EC by factors related to the SNA's characteristics. Central is the SNA's capacity to provide policy-relevant information and the extent to which its interests are potentially affected by EU legislation. We formulate four hypotheses related to the capabilities and/or regulatory exposure of SNAs that may explain their participation in consultations.

First, in order to produce policy-relevant information, interested parties need material resources such as money and staff. The importance of resources for interest representation activities has been demonstrated repeatedly, both for private interests (Beyers & Kerremans, 2007; Dür & Mateo, 2012; Eising, 2007) and for regional authorities (Donas & Beyers, 2013). More specifically, Blatter et al. (2010) show that resources positively affect the likelihood of opening a Brussels based regional office. The larger and better funded an office, the more likely that seeking policy influence is a key goal (Marks et al., 2002, p. 9). With regard to consultations, Klüver (2012) finds that as resources increase, the level of information interest groups supply to the EC increases as well.

H1 The more resources, the more likely an SNA participates in open consultations.

Second, actors with a wide range of interests in multiple policy fields are more likely to be affected by EU policy initiatives rendering them more inclined to seek attention for their policy positions (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009). This implies that regions with significant political autonomy and policy competencies are more likely to mobilize because they face higher levels of regulatory exposure. They become active at the EU-level because the costs of remaining inactive may be high, but also because more policy benefits can be realized (Marks et al., 1996). Various scholars have demonstrated the effect of political autonomy on territorial interest representation activities. For instance, the more regional autonomy, the more likely regional offices are established (Donas & Beyers, 2013; Marks et al., 1996, p. 182; Tatham & Thau, 2014), the larger the staffing size of regional offices (Blatter et al.,

2010; Tatham & Thau, 2014), the larger the size of the policy portfolio (Donas et al., 2014) and the more likely the SNAs will seek to influence EU policymaking (Marks et al., 2002).

H2 The more autonomy, the more likely an SNA is to participate in open consultations.

Third, the policy influence capabilities in Brussels depend on how well the SNA is embedded in the ‘Brussels scene’. Organizations with a permanent presence and/or structural ties with other players or networks within the EU policymaking community, are more aware of opportunities to exert influence (Beyers & Kerremans, 2007; Bunea, 2014; Dür & Mateo, 2012; Eising, 2004). SNAs strive for supranational embeddedness most prominently by establishing regional offices and joining trans-regional associations (Donas & Beyers, 2013). Regional offices monitoring EU affairs provide an early warning mechanism to alert regional governments if upcoming EU legislation implies benefits or costs for the region (Rowe, 2011). Therefore, we expect that having a regional office increases the information producing capacity as well as the awareness of political opportunities, thus stimulating participation in consultations. Mahoney (2004) supports this expectation as she finds that interest groups with a permanent presence in Brussels show a stronger engagement in EU policymaking and are more likely to participate in open consultations.

H3 SNAs with an office in Brussels are more likely to take part in open consultations.

In addition to regional offices, SNAs join trans-regional associations to facilitate information exchange among regions, hereby improving their ability to develop well-informed policy positions. Being member of a trans-regional association creates benefits as the SNA is more likely to become involved in lobbying coalitions, saving resources due to sharing of information. In addition, it has been shown that the way advocates are connected to each other affects how they seek and gain access to policymakers (Beyers & Braun, 2014; Carpenter et al., 1998). For instance, with respect to open consultations, Bunea (2014) finds that the

intensity of interest group preference articulation is positively affected by the number of formal membership ties with other stakeholders.

H4 The more SNAs are member of trans-regional associations, the more likely they participate in open consultations.

To sum up, our first four hypotheses build on the notion that the participation of an SNA in open consultations is the result of a region's capabilities in terms of resources (H1), policy competencies (H2), embeddedness in Brussels (H3) or formal ties with other SNAs (H4).

These four hypotheses have in common that they implicitly presume that participation is invariant to specific policies or the extent to which these policies generate attention from other stakeholders. However, much advocacy and interest mobilization is characterized by herding and bandwagoning. This means that lobbying practices are contagious: the mobilization of one interest tends to trigger the mobilization of other interests (Banerjee, 1992; Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Halpin, 2011). Lobbyists often operate in a crowded environment with other interests – business associations, labour unions, NGOs, other public authorities. This is especially true in the case of open consultations where the EC aims to obtain input from a large and diverse set of stakeholders. Therefore, when explaining advocacy behaviour, it is important to account for the overall organizational context. We argue that, when taking part in consultations, stakeholders do not only exchange information with policymakers, but their act of involvement also signals their position on a particular issue to other potentially relevant stakeholders (see also Bunea, 2014). In other words, participating in consultations has a communicative function towards other stakeholders as well. Specifically, we expect that SNAs signal their position to two other types of relevant stakeholders: regional private interests and other SNAs from the same country.

Formally, SNAs represent a 'public interest' that is tied to constituencies located in a particular region. In this regard, their EU representation might also be a substitute or

intermediation for regional private interests, such as companies, business associations or NGOs. In this way, the SNA adopts the role of a ‘transmission belt’ between regional constituencies and the European institutions, acting as a spokesperson for territorially rooted interests (Greenwood, 2011; Knodt et al., 2011). For instance, SNAs can coalesce with particular economic and functional interests that are tied to a region, such as ports, airports, research institutes or specific economic sectors. For such interests, the active support of a regional government may be valuable as this increases the political credibility of their claims (Rowe, 2011). As representatives of the ‘common regional interests’, we expect that SNAs are more likely to mobilize when regional private interests are at stake. Hence, they will show a higher propensity to take part in consultations when private interests of the same region participate as well. By communicating with EU policymakers SNAs show their regional constituency that they are actively taking care of an issue that is highly important for some regionally based private interest.

H5 When regionally based private interests participate in an open consultation, the regional public authority is more likely to participate in the consultation as well.

Next to private interests, we expect that a regional authority may wish to signal its activity or respond to the efforts of other SNAs from the same member-state. SNAs from the same country might have similar or opposite policy interests. In case interests align, SNAs might cooperate by jointly promoting ‘the general regional interest’ from one particular member-state. As a result, they might encourage each other to participate in open consultations to reinforce their joint position. Alternatively, simultaneous involvement may also occur in case SNAs have competing interests, for instance about EU funding. When a competitor signals a position and shows that it is actively promoting its interests via consultations, it might trigger others to counter their efforts in order to balance the scale (Austen-Smith & Wright, 1996).

Both lines of reasoning lead to the following hypothesis:

H6 A particular SNA is more likely to participate in a consultation if other SNAs from the same country participate as well.

Data and Research Design

In order to analyse the participation pattern of SNAs in open consultations, we mapped all the stakeholders that were active in eight consultations situated in five distinct policy areas. First, based on a survey among 127 regional offices conducted in 2011-2012 we identified five policy areas that were considered as highly salient among regional representatives (for more details see Donas et al., 2014). This concerns the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Environment Action Programme (EAP), Horizon 2020 (H2020), Cohesion Policy (COH) and the Trans-European Network for Transport (TEN-T).

Next, we developed a database with all the actors that participated in these consultations.¹ Anyone can formally participate, either by submitting a position paper or through completing a structured questionnaire. Position papers or questionnaires from individuals were not included in our dataset. If a position paper was submitted in the name of more than one organization (for instance, by a coalition), all those organizations were added as distinct entries. This resulted in an initial dataset of 2,123 unique actors that responded to at least to one of the consultations. For each actor, characteristics were coded based on the information available on their website: national origin (where the headquarter is located), level of mobilization (whether it is a regional, national, European or global organization) and actor type (whether it is a business, NGO, labor union or something else). We could not find useful evidence for 133 organizations, resulting in a total of 1,990 fully coded actors.

For the explanatory analysis, we merged this dataset with another dataset based on research conducted by Donas and Beyers (2013) who collected data on 296 European SNAs. The selected SNAs meet three criteria: (1) being located at the first level below the central

¹ See Online Appendix for an detailed overview of the EC open consultations per policy area.

government, (2) not being a de-concentrated administrative unit, (3) having on average a population of at least 150 000 inhabitants.² The merged dataset is hierarchically structured, meaning that the unit of analysis is a SNA-policy area dyad, namely for each of the 296 SNA we assess five times whether or not they took part in one of the consultations that were organized for the five policy areas. As such, for all 296 regions we have five repeated observations, giving a total of 1,480 observations. We rely on two types of independent variables: variables relating to regional capacities (H1), autonomy (H2) and EU embeddedness (H3 and H4) are measured at the SNA-level, while mobilized private interests (H5) and other SNAs (H6) are measured at the level of each separate SNA and the specific policy area in which it submits a position paper or completes a questionnaire.

Table 1. Overview of dependent and independent variables

	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness
Regional-level variables (n=296)					
Resources (GDP in millions of Euro) <i>Eurostat, OECD</i>	0.48	537.4	38.51	70.01	4.092
Self-rule <i>Hooghe et al., 2010</i>	1	14	8.35	3.05	0.018
Shared-rule <i>Hooghe et al., 2010</i>	0	9	1.26	2.58	2.045
Cohesion funding per capita in euros (2007-13) <i>Eurostat</i>	5.81	3954	360.82	446.64	3.126
Liaison office <i>AUTHOR</i>	0	1	0.72	0.49	-1.002
Affiliations with trans-regional association <i>AUTHOR</i>	0	29	5.14	4.48	1.535
Policy-centered variables (n=1480)					
Regional private interests of the same region <i>AUTHOR CODING</i>	0	1	0.09	0.28	2.976
Sub-national authorities of the same country <i>AUTHOR CODING</i>	0	18	2.63	4.14	1.866
Dependent variable (n=1480)					
Participation in open consultation <i>AUTHOR CODING</i>	0	1	0.14	0.35	2.023

² We use this threshold for various reasons. First, to avoid selecting the lowest level jurisdiction of countries such as Cyprus, Slovenia and Luxembourg in which case small villages and communes would have vastly outnumber larger regions, counties, provinces or cities in our sample. Second, we decided to use the same threshold as Hooghe et al. (2010) because data on self-rule and shared-rule, as well as most economic indicators, are only available for jurisdictions of this size.

We use GDP as a proxy for regional resources to test the effect of resource endowment.³ To test for regional autonomy we rely on the Regional Authority Index (RAI) (Hooghe et al. 2010, pp. 7–8) which looks at self-rule (the authority exercised by a regional government over those who live on its territory and thus the *autonomy* of a region from the central government) and shared-rule (the joined authority and thus the regional *participation* and *co-decision-making* at the central state level); our models include both dimensions. We expect that expressing preferences by submitting a position paper is especially affected by the level of self-rule, much less by shared-rule. Hence, we operationalize regional autonomy by self-rule and control for shared rule. Additionally, we control for the amount of structural/cohesion funding a region receives as it is sometimes expected that SNAs that receive substantial funding from EU sources will show higher levels of political activity with respect to EU policymaking processes (Bache, 1998; Hooghe & Keating, 1994; Marks et al., 1996). Based on data collected by Beyers and Donas (2014), we operationalize EU embeddedness by looking at regional offices and membership of trans-regional associations. We developed a simple dichotomous variable indicating whether an SNA has established a regional office. For trans-regional associations we created a count variable capturing the

³ One might argue that GDP is too remote a proxy for resources and that data on the size of the budget SNAs spend on EU advocacy would be better. However, reliable and comparable budget data are not readily available for most SNAs in our sample. The regional GDP can be considered as a close proxy of an SNA's capabilities; the partial correlation of our GDP measure with the budget data of Blatter (2010, N=80 regions) is .81, when controlled for the self-rule, shared rule, and GDP per capita (and .74 when the outlier Ile-de-France is included). Moreover, Blatter's data is substantially correlated with Hooghe's et al. index of self-rule ($r=.49$, $p<.0001$) (see Donas & Beyers 2013). To strengthen our main argument we ran alternative models in which GDP as a proxy for resources was substituted by other candidates such as GDP/capita and population size. These models largely confirm our main findings (for more information see the Online Appendix).

amount of trans-regional associations an SNA is a member of. Because GDP, cohesion support and the affiliations with trans-regional associations show a skewed distribution, we log-transformed these variables.

As mentioned earlier, we coded all actors that have been active, either by submitting a position paper or by completing a questionnaire, for each of the eight consultations. On the basis of this information we included a dichotomous variable to depict whether or not private interests from the same region were involved in the consultations of a specific policy process. In addition, we developed a variable for assessing the participation of other SNAs from the same country while making sure that the index is comparable across a set of diverse countries. For instance, if two (out of three) SNAs from Belgium participate in a consultation this is a high number, whereas in Romania a score of two (out of 42) is rather low considering the respective amount of regions. We first divided the number of other participating SNAs by the total number of SNAs of the member state. To accommodate the skewedness of this variable and to ensure that we develop a meaningful variable, we established three categories, namely 1) no other SNAs submitted a position paper, 2) less than half of the other national SNAs submitted a position and 3) more than half of the other national SNAs took part in the consultation.

Data analysis

We first provide a short descriptive overview of our data. Table 2 shows that there is a great diversity in the type of actors and the level on which they are mobilized. Most participants originate from the national level (n=758, or 38 percent), while the number of submissions originating from the sub-national level is substantial as well (n=564, or 28 percent). Also the high number of public authorities that originate from the sub-national level (n=321, or 16 percent) is remarkable. Alongside mobilizing private interests, a large share of sub-national

actors involved in consultations are public authorities. We also observe that, in general, business interests outnumber civil society organizations such as NGOs and labor unions.

Table 2. Actor distribution according to interest type and level of mobilization (frequencies)

	Business	Labour	NGO	Institution	Public authority	Unknown	Total
Subnational	152	2	26	32	321	31	564
National	228	21	70	219	178	42	758
EU	170	9	59	128	82	61	509
International	87	2	30	26	3	8	156
Unknown	0	0	1	1	0	1	3
Total	637	34	186	406	584	21	1990

Index: Institutions are semi-public organizations that have no membership structure, such as hospitals, universities and so on.

The actor distribution varies substantially depending on the policy area. Figure 1 gives an overview of the actor types by policy area. In the CAP consultations, businesses (in particular farmers and food industry) and NGOs (especially environmental NGOs and consumers) are most prominent. The environmental consultation has the lowest response rate, with a high prevalence of business interests and NGOs. In cohesion policy, public authorities – of which 68 per cent (n=170) are sub-national – are by far the largest group, which is not surprising considering that regions are important beneficiaries of structural funds. The representation of public and private interests is more evenly balanced in H2020 and TEN-T. With respect to H2020, the participation of institutions – such as universities and research centers – stands out, again due to being direct funding beneficiaries. Interestingly, in TEN-T more public authorities, of which 62 per cent (n=157) are located at the sub-national level, participated compared to the consultations.

Figure 1. Overview of the actor types by policy area (frequencies, N=1990)

To test our hypotheses, we ran multilevel logistic regression models predicting the participation of a region in consultations within a certain policy area. The SNAs are nested within member states and for each SNA we have five repeated measures, one for each area. Given the hierarchical structure of the data, the assumption of independent and identically distributed data is violated and an ordinary logistic regression might over-estimate the magnitude of the predictors. Therefore, we use a three level model allowing two intercepts to vary, one for the member-state level and one for the SNA level. We introduce our independent variables step by step and compare the fit of the expanded model with the more parsimonious model to check if adding a particular set of variables significantly improves the model fit and/or affects the parameter estimates.

Table 3. Explaining the participation of subnational authorities in consultations

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
Fixed effects				
Policy domain (ref.cat. = CAP):				
ENV	0.642 (.35)	0.642 (.35)	0.642 (.35)	0.73 (.41)
H2020	6.100*** (2.47)	6.102*** (2.47)	6.089*** (2.46)	3.327** (1.41)
RP	24.720*** (9.92)	24.602*** (9.89)	24.531*** (9.85)	9.865*** (4.32)
TENT	15.370*** (6.12)	15.337*** (6.12)	15.298*** (6.1)	6.320*** (2.68)
GDP (log)		1.579*** (0.20)	1.262* (0.17)	1.106 (0.13)
Self-rule		1.169** (0.09)	1.034 (0.08)	0.964 (0.05)
Shared-rule		0.998 (0.09)	0.997 (0.08)	0.951 (0.05)
Cohesion funding (log)		1.035 (0.13)	1.010 (0.12)	0.939 (0.01)
Regional office (ref.cat. = no)			1.433 (0.49)	1.717 (0.6)
Trans-regional association (log)			2.497*** (0.65)	2.272*** (0.55)
Private stakeholders (ref.cat. = no)				2.568** (0.8)
SNA of same country (ref.cat. = no):				
Less than half of the SNAs				4.024*** (1.3)
More than half of the SNAs				12.589*** (5.88)
Constant	0.012 (0.01)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)
Random intercept				
Country constant	1.551 (.65)	0.739 (.34)	0.479 (.25)	0.014 (.09)
SNA constant	0.786 (.32)	0.572 (.29)	0.461 (.27)	0.744 (.34)
Model fit				
Df	4	8	10	13
-LL	-464.19	-451.40	-444.11	-421.84

Index: multilevel logistic regression; odds ratio's; standard-errors between brackets; * p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, N=1480

In Model I we simply control for the random intercepts for country and region and the five policy areas using dummy variables. Taking CAP as a reference category, we observe that policy area has an effect: it is more likely that SNAs participate in consultations on Cohesion Policy, TEN-T or H2020 than in consultations on CAP or environmental policies.

In Model II we add variables that test the effect of regional resources and autonomy. This leads to a significant better fit ($2*(-LL--LL)=25.58$, $\Delta df=4$, $p<.0001$). As expected GDP (H1) and self-rule (H2) have a significant positive effect on the regional participation in open consultations, whereas cohesion funding or shared-rule have no significant effect. The null result for cohesion funding corroborates with earlier claims that the distribution of structural funds is largely a matter of socio-economic criteria and high-end political bargaining and that securing structural funds is not the only or most important concern of sub-national policy advocacy (Donas & Beyers, 2013).

Model III tests for EU-level embeddedness, while controlling for resources and autonomy. Again, this model gives an improved fit compared to Model II ($2*(-LL--LL)=14.58$, $\Delta df=2$, $p=.0007$). Having a liaison office in Brussels does not predict the involvement in public consultations (H3), whereas being a member of a trans-regional association enhances the likelihood of getting involved in consultations (H4). Interestingly, GDP remains significant, although less so than in Model II, and self-rule no longer significantly predicts the participation in consultations. The better fit of Model III means that by adding these variables we get a more accurate prediction of the probability that SNAs take part in consultations. Yet, at the same time, the predictive importance of regional characteristics decreases (in the case of GDP) or disappears (in the case of self-rule), which means that a more parsimonious model with only these factors overestimates the relevance of resources and autonomy. Based on Model III, we should indeed reject our second hypothesis. We must slightly nuance this finding, however, since having a Brussels-based liaison office

and being a member of trans-regional associations is a privilege of regions with more self-rule and a higher GDP (Donas & Beyers, 2013). Maybe, the effects of self-rule and GDP are engulfed by the explanatory power of membership in trans-regional associations.

Finally, adding our key explanatory variables, the private stakeholder (H5) and SNA participation (H6), leads to a much better prediction ($2*(-LL--LL)=44.54$, $\Delta df=3$, $p<.0001$). Both provide a robust explanation, even after controlling for regional capacities, autonomy and EU embeddedness. More so, the impact of GDP and self-rule simply evaporates, meaning that being resourceful or having many policy competencies does not add to a better prediction if we control for whether private regional interests or other SNAs from the same member-state mobilize. Figure 2 illustrates the impact of these variables on the predicted probabilities while holding all other variables in Model IV at their mean. If there is at least one private regional stakeholder submitting a position paper, the likelihood that the SNA of that region gets involved increases from 11 percent to almost 40 percent. The likelihood that an SNA uploads a policy view is almost zero if no other SNA from the same country makes an effort to take part in consultations. There is a significant increase when a small number of SNAs becomes active, but the likelihood to take part increases to more than 50 percent in case more than half of the SNAs from one country get mobilized. If we consider situations where both SNAs and private interests get involved, we predict that if these two conditions are maximized and all other factors are kept constant, the likelihood for an SNA to take part in consultation is more than 70 percent.

Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of the main explanatory variables

mobilized private interests from the same region

mobilized regions from the same country

Conclusion

In this paper we demonstrated that SNAs actively use open consultations to voice regional preferences and influence EU policymaking. While, unsurprisingly, SNAs are most active in consultations on cohesion policy, our mapping shows that their participation stretches into policy areas where territorial interests are less directly tangible. Hence, SNAs constitute an important ‘advocate’ type and should not be overlooked when studying the EC’s consultation regime. Moreover, there is strong evidence suggesting that the participation of societal interests may trigger regional lobbying and vice versa. This implies that in order to identify the mechanisms behind consultation practices, future research should pay closer attention to the way in which territorial interest representation gets intermingled with private interest mobilization (and vice versa).

Although SNAs are relevant policy players, there is strong variation in the extent to which SNAs participate in EU policymaking via open consultations. The observation that nearly all SNAs have some kind of regional representation in Brussels constituted proof for some authors that a ‘convergence of regional mobilization patterns’ had occurred (Moore,

2008; see also Tatham & Thau, 2014). However, while having a regional office has become commonplace, advocacy via consultations certainly has not. Of the total population of 296 identified SNAs, only about half (137) participated in at least one of the selected sets of consultations. Interestingly, we did not find a significant effect of having a regional office on participating in open consultations. This supports the view that a regional office first and foremost serves to increase visibility, but does not necessarily add much in terms of seeking effective policy influence (see also Knodt et al., 2011).

Instead, our analysis demonstrates that involvement in open consultations depends on the specific context of a particular policy process. Regional participation in consultations might be stimulated by the presence of other interests either through membership of formal associations or through the simultaneous involvement by private interests and/or other SNAs. Nonetheless, we should remain careful and not underestimate the relevance of regional characteristics when explaining regional advocacy behavior since resources and autonomy are somewhat connected to some other explanatory variables. For instance, more resources and autonomy increases the likelihood of having a regional office and strengthens the ties with trans-regional associations (Donas & Beyers, 2013: 540; Marks et al., 1996; Tatham & Thau, 2014). Moreover, regions with a high GDP generally have more industrial activity, a more diverse economy and therefore more societal interests that are potentially affected by EU legislation. If such resourceful regions are additionally endowed with substantial competences (self-rule), they show a higher propensity to harbour private interests that are organized at the sub-national level (Keating & Wilson, 2014).

Additionally, the fact that the explanatory power of shared-rule and self-rule is limited or disappears when controlled for contextual policy-centered variables, might point at some other relevant aspect related to some specific particularities concerning open consultations. Generally, SNAs with high levels of regional authority tend to have developed extensive

intra-state channels for regional interest mediation in the EU (Beyers et al. 2015; Jeffery, 2000; Tatham 2011). These intra-state channels may depress the need to take part in open consultations as more effective channels are available. This might explain why shared-rule and to a lesser extent self-rule is not such a strong and robust predictor for participation in open consultations. Yet, this finding does not necessarily rule out regional authority as an important factor as it might be relevant for other, perhaps more effective, forms of regional mobilization, such as gaining access to Commission expert committees.

Our main contribution is that we provide proof for the claim that the involvement of SNAs in EU affairs should be analyzed in a broader context and requires a policy-centered research design. While we find a strong association between regional private interest involvement and the participation by SNAs, the mechanism that leads to this coinciding participation remains black-boxed. This raises a couple of interesting questions. First, despite the co-occurrence of private and public interests, we do not know at this moment to what extent the policy positions put forward in the submitted documents align. A public and private actor originating from the same region might as well submit documents with opposing positions. Secondly, consultation data cannot provide a decisive answer about the direction of the relation between private and public sub-national actors: who triggers who into participating in online consultations? To answer this question, future research involving interviews with regional administrations for instance, is required.

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