

THE PARTICIPATORY AND DEMOCRATIC POTENTIAL AND PRACTICE OF INTEREST GROUPS: BETWEEN SOLIDARITY AND REPRESENTATION

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Embracing 'groups' as means to address democratic deficiencies invites scrutiny of their democratic practices. However, many groups lack internal democratic practices and offer few opportunities for affiliates to participate. Guided by an implicit 'representation' narrative of groups, the absence of internal democratic practices is interpreted as a sign of 'failure' or 'deficiency'. Some scholars have entertained the idea of setting minimum standards of internal democracy as a prerequisite for policy access. This article scrutinizes this emerging consensus and its 'representation' narrative. Drawing upon the work of O'Neill (2001) and Pitkin (1967), it is argued that groups can also be viewed through a lens of solidarity. This paper argues that the type of constituency a group advocates for can be used to calibrate expectations of internal democratic structures of accountability and authorization. The concepts of 'representation' and 'solidarity' are used to make sense of the (changeable) practices of a variety of groups.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS: GROUPS AS DEMOCRATIZING AGENTS?

Confronted with so-called 'democratic deficits' and widespread mistrust of political institutions, governmental institutions – both national and supranational – are keen to engage with 'civil society'. This enthusiasm is mirrored by a literature that views groups as potentially able to forge new linkages between citizen and state in the face of a political party system that is widely accepted to be failing (see Lawson and Merkl 1988; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Cain *et al.* 2003; Dalton 2004). Groups are also seen as able to supplement the deficiencies of majoritarian institutions of representative democracy (Sawer and Zappala 2001, p. 13). The 'associative democrats' have advanced the role of groups as a valuable mode of democratic governance (see Cohen and Rogers 1992; Hirst 1994). Expectations about the democratizing and participative potential of groups is no doubt also shaped by images of groups as 'little democracies', promoted by the social capital literature. Groups have become loaded with a number of great (democratizing) expectations: to address a decline in political participation, to engage citizens in democratic processes of government, to school citizens in politics and to address the political exclusion of marginalized constituencies. As Rossteutscher

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(2005, p. 5) states in summary, the approaches of these different authors, while uncoordinated, '...have two common threads: (1) that traditional representative democracies are in trouble; and (2) that an associative turn might provide the cure'.

The early rush to embrace groups as agents for democratization has, however, been met by a period of reflection and renewed caution. A literature has emerged arguing that the asserted democratic dividends from the enhanced status of groups relies on the accuracy of the assumption that groups are, or at least could be, voluntary, internally democratic, accountable to members, and provide arenas for member deliberation (see the discussion by Perczynski 2000). The proposition that groups can remedy democratic deficiencies has invited scrutiny of the internal democratic practices of groups. Some scholars are 'discovering' that many groups under-perform. For example, in the EU context, Warleigh (2000, 2001) found the groups he examined had poorly functioning internal democratic processes and failed to facilitate among their members or supporters high levels of engagement with the European policy process. Yet, this is in fact a long-standing consistent finding made by group scholars in Western democracies. In the UK, Finer (1974, p. 261) observed that the views of members and leaders are often far apart. In Australia, Lyons notes it is often the case that membership-based NGOs have disinterested membership bases and are effectively left to be run by the leadership group who are '...clearly not interested in taking steps that might achieve a wider membership involvement' (2001, pp. 24–5). More generally, McLaverty (2002) observes 'that there is nothing *intrinsically* democratic about "civil society organizations"' (p. 310, original italics), and that 'in reality they often fall short of democratic principles' (p. 314). It is a relatively uncontroversial proposition that many interest groups (also known as civil society organizations, social movement organizations or NGOs) provide neither effective internal democracies nor systematic opportunities for participation. The more controversial issue is how to interpret this finding.

There is a dominant thread in the literature that assesses findings of absent internal democracies and the lack of participatory opportunities as 'deficiencies' in need of rectifying. The solution emerging in the literature is that *all* groups become democratic practitioners. Indeed, one resolution being floated by scholars (see Warleigh, 2001, p. 636; Grant 2001, p. 347) – and pursued by supranational institutions such as the European Commission and the United Nations (European Commission 2001, p. 15; UN 2004, p. 8) – is for group standards to be enforced: groups become internally democratic or are denied access to policy processes. This type of response draws on a dominant – albeit largely implicit – representation discourse in the group literature.

The group literature rarely extends beyond discussions of representation. Thus a representation narrative dominates discussion. Dunleavy, for instance, reiterates the general consensus in the literature that 'No group leader can

publicly represent members' interests without regular and open procedures for gauging their views' (1991, p. 20). In a similar vein, studies such as that of Franke and Dobson (1985) probe the degree to which the policy positions put by leaders 'represent' the views of members. This reflects the aggregating function attributed to groups, and the notion that they pursue the interests of 'members'. Internal democratic processes – part and parcel of a membership style affiliation – are logically required in order to aggregate and distil the interests of members. Discussions of democratic expectations around group behaviour reflect the adoption of a 'representation' narrative of group practice. Grant (2001, 2003, 2004, 2005), for example, calls explicitly for 'members' to be given 'opportunity to participate' in groups, for the 'accountability' of groups to 'their own members', and for groups to be 'representative' of the 'interests' and 'causes' they pursue. These types of expectations of group practice appear to draw on what Jordan and Maloney described as the 'extreme' and 'popular' vision of groups as 'voluntary, democratically accountable, and individual based' (1997, pp. 70–1).

Similar expectations shape discussions of affiliation style. The group literature maintains a qualitative difference in the manner by which individuals affiliate with interest groups; some groups 'practice' more participation than others. For instance, in their search for 'authentic members', Baumgartner and Walker distinguish between 'contributors' and 'members' as modes of 'group affiliation' (1990, p. 662). The former make financial donations to the group and the latter take up formal membership of an association. In other literatures, 'contributor' is sometimes replaced by 'supporter'. Whatever the exact formulation, 'member' is used to denote a group affiliation inclusive of some involvement in policy formulation and the authorization of leaders, while 'supporter' or 'contributor' denotes a 'looser' group affiliation limited mostly to financial payments (Jordan and Maloney 1997). Terms such as 'credit card participation' (Richardson 1995), 'astroturf participation' (Cigler and Loomis 1995, p. 396, cited in Jordan and Maloney 1997, p. 188) and 'mail order groups' or 'memberless groups' (Jordan and Maloney 1997, p. 187) draw attention to the way in which group practices fall short of representative style expectations. The implicit normative tone here seems self-evident.

But is this line of thinking and logic as straightforward as it seems? While largely agreeing with the empirical findings – many groups are without internal democracies or extensive options for participation – this article takes up the issue of whether it is necessary for all groups to aspire to the same internal democratic models. The normative tone – that poor democratic qualities are *ipso facto* deficiencies – is, it will be argued here, without clear logic. Does it mean that just because interest groups, by definition, have affiliates, they should engage with them along democratic lines? Does it follow that all groups with affiliates should/ could also rely on democratic forms of legitimacy to underpin advocacy?

There are hints in the literature that democratic/participatory expectations need to be more varied. For a start, many 'groups' are in fact institutions that do not have affiliates. Jordan *et al.* (2004) argue that 'policy participants' –

organizations that pursue policy change but without affiliates – are without potential for democratic participation. They argue ‘... only a minority of what have been in the past terms “interest groups” are actually in a position to even *potentially* enhance political participation’ (Jordan *et al.* 2004, p. 209, original italics). Policy participants have no affiliates, something which removes any need for internal democracy (this is a not insignificant point given that US research (Lowery and Gray 2000, p. 8) shows that more than 80 per cent of ‘interest organizations’ are in fact non-membership groups without affiliates). Further, some interest groups – those with affiliates – do not claim to actually ‘represent members’. Jordan and Maloney (1997, p. 191) note that ‘... public interest/campaigning/protest group politics do not significantly extend participatory democracy’. Importantly, they follow this up with, ‘But this is not a criticism of the groups because they have not set themselves up in the business of enhancing democracy. Groups such as Greenpeace and FoE [Friends of the Earth] are committed to maintaining a high profile for environmental ends: the mass membership is a tool of that process’ (p. 191). This fits with the more general point about the suitability of ‘representation’ as a metric by which to measure the contribution of development style international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) (Collingwood and Logister 2005, p. 188).

Building on these observations, this article offers an alternative approach to interpreting the internal democratic and participatory patterns of groups. It is argued that some interest groups need not (or cannot) pursue ‘membership’ style affiliations because to do so is unnecessary (or impossible); in other words, their contribution to legitimating group advocacy is tenuous. Those groups that ‘need not’ pursue membership affiliations are those that cannot pursue representation; here it is suggested that they pursue solidarity. The groups that ‘cannot’ are those capable of representation but that find practical impediments to engaging fully with their constituencies.

This article makes several propositions. Firstly, borrowing from O’Neill’s discussion on representing nature and future generations, it is argued that advocacy by interest groups for some constituencies simply cannot be pursued through representation style behaviour; they can only be pursued through a form of solidarity. Secondly, in turn, it is argued that solidarity style advocacy by groups does not require (indeed does not benefit from) internal democratic structures. That is, some interest group advocacy is founded on other – non-democratic – forms of legitimacy; that these same groups have affiliates does not imply the need to engage democratically with them. Thirdly, by deploying the representation-solidarity categories as a type of continuum, the article demonstrates how it is possible to calibrate democratic expectations of groups and contrast them against group practices (and changes thereof). The article concludes that the ‘problem’ of undemocratic or unrepresentative groups is less a problem of recalcitrant group practice than a problem of scholarly perception/expectation. Further, the article contests the idea that all groups should pursue membership style affiliations

and internal democratic practices. It argues that only a small fraction of 'groups' could ever be expected to be agents for democracy. The section that follows pursues this conceptual distinction, while the subsequent section demonstrates its analytical value by reviewing actual group behaviour.

EXPLORING INTEREST GROUP POTENTIAL: (RE)CALIBRATING DEMOCRATIC EXPECTATIONS

The implicit normative aspect of the representative narrative of groups would approve of all groups practicing membership and would frown on supportership. However, as will become clear, this article questions the logic of such a view. Drawing on theories of representation, the article now examines the appropriateness of linkage styles between affiliates and groups. It is argued that expectations of 'democratic' behaviour ought to be calibrated by the 'style of advocacy' pursued by different groups (on a continuum from representation to solidarity); this is itself shaped by the types of constituencies groups advocate for.

Pursuing representation or solidarity?

To see why the 'representation' narrative alone is insufficient as a heuristic device for analysing group life, it is necessary to step back and consider what representation implies more generally. According to Pitkin's seminal work on the subject, representation is about 'acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them' (1967, p. 209). Claims to representativeness are underpinned and legitimated by reference to indicators of responsiveness. As O'Neill (2001, p. 496) has noted, the basis for 'any particular individual or group making public claims to speak on behalf of the interests of others' rely on '... authorisation, accountability or shared identity [presence]'.

This account of representation and legitimacy seems straightforward enough, yet it starts to unravel when we consider what exactly is being represented. The question 'what is being represented?' is fundamental to determining what type of responsiveness is required (and indeed possible). Pitkin says, 'Where representation is conceived as being of unattached abstractions, the consultation of anyone's wishes or opinions is least likely to seem a significant part of representing' (1967, p. 174). According to Pitkin, it is possible to distinguish between 'unattached' and 'attached' interests (1967, p. 210). She says that unattached interests are 'interests to which no particular persons were so specially related that they could claim to be privileged to define the interests. But when people are being represented, their claim to have a say in their interest becomes relevant' (1967, p. 210). The point here is that if interests are unattached then responsiveness becomes difficult to achieve. In other words, to whom, precisely – to what constituency or client group – is the representative to be responsive to?

O'Neill (2001) approaches the issue of representation through a discussion of 'types of constituencies'. He argues that some constituencies or client

groups are simply unable to utilize democratic responsiveness as a way to legitimate representatives. According to O'Neill, human constituencies can, for the most part, speak in their own voice and be present. As such, they can authorize representatives to speak for them or at least keep unauthorized representatives accountable (by dissenting from their advocacy). These constituencies require the style of representation Pitkin called for in the case of attached interests. This is not the case for other constituencies. O'Neill says that the difficulty in representing nature, future generations and non-humans is that '...two central features of legitimization – authorization and presence – are absent. Indeed, for non-humans and future generations there is no possibility of those conditions being met. Neither non-humans nor future generations can be directly present in decision making. Clearly, representation can neither be authorized by non-humans or future generations nor can it be rendered accountable to them' (2001, p. 494). For O'Neill, this denies those advocating for such constituencies usual 'representative' forms of legitimation. In the absence of the usual forms of legitimation available to those advocating for human constituencies, he argues that '... the remaining source of legitimacy to claim to speak is epistemic. Those who claim to speak on behalf of those without voice do so by an appeal to their having knowledge of objective interests of those groups [read constituencies], often combined with special care for them' (O'Neill 2001, p. 496). Advocates for such constituencies are operating in the realm that Pitkin described for unattached interests: no person is objectively better placed to speak for these types of constituencies. Legitimizing advocacy for such constituencies or interests becomes a matter of asserting one's epistemic claims, abstract qualities such as scientific competence, spiritual connections or experiential understandings.

The practical impossibility of advocates for non-humans and future generations actually engaging 'directly' with their constituencies removes any 'potential' for the responsiveness Pitkin identified as central to acts of political representation. A narrative for advocacy, separate from representation, is surely needed. O'Neill concludes that we can distinguish between '... "acting in solidarity with" and "acting as a representative of"' (2001, p. 492, fn. 18). For O'Neill, those advocating for such constituencies engage, 'by necessity', in solidarity and not representation.

Characterizing group advocacy: two narratives

The above discussion has salience for how group advocacy is conceived, as well as for the role of the participation of group affiliates in legitimating that same advocacy. It provides the basis for a companion narrative on group advocacy to that provided by representation.

Before elaborating on why an ideal type group pursuing solidarity is a manifestly different proposition to one pursuing representation, a set of additional terms are required. The core distinction is between the 'affiliates'

of a group – those who are joining the interest group – and the ‘beneficiaries’ or ‘constituency’ of the same group – those whose interests the groups advocacy is aiming to advance. For a group to be described as pursuing representation, they must be pursuing the interests of their affiliates. That is to say, the affiliates and the beneficiaries/constituency are the same set of individuals. As such, group leaders can access the interests they advocate for by directly consulting with their affiliates. Responsiveness – and ‘membership’ style linkages with affiliates – would, therefore, logically legitimize the advocacy of group leaders. By contrast, a group pursuing solidarity is pursuing the interests of the beneficiaries who are *not* exclusively the affiliates. That is, the affiliates and the beneficiaries/constituency are mutually exclusive in solidarity groups. Group leaders cannot logically access the interests of the beneficiaries via consulting with the affiliates. As such, the responsiveness of leaders to affiliates – including membership style linkages and democratic processes – does not itself add to the legitimacy of group advocacy.


Groups have less often been discussed in terms other than representation, but there are exceptions. For instance, the social movement literature has established the concept of ‘solidarity movement’ (see Giugni and Passy 2001). According to Giugni (2001, p. 242), solidarity movements involve ‘people engaging themselves on behalf of others without taking any (material) advantage from it’. What is pertinent is that solidarity is about one set of people (affiliates) engaging in advocacy on behalf of a separate constituency (beneficiary group). This article distinguishes between groups whose advocacy is ‘by definition’ about representation and about solidarity, taking these definitions as means to calibrate democratic expectations. It is then possible to ask how these expectations (promises) contrast with their practices.

Calibrating interest group potential

This article pursues the point that interests groups, as defined by Jordan *et al.* (2004), can be conceived at a conceptual level as resembling two ideal types of groups, each pursuing quite a different political purpose, making different claims to legitimacy. Each, so it is argued, requires different democratic organizational practices to legitimate its advocacy. These generalized expectations are shaped by the type of constituency a group advocates for. Groups may exceed these requirements (and why they do so is worth exploration), but these practices are not logically linked to nor do they enhance the legitimacy of their advocacy claims. Groups may not match their practice to their promise, in which case they are ‘fair game’ for critics of group democratic underperformance.

Calibrating expectations about appropriate democratic practices and levels of participation can be set by defining whether a group embodies a promise to pursue either representation or solidarity. The process by which it is possible to calibrate group expectations is elaborated as follows and summarized in tables 1 and 2 below.

TABLE 1 *What generalized type of advocacy is promised and/or possible?*

Sorting questions...	Solidarity	Representation
		
Constituency being advocated for?	Non-human/Future generations	Human
Is an overlap between (1) those 'affiliated' with the interest group; and (2) the 'constituency' being advocated for <i>possible</i> ?	No	Yes
Can the constituency potentially speak in its own voice?	No chance of speaking in own voice	Can speak in own voice


Solidarity

Groups that advocate for the interests of constituencies of non-humans and future generations – those constituencies that lack entirely the potential for representation – embody a 'promise' to pursue solidarity. Interest groups that advocate for these types of constituencies cannot physically affiliate those constituencies. As O'Neill put it, their beneficiary group lacks the basic capacity to be present, and is not able to be affiliated to the group or to exercise accountability and authorization, the central components of responsiveness and therefore representation. These interest groups, and those who affiliate with them, are acting 'in solidarity with' constituencies rather than being representatives of constituencies.

Interest groups pursuing the interests of constituencies that are unable to speak in their own voice must develop processes to give legitimacy to the interests they advocate: they make epistemic claims. A group pursuing the interests of nature may use, for example, scientific analysis of an ecosystem to legitimate its claims that an increase in intensive land-use would be harmful to the system's integrity. The views of the group's affiliates are not relevant in terms of legitimacy. For instance, the group is unlikely to take a survey of individuals affiliated to them to enhance their influence, nor are policy-makers likely to seek any reassurance that the position advocated by the group accords with the will of affiliated individuals. As Van Rooy (2004) argues they are likely to invoke other 'legitimacy rules' such as 'victimhood', 'expertise', 'experiential evidence', or 'moral authority' (as opposed to emphasizing 'representative' considerations such as 'membership' size, breadth and depth or 'internal democracy' such as election, accountability and control). Joining this type of interest group amounts to a show of solidarity with a separate constituency.

If individuals were affiliated to such a group as 'members', and were involved in decision making and group agenda setting, this would merely be as part of a process to divine the interests of a third party (the group constituency or 'client' group). But it is not clear that this would actually add anything to the legitimacy of the group. In short, groups with potential only to pursue

TABLE 2 *Summary of expectations for group democratic practices*

Sorting questions...	Solidarity	Representation
		
Implied type of 'linkage'	Supportership	Membership
Implied extent of internal democracy	Because those affiliated with the group are not the beneficiary group they advocate for they need not be consulted in determining positions	Because those affiliated with the group are the beneficiary group they need to be consulted with
Implied source of legitimacy	Epistemic source: question of expertise or strength of solidarity (experiences) or empathy with beneficiary group	Question of representatives being responsive to the represented; are processes in place for authorization and accountability?

solidarity need only engage in supportership as an affiliation style, with its implications for extremely shallow internal democratic practices and limited responsiveness to affiliates. As Jordan and Maloney (1997) assert for cause groups, '...the groups do not see themselves as being vehicles for the expansion of participatory democracy, and nor do the members themselves' (p. 191). It is, therefore, a moot point why such solidarity groups have affiliates at all. Groups pursuing solidarity need not have affiliates for legitimacy reasons; but affiliates bring advantages such as funding; they gesture to electoral clout and potentially provide a core of activists/volunteers. The size of what social movement scholars term a group's 'attentive public' (Robinson 1992, in Jordan and Maloney 1997, p. 57) is perhaps more important than its supporter base. It is the resonance of the group's views with an attentive public, as opposed to the affiliated supporters, that provides groups with political power.

One could, however, imagine other positive impacts from membership practices by groups that rightly pursue solidarity. Close contact with individuals affiliated with a solidarity group may be useful in establishing transparency over the group's expenditure of supporters' funds and in managing its public image. It may be an important organizational incentive for recruiting those who like to be 'active'.

Representation

Groups that advocate for a constituency that can be present, and affiliate individuals from that same constituency to the group embody a 'promise' to pursue representation. These interest groups have the 'potential' for representation since they can by definition affiliate those whom they advocate for. Their beneficiaries and affiliates can be the same people, and these individuals are able to be involved in internal democratic processes. Individuals can form part of a sectional or categoric (Yishai 1991) constituency by virtue of their formal economic role (doctor, lawyer, mechanic, and so on) or social/cultural identity (religion, ethnicity, and so on) or experience (for

example, prisoner, asylum seeker, unemployed person). It is the specific economic function/identity/experience that individuals fulfil that forms the criteria for their inclusion in any constituency. In Pitkin's terms, these interest groups advocate for the interests 'attached' to human constituencies (1967).

This has implications for the expectations of interest groups advocating for such constituencies. Individuals may decide *not* to join 'their' interest group(s); nevertheless, they are still involuntarily part of the constituency from which the group(s) must draw members/supporters and go on to claim to represent. Individuals cannot easily 'exit' from the constituency since they are not often given an opportunity by the political system to 'voluntarily' join the constituency (unless of course the political system comes over time to recognize a new sub-constituency: for example, single mothers vs. other mothers). Such groups, therefore, have an exclusive set of individuals from which to recruit, and cannot easily refuse affiliation from those individuals that fit the definition. This approximates Dunleavy's term 'exogeneous group', the key characteristic of which is that 'their potential membership is fixed or delimited by external factors' (1988, p. 33). As such, the groups are tied to fulfilling, or appearing to fulfil, a charter to represent a distinct and exclusive group of individuals: their constituency. Policy-makers often seek a single view from an entire 'sector' or industry since there is an implicit assumption that representative groups have a constituency that share a basic affinity with one another. These interest groups represent constituencies that are made up of individuals who can speak in their own voices.

Claims to speak for sectional or categoric constituencies are, therefore, legitimated by the accountability of leaders to their constituency and the authorization of leaders by their constituency. There is an expectation, or more accurately a presumption, therefore, that these groups affiliate with the individuals they organize in a manner that resembles 'membership'. One could imagine that measures to enforce groups with representative potential to adhere to membership style affiliations and internal democratic procedures would enhance the legitimacy of their advocacy activities. This participatory potential/promise is not always fulfilled and, as was reviewed earlier, groups employ democratic processes to legitimate representative claims to varying degrees.

By way of summary, table 1, above, elaborates on the generalized types of advocacy possible by interest groups, contingent largely on the type of constituency being advocated for. The calibration of 'expectations' for groups in relation to linkage and internal democracy is, as has been argued, contingent on whether they implicitly promise to pursue solidarity of representation. These expectations are summarized in table 2, above.

The conclusion reached from the above is that some interest groups 'implicitly' promise to pursue solidarity and others' representation. This provides two ideal type narratives by which to talk about group life, calibrate expectations of democratic practice and to which practices can be usefully

compared. It is against this set of expectations that empirical evidence of participatory and democratic practices can be judged.

GROUP PARTICIPATORY POTENTIAL VERSUS PRACTICE: THE EMPIRICS

The discussion above provides a heuristic device by which to calibrate expectations of group democratic practice, a preferred option to the representation only proposals reviewed at the outset of this article. This final section reviews groups active in different national (UK, Australia) systems to establish the analytical value of the above discussion. Cases are drawn from within the literature and from the author's own empirical studies. Empirical evidence of practice is contrasted with promise (as calibrated by the analytical categories above), and generalized labels are generated which capture the diverse way in which these theoretical labels find their way into practice. At the two ends of the continuum, we find groups that in practice largely approximate their promise of representation or solidarity. Between these are: (1) groups that under achieve (constitute representative promises but fail to match it with practice); (2) groups that over achieve (need only pursue solidarity but pursue representation); and (3) groups that under achieve representation but for pragmatic reasons (their constituency is able to exercise voice but access to them is difficult). As will be evident from the discussion below, group life does not simply 'fit' into either of these conceptual 'ideal type' boxes; however, these concepts provide one way to gain purchase on promises and practices of interest groups with affiliates with respect to democratizing and participatory potential.

Representation and solidarity by definition

Two cases demonstrate where the promise of ideal type representation and solidarity (respectively) are closely approximated by practice. The NFU Scotland (NFUS) is a farmers' union that pursues the interests of a discrete vocational grouping; Scottish full time farmers. Farmers are able to be affiliated to the group and mechanisms of responsiveness between them and group leaders can be established. This implies a promise for representation style advocacy; empirical analysis establishes that it matches this with practice. It is this style of group where the representation narrative is most valuable and appropriate. The NFUS explains its legitimacy as flowing from an engagement with 'members' couched in straightforward representative terms. At interview a staffer explained:

We have 71 branches.... The branches are the base level of which the members meet. So if you are a member, you join up, you get assigned to a branch. Now the reality is ... that less than 10 percent of members go to branch meetings with any regularity.... The Council is in effect all nine regional boards meeting together in plenary session. And there is a numerical base, so for every 80 members in the branch you get one person

on a regional board. The Regional Boards are responsible for appointing the members of 8 subject committees (e.g. livestock committee, crops committee, environment and land use). Now what happens here is the chairman of each of the Regional Committee and the chairman of each of the subject committees ... are the Board of Directors, plus the Presidency, plus the Treasurer plus the CEO.

The precise structure here is unimportant; the salient point is that the NFUS pursues a cumbersome and resource intensive engagement with its affiliates. It admits that it is not very well used, yet it persists. The rationale for this set-up is to generate a form of responsiveness between members and leaders in support of its representative claims – if it did not do so farmers may exercise voice and undermine the group's authority.

Interestingly, governments also recognize the NFUS's representative role. They 'read' its involvement as based on 'representative' activity (evaluating it likewise); and they contrast it with something that is non-representative (close to what is characterized herein as solidarity). A Scottish civil servant responsible for agricultural policy remarked at interview:

The NFUS has its regional structure and so therefore it can say 'We have put this down the line we have spoken to our members and this is what they are saying'. Single issue groups ... tend not to have that mechanism. So you are then in danger of negotiating with leaders of the group who may or may not be representative of their membership. You could get leaders in and they may be reasonable people and you could come to some sort of deal and that just falls apart. ...

Groups such as the NFUS are 'representation by definition' types of groups: they 'can' engage directly with their affiliates (who are also their beneficiary/constituency group) and they 'do'. Responsiveness is possible between representatives and the represented, and structures are in place to make that possible. The literature is replete with cases where such practices, while formally available, are used infrequently. However, following Pitkin's point above, the key is that internal democratic practices are there and responsiveness is possible. If nothing else, these groups are (to borrow Hirschman's terms) vulnerable to 'exit with voice'; there is an inbuilt imperative for leaders to ensure some degree of fit between the interests they pursue and those of their membership lest they risk losing the trust and status ascribed to them from government (and other actors). Interviews revealed quite an amount of activity designed to assess the support of 'rebel' farmer organizations and to try and incorporate their concerns (a co-option strategy). By contrast, groups such as WWF Scotland (see also below) revealed that they sought out complementary niches alongside other groups advocating for nature.

The other end of the representation–solidarity continuum is a group such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Scotland. Its claim – with 'cause' like references – is that it takes action for a living planet. It advocates for nature:

it promises solidarity and delivers it. It offers a very open type of affiliation, recruiting through direct mail and Internet strategies, seeking up to £10 per month from subscribers. While the language of 'member' is used, the internal participatory and democratic opportunities are minimal. As one interviewee from WWF Scotland explained, in straightforward solidarity terms:

We do not pretend to be representative. We offer individuals a product and they can choose to support it by paying subscriptions. Therefore we have no need to consult with members. In fact when we ask them if they wanted to be consulted they said 'No'. They preferred the resources to go into getting the message out. Our role is informing the policy process. The role of science is high as it provides the basis for our advocacy. We offer an expert view and not representation.

Accountability to affiliates is an indirect affair. The interviewee further stated: '... we do have 26,000 supporters in Scotland, and the annual subscription can be withdrawn at any time'. Above a respectable level of support, the actual number becomes less important to government since it is more concerned with the sentiment and sympathy of the group's 'attentive public'.

In terms of political strategy, then, the primary emphasis is not on mediating between the views and mood of group affiliates and the political 'realities' of civil servants and elected officials. Rather, the focus is on activating and shaping public opinion and the quality of their science. The WWF Scotland spokesperson remarked: 'Our legitimacy arises from the quality of our contribution to the debate.... If science is one plank of the armoury then public opinion is the other'. The most salient point is that the route of public opinion and science – not the predispositions of a majority of WWF affiliates – is used to drive home advocacy. As referred to earlier, the WWF's concern is to mobilize and gesture to as big an 'attentive public' as is possible, while gathering sufficient paying supporters to keep its operation running.

Groups such as the WWF Scotland could be conveniently characterized as groups who pursue 'solidarity by definition'. They match a promise for solidarity with equivalent practice. Their advocacy need not rest on membership and internal democratic processes. The literature consistently finds that groups advocating for constituencies such as non-humans and the environment operate bereft of opportunities for political engagement by supporters and seek to maximize supporter revenues (see Jordan and Maloney (1997) for discussion of FoE and Greenpeace). This article does not quarrel with the empirical veracity of this image. Rather, we wonder if those constituencies (the bread and butter of so-called 'cause' or 'campaign' groups) could in fact be organized in any different way? Put another way, is this a 'natural' mode to organize advocacy for such constituencies or is it an unwelcome development eroding an otherwise more democratic and participatory alternative? This article errs towards the former view.

Additional diversity

Unsurprisingly, for the most part group practices vary significantly from the types of promises they embody for representation and/or solidarity (as imputed from the conceptual framework discussed above). A few variations demonstrate the use of these analytical categories in calibrating potential and contrasting it with practice: it shows how they provide traction in interpreting group practice and opening up points for further debate (particularly with respect to what practical impediments would make a 'failure' to fulfil their representative promise justifiable).

Solidarity by choice

Groups who have the potential for representation, and confront very few obvious impediments to affiliating their beneficiary group, but who fail to fulfil that potential, could be referred to as 'solidarity by choice' groups. It is here – where the practices of groups fail to match the promise for representation – that claims of democratic underachievement seem most relevant. It is to these groups that critics of group democratic practice should properly aim their criticisms. It is extremely hard to identify these groups, given that a majority of interest groups project and explain their internal procedures in representative terms (but see also the case of the Royal National Institute of the Blind which follows). But the most important trend to note in this regard is the tendency for groups with an implicit promise of representation to reduce affiliation practices towards supportership. Jordan and Halpin (2004, pp. 447–8) report the way in which the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) in the UK has shifted its affiliation from membership to 'fee for service terms'. They note that 'The "second wave" of FSB members [post 1990s] are invited into membership as an economic decision – there need be no identification with goals'. They conclude that this development weakens its capacity to 'compensate for a participatory decline in voting and party activity' and they come to resemble 'the broad picture in public interest groups' (p. 447). This is not an isolated instance; similar trends are reported in Australia (Halpin and Martin 1999). This type of shift towards solidarity by choice seems connected with efforts by groups to pursue 'professionalized' advocacy – which requires increased financial resources, a passive membership and increased leadership autonomy.

Representation by choice

There are some instances where a group that is clearly limited to pursuing solidarity (solidarity by definition) – that is, its affiliates are not the same as the beneficiary group – nevertheless adopts an internal structure appropriate for groups pursuing representation. They represent democratic overachievers. The National Trust for Scotland is one such group that pursues 'representation by choice'. Its mission is to 'protect and promote Scotland's natural and cultural heritage for present and future generations to enjoy'. It uses the language of membership and asks individuals to join by way of a modest

annual fee. 'Members' are free to stand for election at an Annual General Meeting, although the positions are not hotly contested.

In relation to policy advocacy, its 'beneficiary' group is ambiguous. In its recent 'Governance Review' of 2003, it stated:

It is undoubtedly the case that the Trust has a large number of members – some 260,000 at the latest – that it relies heavily on income received from the membership in the form of annual, or other, subscriptions, and that it has clear responsibilities towards its members. *The Trust is not, however, wholly and solely a membership organisation ...* the Trust holds its properties for the benefit of the nation as a whole. It is conceivable, therefore, that circumstances could arise in which the Trust would have to give preference to the interests of the nation over the interests of its membership. (emphasis added)

The need to pursue a position at direct odds with a membership decision – presumably democratically produced – is an eventuality that is not likely to emerge in 'representative by definition' groups. The National Trust for Scotland's advocacy, in practice, rests on a bank of relevant expertise – the democratically determined consensus among its members is not a strong feature of legitimating its stated policy. Why these democratic practices are pursued is a moot point and one that deserves further empirical work. However, initial research suggests that these practices are often hangovers from early structures where such groups were effectively organizations of heritage and cultural 'experts', and hence their 'expert' opinions mattered.

Representational aspirants

Some groups do not fulfil their potential for representation, but confront conditions that make doing so difficult. They could be referred to as 'representational aspirants'. While O'Neill (2001) applied the term solidarity to those advocating for non-human constituencies (those without possibility for presence), some groups find participatory promises extremely hard to fulfil, largely because the constituencies they seek to advocate for – their beneficiary group – are difficult to mobilize. This is most obvious in the case of advocates for constituencies that are politically or economically marginalized (for example, the unemployed, prisoners, asylum seekers).

The example of Amnesty International (AI), examined by Jordan and Maloney (1997), is just such a case. They cite Ennals (1982), who observed that the focus of AIs work was defined by the answer to the question '... what will be the most beneficial to the interests of the prisoners involved?' (Jordan and Maloney 1997, p. 32). AI is not pretending to represent its members but to act in the interests of prisoners held unjustly. They go on to cite Ennals's description of the AI as run by a secretariat somewhat remote from the concerns of supporters. AGMs and annual elections exist, but these are under attended and largely divorced from strategic decision making. Leaders

decide which 'prisoners' are to be championed and how to proceed in protecting their interests.

In short, for these groups, it is very difficult, for whatever reason, to effectively establish a system of responsiveness between these constituencies and their advocates. Potential exists but serious (perhaps insurmountable) impediments exist to converting this into practice. As such, groups may have potential for representation, but instead pursue solidarity; they aspire to representation but practice solidarity. This leaves them open to criticism that they are undemocratic and unrepresentative. As Grant has argued of such groups more generally: '... however well-intentioned they are, they are not the authentic voice of the excluded groups [read *constituencies*] themselves' (2001, p. 346). The concern with 'authenticity' emerges from the observation that some marginalized constituencies do not often exercise presence or speak in their own voice; but, crucially, they have the potential for both. Some argue that this potential should be exercised more often (Young 1989; Phillips 1995).

In practice, there are limits to what is popularly accepted in relation to representing attached interests as though they were unattached. Phillips notes that the importance of this requirement for presence surely fluctuates between constituencies: 'some experiences are more detachable than others' (2001, p. 26). For example, she says that it appears less problematic to have an agricultural expert represent the interests of farmers than it would for a male expert on gender to represent women, given that the experiences of the former constituency are more 'objectively' accessible than those of the latter. This type of pragmatic principle – 'objective accessibility' – points to possible ways of policing the boundaries of authenticity. These types of considerations point to how groups who have representative potential, yet practice solidarity, can be defensible. That is, to borrow the terminology of Dalton and Lyons (2004, p. 15), these types of principles help to sort out which groups that advocate for the disadvantaged should be 'governed by the disadvantaged' [representative] and which 'governed for the disadvantaged' [solidarity].

Returning to the case of AI, the absence of internal democracy seems appropriate; after all it is the input of prisoners that would enhance legitimacy. The argument for AI to be democratically accountable to affiliates is weak, yet to criticize it for not engaging better with the political prisoners they advocate for is clearly implausible. Scholars and observers may be able to easily spot the 'potential' for representation, but the challenges for group leaders to put potential into 'practice' are often immense.

Shifting along the representation–solidarity continuum: re-defining practice and promises

While the analytical categories, as well as the discussion above, approaches groups in a static, snapshot manner, groups can shift, redefining both promises/potential and practices. Groups that at one time practiced solidarity

may shift to a representation style of operation: over time they have 'redefined their practice'. The Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) is a group that pursues the interests of the blind. Since 2002 it has affiliated the blind into membership, in part a reaction to the type of criticism about authenticity cited above. It explains:

RNIB is a membership organisation which radically affects how we govern ourselves. Being a member is all about being closer: to information that can help you; to a community of other members; and to RNIB itself where you can make your voice heard and influence what we do.

The RNIB offers 'full membership' to those who are blind and partially sighted their families and carers. Associate membership is offered to 'well-wishers' and to 'related professionals'. Its structure is a recent development. Its website (<http://www.rnib.org.uk>) explains:

We began recruiting to our new mass membership in 2002...because: We want to give a say to a greater proportion of blind and partially sighted people on how we are run and how we deliver our services. Many blind and partially sighted people have had no input into our decision making until now. Membership will give people that, by involving them in consultations and giving them a chance to vote and stand for election.

There is also an apparent appreciation of the increased status that membership brings. It continues:

a large membership will give RNIB a stronger voice when we negotiate on behalf of blind and partially sighted people with Government and other organisations. That will help us press for more changes to the law, more accessible services and better services for blind and partially sighted people generally.

The RNIB has turned away from a solidarity style in order to fulfil its implicit promise as a representative group (a contrast to the turn towards solidarity style practices by the FSB discussed earlier). Leaders, such as those at the RNIB, apparently recognize a value in matching participatory potential for representation (and membership) with democratic practices. This type of change of group *modus operandi* is what the authenticity critics would no doubt like to see across the board. But clearly, as the Amnesty International example above indicates, some such transformations are easier to make than others.

A similar phenomenon, but in the *reverse* direction, is evident in the case of the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF). It has changed over time from a group pursuing representation to one pursuing solidarity: in other words, it has 'redefined its promise'. As Warhurst (1994) explains, the ACF commenced life as a "'semi-scientific body"...and drew upon the upper echelons of scientists in government and universities' (p. 77). It had active AGMs and contested elections for a board which then set strategic direction. Post

1970s, it pursued a more radical agenda and tactics, and opened up its membership to a mass public. In the latest period covered, Warhurst explains how the ACF appointed a lawyer as Director and a rock star as its President. The organization for senior scientists had become a mass affiliation group pursuing an environmental agenda. The ACF started life as a group of professional ecologists concerned with the environment, its legitimacy arising from the democratically derived view of its professional membership. It has ended up as a group pursuing affiliations with supporters and generating an attentive mass public to show solidarity with nature. Warhurst (1994) notes that while 'The culture of the organisation is participative...the leadership has tended to overshadow the membership...' (p. 82). Indeed, the ACF itself now talks of supporters and volunteers; its web site does not explicitly show how a 'member' can actually influence the group direction (see <http://www.acfonline.org.au>). That the ACF has changed from a group with representative potential to one with solidarity potential – without a name change – highlights both the potential for change and the difficulty in identifying it from afar.

This review of group practices establishes the way in which these two narratives of group advocacy help to calibrate expectations which, in turn, provides a nuanced set of expectations against which practice can be interpreted. Many other labels could be generated from additional case study review. The simple point to be made here is that these ideal type labels (representation and solidarity) provide an analytical tool for comparing and contrasting group promise with the diversity (and changeability) of group practice.

CONCLUSION

The embrace of non governmental organizations and organized civil society as vehicles by which to address democratic deficit has been guided by expectations of groups as little democracies. These high expectations have been justly fettered by reminders that in fact many groups do not themselves embody democratic internal practices. However, rather than question whether the expectations of groups are actually appropriate, scholars have proceeded to scrutinize the representativeness of groups, highlighting 'deficiencies' and floating the idea of standards and checks to enforce democratic practices upon all groups. This article has taken one step back to scrutinize what potential groups have to deliver on these heightened expectations. The conclusion is that it is largely our scholarly expectations of groups, rather than 'deficient' group practices, which are in need of review.

In defence of this position, a number of points have been made. Firstly, the article establishes that only a small minority of all groups actually have any potential to meet expectations for democratic practice. Pressure participants – groups without affiliates (accounting for as much as 80 per cent of all policy participants) – are by definition unable to comply with such

demands; they would fail any internal democratic tests proposed. Only interest groups – defined as those with affiliates – have even the potential to adopt internal democratic practices.

The second point is that only a sub-set of interest groups are able to engage with the constituencies they are advocating for. For some groups – those advocating for non-humans, future generations and nature – establishing leadership responsiveness to affiliates is not going to generate representativeness or democratic legitimacy. Calls for groups to become more ‘representative’, upon threat of being restricted from policy access, miss the larger point that many groups do not in fact have any ‘potential’ for representation. Two narratives of group life were elaborated – representation and solidarity – each of which established a different set of expectations for linkage with affiliates. It is argued that scholars should recalibrate expectations of group democratic practice based on what their promise is – whether for representation or solidarity – with this largely dictated by the type of constituency being advocated for.

The article uses these analytical categories to review the conduct of a broad range of well-known groups, across countries, for which data would be readily accessible to others in the scholarly community. Two groups were identified that illustrated where practice most approximated potential. As we might anticipate, a review of other groups shows that their practices can be described as spanning the full length of the solidarity–representation continuum. The difficulty in accessing constituencies, and drawing them into direct affiliation with a group, made ‘representing’ some constituencies – and typically those politically marginalized already – extremely difficult to practice, despite it being a possibility. Such interest groups would fail tests of representativeness. But denying them access would impede the task of political inclusion that many scholars would be willing to support. This highlights how the task of addressing democratic deficits through enhancing group ‘representativeness’ may work against, or at cross purposes to, that of political inclusion.

In agreeing with the suggestions that there needs to be more debate over the ‘representativeness’ of groups (see Grant 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005; Warleigh 2000, 2001), the position developed in the article suggests that an across the board insistence on groups practising ‘membership’ style affiliations and internal democracies would be overly heavy-handed, possibly even counterproductive. More nuanced approaches to vetting the policy involvement of groups suggest themselves. The argument put in this article clarifies the implicit potential of groups (based on the constituency advocated for) – to show solidarity or to represent – and suggests how this translates into forms of group affiliation – supportership and membership.

The argument made in this article debates the position that all ‘interest groups’ ‘should’ pursue membership style affiliations and internal democratic practices. Theoretically, this approach assumes that all groups pursue representation, a case that is under-made and a view that this article contests.

Practically, it underplays the difficulties in actually mobilizing some constituencies by (at least potentially) sympathetic or altruistic individuals. For example, if the affiliates of WWF Scotland were to decide lobbying positions, would that actually contribute to representing the environment? The present practices of the National Trust for Scotland highlight the ambiguity (and potential for tensions over accountability) that membership style affiliations bring to what are ostensibly 'solidarity by necessity' groups. Until the benefits of such representative practices are more evident, it is unclear why groups would and should go down that path.

Finally, this article argues that the number of 'groups' to which democratic expectations are invested need to be contained to a rather narrow slice of the entire population. Following Jordan *et al.* (2004), 'policy participants' (likely to be the bulk of policy active institutions) are discounted as groups with democratization potential. To this, the present article adds groups with potential for solidarity (solidarity by definition) in addition to groups capable of representation but who find insurmountable impediments to engaging directly with their constituency (representational aspirants). Conceptually conflating group 'affiliates' with the 'constituency' (or 'beneficiary group') has inhibited a more fine-grained account of the participatory potential of interest groups. By disaggregating these two terms, this article provides one way to gain purchase on the question of appropriate group democratic practices. The suggestion here is not that the conceptual distinction between solidarity and representation be pursued directly in deciding on access to policy processes: it is not intended as the basis of any iron rule of legitimacy. Rather, it is anticipated that this will provide a basis to problematize the issue further. Debates as to what extent the disjuncture between representative promise and group practice can be reasonably tolerated, and the impact this would have on the quality and integrity of democratic systems of government, are logical extensions of the ground opened up by the approach pursued here.

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