



UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA  
DE MADRID

# Understanding the Unstable Frames of Citizen Participation in the EU: field effects, public sphere and governance functions

---

LUIS BOUZA GARCÍA – UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE MADRID

THEORISING THE EU'S CRISIS

FULDA RESEARCH CENTRE FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND EUROPEAN STUDIES  
(CINTEUS) AND ARBEITSKREIS EUROPÄISCHE INTEGRATION E.V. (AEI).

# Participatory arrangements as political opportunities

---

Focus on growing formalisation of interest group relations (art 11 TUE)

- Unrealised semi-corporatist demands for a civil dialogue (Art 11.2 TUE)
- Neo-pluralist tendencies since 2005
  - Focus on improved governance and stakeholders consultation (Art 11.3 TUE)
  - Open online consultations
  - European Citizens' Initiative (Art 11.4 TUE)
- Clear differentiation between insider and outsider registers of mobilisation

# Contribution to legitimacy

---

Potential effects of the ongoing redistribution of political opportunities to engage with EU institutions upon the logics of interaction, coalition building and competition among civil society groups in the EU

- Evaluation of the contribution of compromises and the logics of cooperation and competition change strongly with different theoretical lenses

Most of the evaluations of participatory mechanisms focus on the institutional dimensions of participation (procedural rights, efficacy, balance of interests) but overlook how interest groups see the rationale for their own involvement

- Example: the effect of the ECI is very different from the institutional and inter-group completion logics

In order to discuss the legitimacy effect of what groups do with participation opportunities we build on 3 approaches of the political sociology family: field theory, public sphere definitions and governmentality

# Insiders and outsiders: European civil society as a social field

---

Focus on the competition among alternative forms of collective action at the EU level and among different views of the rationale for involvement in EU policy making are “a game in which [actors] are playing to maintain or improve their position” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012: p.28; Johansson and Kalm 2015)

- What is at stake: defining the legitimate forms of interaction with EU institutions → who has access?

Civil society in the EU is a settled field but the “rules of the game” are still up for grabs

- Without “civil dialogue” dominant organisations are constantly in need to demonstrate their legitimacy
- New types of “capital” rewarded, such as mobilisation via the ECI

Contribution to legitimacy is a by product of the struggle for power and influence

- Structural distinction between insiders and outsiders, tendency to non-cooperative behaviour
- Field dynamics may change the registers of collective action of the insiders

# Participation opportunities as a form of governmentality

---

Whereas Foucault's approach to biopolitics has been applied to several areas of EU politics very limited to civil society (Kutay) or to participation logics

- Rationale: Lipschutz's distinction between institutional and productive power of civil society: civil society's main potential is to resist depoliticisation trends, and this is impossible in institutional arrangements

Whereas governmentality theorists consider civil society tend to see opportunities for civil society involvement in global policy-making as a contribution to making the "rationality of governance conceivable and the global political space governable" (Lo Schiavo 2014: 191)

- The EU seems to have further advanced this path with the better governance package by conceiving expertise as the main contribution by civil society.

Legitimacy: distrust of formal participation and tendency to dichotomise outsiders as real civil society. Conflict and outsider protest important.

# European civil society and the public sphere

---

Since the very origins of the institutionalisation of civil society access to the EU there have been expectations that these will contribute to the public sphere

- 2000 – 2003: internal debates in civil society
- 2005: civil dialogue in national capitals

Changes with the neo-pluralist turn, but still strong expectations on transnational communication

- Public oversight of the transparency register
- ECI as a “reward” for organisations able to mobilise a segmented European public to put a demand on the agenda

Contrary to the expectations of the governmentality literature and field approaches protest movements are combining signs of their outsider nature with a degree of empowerment resulting from their ability to introduce contestation and dissent (Della Porta and Parks 2018, Oleari and Bouza 2018)

# Conclusions

---

The three approaches presented anticipate that the current configuration of access opportunities will rather contribute to the competition between coalitions of insiders and outsiders for the attention of the EU institutions rather than to more compromise

Institutional evaluations tend to underestimate the legitimacy contribution resulting from outside mobilisation

Need to develop theoretical perspectives on the legitimacy effects of what groups do with access tools