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Article

How to Influence Forest-Related Issues in the European Union? Preferred Strategies among Swedish Forest Industry

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Abstract: Although forestry is not a regulated area in the European Union (EU), numerous decisions in other policy areas are related to forestry. However, its position outside of formal policy-making can result in the fact that actors, such as those within the forest industry, may have a larger role when compared to other policy sectors where the state system has an integrated role. This explorative study reviews the ways in which the forest industry in Sweden, one of the EU states with the most forest land, tries to protect and promote its interests on an EU-level. It concludes that a main way to influence decision-making in the EU is through lobbying, through its own organisations and through the transnational trade association, The Confederation of European Paper Industries (CEPI). The study shows that collectively conducted lobbying is largely preferred which means that internal communication is important since lobbying at the EU-level is potentially limited by the diverging positions of trade association members as well as among the different trade associations themselves.

Keywords: Swedish forest industry; transnational trade associations; European Union; communication theory; lobbying

1. Introduction

While forestry is not currently a regulated area under the European Union (EU) framework, issues that are linked with forest use and forestry are taken up in a number of other policy areas such as

environment, biodiversity, habitat, and water management [1,2]. As regulation in such areas can be of a large importance to forest companies, there is a question on how stakeholders in forestry, especially in states with large forest interests, work to influence the development of forest-relevant regulation in Brussels. When it comes to the EU policy process, the European Commission now actively tries to network with different kinds of interests groups, partially to obtain expert knowledge and also to involve different stakeholder groups early on in the policy process, which may allow them to facilitate the implementation and legitimise its decisions [3–7]. Fostering intersectoral coordination and communication (both nationally and on an EU-level) is also one of the four main objectives of the EU Forest Action Plan that was implemented in 2007–2011 [8]. An increased need for information on complex and/or technical issues offers interest groups (not least the forest-based industries) more opportunities than ever to influence EU legislation. Yet, how the forest industry handles this opportunity is not clear, and it is not known if this industry has moved away from the traditional approach of seeking influence in Brussels.

Earlier research suggests that forest companies wishing to participate in the EU's decision-making processes are often expected to be involved in trade associations which are seen as the obvious hub of corporate horizontal relationships [9]. A central task of the trade associations is to represent and defend the interests of its members in the decision-making processes of the EU institutions. Industry-wide views, however, are far from given. On the contrary, there is on-going work within the European trade associations to form opinions and arguments that the members can agree on [10]. Constantelos (2007) claims that business associations in France and Italy no longer believe that their interests are adequately represented by their European peak associations. Supplementary independent lobbying is therefore seen as essential for securing their interests [11,12]. One can ask if this is an exception, or if it indicates a general trend where the national associations' need to protect and promote their own interest is at a higher degree than in the past.

Proceeding from the case of Sweden—one of the larger forest countries in the EU—as an example, this explorative study reviews the ways in which Swedish forest-based industries work in their attempts to influence the EU in decision-making for forest-related issues. What types of interactions do the Swedish forest industries use in their attempts to influence EU policy making? Also, in this respect, what role does the transnational trade association, CEPI, play? The internal processes in the association are analysed in an attempt to shed light upon the strengths and weaknesses of collective acting, as well as question the asymmetric relationships in traditional one-way lobbying.

2. Theoretical Framework

The role and potential of outside actors to affect policy development has been on the agenda for political science for more than a century, where the pluralist and corporatist views have been the most predominant within the literature [13–19]. Many have also studied why interest groups have come to Brussels and how they attempt to influence the EU policy process [20,21–24]. A key assumption with regard to gaining input into policymaking is constituted by the ability to reach out with one's own perspectives. With particular regard to forestry, Janse (2007) has highlighted that “fragmentation of forest policy at the EU level and image problems of the forest industry have increased forest sector actors' interest for cooperation on and coordination of communication activities” [25]. Janse has

reviewed communication strategies of forest-based industries in relation to the EU, including internal strategies of the industry, such as the Communications Strategy for Forest-based Industries in the EU [26].

In his research, Janse (2005) points to three general ways in which the forest sector communicates outward. These are via public relations (PR) such as campaigns, through lobbying, and with two-way communication processes such as participation in joint forums or meetings. The first form of communication consists mainly of campaigns to inform the general public on forests, forestry, and the forest-based industry and to change the image that the public has on the forest sector. The use of lobbying as another form of communication has a more bilateral character in the sense that it can be characterised by the efforts of the forest-based trade associations to influence EU policy makers (one-way communication). The third way is through a two-way communication process. For the forest sector, such communication would take the form of a forum based specifically on communication in which all the major stakeholders (policy-makers from all relevant policy fields, forest owners/managers, forest industry, and NGOs) participate and where the goal is to understand each other's values and interests. These forums are a place where they learn from each other, create joint meanings, and begin sharing a common frame of reference [27].

Since this is an explorative study, the interviewed stakeholders were asked to describe all forms of communication that they use in their attempts to protect and promote their interests. However, as it turned out, it was mainly the second form of communication—*i.e.*, the forest based industries lobbying strategies—that was mentioned. Therefore, it seems thus necessary to further define and fine tune this concept.

Lobbying is seen here as a specific activity conceptualized within the framework of communication theory, although lobbying research has its origins in public relations theory in which it is defined as creating and maintaining of relations with politicians [28]. Lobbying is often equated with attempts to influence public organizations' (states, government, EU) decisions [29]. There are also much narrower definitions, where lobbying is defined as attempts to seek influence through informal meetings. Lobbying would thus differ from other complementary methods to influence such as advocacy, campaigns, and corporative participation [28,29]. Jaatinen (1999) gives the following definition of the concept:

Lobbying is influencing political decision-making in the interest of a group by communicating with publics relevant to the political process of a certain issue. These publics are the political decision makers and officials, competitors (other actors that trying to influence the same issue), the mass-media, citizens, and the constituents of the lobbyist (employees and members) [30].

Lobbying, in practice, consists of the means that are used to achieve a certain objective or a certain kind of decision. A political decision-maker, even if he or she is an intermediary of opinions, is just a point in the process of decision-making. Seen as an effort to influence political decision-making, lobbying thus hints at an unequal (asymmetric) relationship between the lobbying organisation and its subject, the political (sub)system [30]. This, according to Janse, distinguishes it from a true symmetric, two-way communication process where people engage in a learning process [27].

Thus, lobbying is essentially seen as an interaction between organisational representatives and governmental and parliamentary decision-makers, as well as other groups which try to influence political decision-making. In this study, the term lobbying is used as a generic term for attempts (both formal and informal) to influence public decisions. This interaction can be both vertical and horizontal, and of direct or indirect character. Direct strategies refer to situations where the stakeholders approach public decision makers (politicians and/or bureaucrats), while indirect strategies are used when influence on policy is sought in less direct ways (media and/or mobilisation).

Altogether, this results in three potential strategies of influence: one for targeting bureaucrats to seek corporate integration, one for lobbying politicians and parties and one for influencing the media [31]. According to Binderkrantz (2008), interest groups (such as trade unions) with corporate resources use the administrative strategy more than other groups, while public interest groups, such as environmental and humanitarian groups, are more likely to pursue indirect strategies. Although Binderkrantz' study was conducted for a national context, it is reasonable to believe that there would be similarities on a supranational level and that the forest industry should rely heavily on a strategy of targeting bureaucrats. This study aims to see if the empirical findings support this type of conclusion.

Much of the literature on lobbying views lobbyists as unproblematic, homogeneous units. The focus is on relations between the formal decision-makers and interest groups, while what happens inside the interest groups is often overlooked. The internal processes inside the association have not been linked with its advocacy efforts [10,31]. Jutterström (2006) argues that such approaches also ignore another potential problem—that organisations will automatically be seen as independent and functional lobbyists. However, in practice, various companies within the industry associations often have to coordinate with each other [10].

This study takes an open approach in order to highlight the diverse factors of external communication between organisations in terms of formal and informal, vertical and horizontal, and direct and indirect communication. It will also review internal communication processes that may affect functional lobbying, in order to discuss the preferred strategies of the Swedish forest industries in their attempts to influence the development of forest-relevant regulation in Brussels.

3. Background and Methodology

The forest industry is a cornerstone of the Swedish economy and one of Sweden's most important basic industries which contribute to employment throughout the country. The forest industry provides direct employment for around 60,000 people in Sweden, and together with its suppliers it creates 200,000 employment opportunities. Sweden is the world's second largest exporter of paper, pulp, and sawn timber combined, and the Swedish pulp and paper industry is the third largest in Europe after Germany and Finland [32].

This study emphasises the Swedish forest-based industries rather than the Swedish government, since earlier research has shown that that the Swedish forest stakeholders find the Swedish government's engagement, efforts, and impact on forest-related issues on the EU-level both weak and unsatisfactory. These opinions are illustrated in understandings in earlier work such as that "there is great ignorance in the government" and "it is strange since we are such a large forest nation, forest and forestry is very important for the country, in spite of this we handle it in such an insufficient way" [33].

The lack of engagement from the Swedish state may be due to the fact that there is no formal forest policy in the EU, and the state's official opinion is that it should stay this way. This makes the state unwilling to participate in processes and structures which could facilitate an integration into formalised forest politics in the EU where the member states would have no or shared competence [33,34].

With regard to limitations, the study reviews only the forest industry and does not include, for instance, forest owners or the environmental movement. This is based on the fact that a large forest company will be more affected by the decisions in Brussels than an individual forest owner, and it also has more resources available to influence the policy-making process [13]. Janse (2005) defined forest-based industries as composed of woodworking, pulp and paper production and packaging, and the printing and publishing sectors. These industries are interlinked through their common use of raw materials from forests, and all have a common dependence on the forestry sector which includes forest owners, workers, entrepreneurs and foresters. To some extent, these forest-based industries are also dependent on the existence of a forest industries cluster, including process control systems, furniture construction elements and similar industries. These are represented in Brussels both sectorally as well as for different member states [27].

In order to review the ways in which the Swedish forest industry tries to protect and promote its interests, this study is based on official material (both in print and online) which was produced by the Swedish Forest Industries Federation (SFIF) and The Confederation of European Paper Industries (CEPI), as well as corresponding elite-interviews, *i.e.*, where the participants were chosen because of who they are within the company or what position they occupy. Respondents were selected from CEPI, SFIF and large Swedish forest companies which are members in the latter.

SFIF is the trade and employers' organisation for the pulp, paper, and wood mechanical industries. The Federation is involved, along with its member companies, in Swedish and European industrial policy-making. The Federation represents around 90% of the pulp and paper mills in Sweden and nearly 40% of the sawmills (mainly large modernised sawmills, however, since there are a couple of thousands small-scale private owned sawmills in Sweden the percentage is somewhat misleading), as well as a number of companies that have close ties with the production of pulp, paper, and sawn timber [32]. SFIF co-operate with other member state forestry federations in different kinds of networks and trade association on the European level, where the work through CEPI is the most predominant [27,33].

CEPI is a Brussels-based, not-for-profit organisation which represents the European pulp and paper industry and champions the industry's achievements and the benefits of its products. Its mission is to promote the member's business sector by taking specific actions such as monitoring and analysing activities and initiatives in the areas of industry, environment, energy, forestry, recycling, fiscal policies, and competitiveness in general. Through CEPI, the paper industry increases its visibility and acts on emerging issues, making expert and constructive contributions on behalf of the industry. Through its 18 member countries (17 European Union members plus Norway) CEPI represents some 520 pulp, paper and board producing companies across Europe, ranging from small and medium sized companies to multi-nationals, and 1000 paper mills [35].

To illustrate the formal work of CEPI and the policy areas in which the association is most active, a systematic overview of its position papers, covering the last 10 years (2003–2012), was conducted. CEPI's own categorisation of the subjects of the position papers has been used since this indicates how

they perceive and present the forest-related issues that they work with. The position papers also indicate internal cohesion by pointing to which issues members have agreed on and worked on together.

In addition, five semi-structured interviews have been undertaken which allowed us to capture informal aspects. These interviews were with a leading representative from CEPI, a central representative from SFIF, and three representatives in chief positions from major forest companies in Sweden, all of whom are members of the Swedish Forest Industries Federation. The interviews with the company representatives were undertaken both to validate the answers of the representative from SFIF, and to investigate if, or to what extent, Swedish forest companies also choose to lobby on their own, outside of the SFIF and CEPI.

We chose to focus on large companies as it is presumed that small and medium-sized companies lack the time, money, and knowledge to carry out lobbying activities on their own, they often choose to work only through SFIF and CEPI [13,33,36]. Large companies, who operate internationally, are assumed to have the preconditions and resources needed for lobbying on their own behalf. Thus, if they chose not to do so, it is plausible to believe that small and medium-sized companies would apply the same strategy. This information seemed to be verified by the fact that the three representatives from small forest companies and three representatives from medium-sized companies that were invited for interviews all referred to SFIF, and declined to participate in this study with reference to the fact that SFIF undertakes this work on their behalf. They also stated that they did not know exactly *how* SFIF worked on EU-related issues.

The representatives from the large companies also referred to SFIF, but made themselves available for interviews as they knew how SFIF collaborated on these issues, and which strategies are applied, since they themselves had been involved and engaged in different ways. Thus, the limited number of interviews is due to the organisation of the Swedish forest companies when it comes to their efforts to influence decision-making processes in Brussels. As it turns out, forest companies mainly collaborate nationally in SFIF who, in turn, handle all the work on their behalf on the European level, since it is SFIF who is a member in CEPI rather than the individual companies.

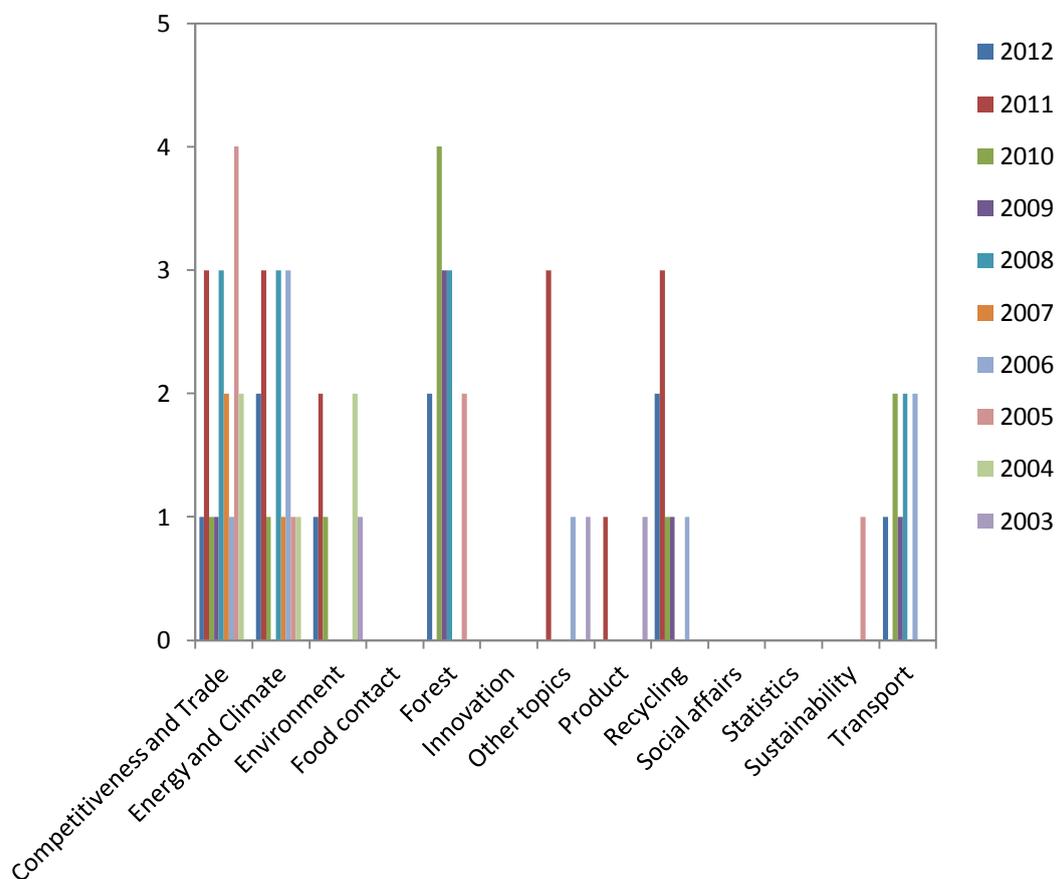
The semi-structured interviews were conducted in February–March 2012, and lasted approximately 45–60 min each. An interview manual based on the categories presented in the theoretical framework guided the interviews. The manual was designed to include a range of communication and both external and internal types of lobbying strategies. Three of the interviews were made in person, while two were made over the telephone. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. The interviewees had the opportunity to read the transcribed interviews and to clarify and correct their statements if they deemed necessary, in order to assure validity of the study [37]. The interviews were coded with regard to communication and lobbying activities and preferences. Quotations in the text had been translated from the original Swedish by the authors (the interview with the CEPI representative was however conducted in English), and we chose only to identify respondents by their organisational affiliation (CEPI, SFIF, Company A, Company B and Company C) due to integrity reasons.

4. Results

4.1. General Content and Targets of Lobbying

CEPI acts, in part, by regularly producing position papers on upcoming issues in the EU which affect their members. During 2003–2012, CEPI presented nearly 70 position papers on a wide array of issues. The position papers and action areas have been divided into 13 different categories by CEPI. By following CEPIs own categorisation, position papers about Competiveness and Trade (18) were the most common, followed by papers which considered Energy and Climate (15), Forest (14), Recycling (8), Transport (8), Environment (7), Other topics (5), Products (2) and Sustainability (1). In the four categories of Food contact, Innovation, Social affairs, and Statistics, no position papers were written (see Figure 1). The fact that Competiveness and Trade was the most common area for position papers could be due to the origin of the EU, where common policies on trade are an important component to ensure the single market and the free movement of people, goods, services and capital, which is also of interest to the members in CEPI.

Figure 1. Issue areas of The Confederation of European Paper Industries (CEPI) position papers, 2003–2012.



Note: Some position papers are placed in multiple categories.

The areas in which CEPI has paid the most attention to have differed over the years. For instance, it is only during the past few years that recycling has been on the agenda. Energy and Climate is also an

area where activity has increased, while Forest and Transport gained more interest a few years ago. Position papers have also often only used CEPI as a dispatcher; joint positions with other European trade associations are rare. In total, only 19 of the position papers are joint position papers, of which 10 were developed with only one additional partner. Only nine of the total number of papers were broad collaborations with multiple partners. In these cases, CEPI usually collaborates with other industry associations, but have also worked together with WWF in a joint position paper on recommendations for an effective implementation of European Renewable Energy Sources (RES) policies. The most extensive joint position papers handled energy issues that are relevant for Europe's energy intensive industry. Energy and Climate is an area where CEPI is active both on its own and in different forms of collaborations, which results in joint position papers. Other areas where broad collaboration has occurred were transport and recycling. The proposal by the European Commission for a New Chemicals Policy (REACH) was also an area that motivated twelve industry sectors in Europe to work together via other European trade associations.

The interviewed stakeholders were asked to describe all forms of communication that they use in their attempt to protect and promote their interests. However, it was mainly the second form of communication, the lobbying strategies, which were mentioned. When it comes to the lobbying efforts and the perceived impact of different European association in relation to the forest industry, most of the interviewees describe CEPI as the most important European organization. CEPI is based in Brussels, is headed by its Director General and has twenty staff members. It also has five Standing Committees, which take long-term strategic perspectives on the issues affecting the industry. These are the Forest, Environment, Climate Change and Energy, Innovation and Recycling, and Product committees under which a number of ad-hoc issue groups operate. The Association Directors' Group (ADG) is the senior advisory group to the Director General of CEPI and is composed of Director Generals of National Associations [35].

In comparison, CEI-Bois (*Confédération Européenne des Industries de Bois*), which was mentioned by some of the interviewees, has a much smaller secretariat and fewer staff placed in Brussels. According to the interviewees, this seems to be one reason as to why the organisation is perceived of less importance. However, CEPI tries to cooperate with CEI-Bois and the forest owners associations (CEPF and EUSTAFOR) when possible since their messages gain more weight if the forest sector as a whole stands behind the position.

Organisationally, the main focus of CEPI's work is the European Commission. CEPI works with the national member associations to take forward nationally what have been agreed at European level and call on national members to make contact with the members of the European Parliament and relevant ministers for decisions in the Ministers Council. While the European Commission is the most important body to address, the parliament is becoming more and more important. Several interviewees state this increasing role of the parliament. For instance:

The parliamentarians are elected nationally, and even if they are elected into the European parliament they sometimes have stronger connections with their own constituencies than with European organisations and this is something CEPI needs to build and improve (CEPI, interview).

The national and European associations' roles are largely expressed as complementary. In some cases, national associations may be more involved or take competing positions to CEPI. When approaching the EU institutions, there is a mix of complementary actions between the CEPI secretariat and the national members themselves. The SFIF is assumed to contact and interact with the Swedish parliamentarians to assure that they are up-to-date on the forest industry related issues. If there is an obvious national interest at stake for Sweden, SFIF may contact Swedish parliamentarians directly. SFIF also approaches the Swedish representation in Brussels when necessary. It is the national members' task to work through these kinds of channels, according to both the company interviewees and the CEPI representative. This type of dual lobbying and influence system may, however, also result in potential conflicts when national (SFIF) and EU (CEPI) positions do not concur.

4.2. General Strategies: Formal, Informal, Direct, and Indirect

CEPI staff members use many different strategies to communicate their positions. First and foremost, interviewees state the role of personal contacts, but they also make use of petition papers, hearings, and meetings and conferences, which they either organise themselves or attend in order to put their arguments forward. They also utilize official channels such as the consultation processes organised by EU institutions, to, for instance, collect input from the different participants in working groups. Amongst other, several working groups exist that are set up on an ad hoc, short-term (one year) basis, in order to deliver reports to the European Commission or to the Standing Forest Committee.

This relationship between the representatives from the forest industry and the EU institutions was described as a "give and take" relationship (CEPI, interview). This may indicate that the one-way lobbying activities are complemented by a symmetric two-way communication process [27]. The European Commission explicitly asks for the input of the different groups, such as the forest action group, while ad hoc groups deliver reports to the European Commission. This arrangement provides possibilities for the European Commission to gain knowledge and also an opportunity for the forest industry to be proactive and put forward their own questions on the agenda. As one respondent exemplifies:

It is also important to create a project which gives you a reason to ask if you can meet with the Commission. It is not (a place) for people to just sit there, but also (a place to be proactive) (SFIF, interview).

CEPI engages in both formal and informal processes, but judges the informal ones to be the most efficient as they take place at the early stage of policy development. In general, the view was taken that the formal participation which includes responding to consultations meant that the issue has already been developed in the institution and that you are at this stage mainly *reacting*, with relatively little room for policy development. For instance:

It is clear that you should try to influence the decisions proposed by your referral, but if you have done well in your earlier attempts to influence the process then you have already received a proposal which, on the whole, already includes the annotations you think are important (Company A, interview).

However, formal processes such as the consultation process were seen as important since they allow the involved actors to coordinate and discuss the issues internally. On this point, actors noted that they often seek to reply to or write referrals together, in order to give their position greater weight. This applied both to the companies in SFIF, the different national associations inside CEPI, and to CEPI together with other European trade associations. With regard to daily engagement in formal and informal processes, the respondents judged it to be equal in extent. However, informal discussions with staff in the European Commission were seen as being of great importance since these provide access to the sites where the issues are framed. The forest industry representatives noted that this made it possible for them to be proactive and influence which issues are raised and how they are formulated before formal consultation. Direct and informal communication is thus preferred:

...the earlier you can address the issue with the one who holds the pen the better (CEPI, interview).

As a result, among the interviewees, “friendly personal contacts” in the European Commission were judged to be the most efficient way of getting access to information and to be able to influence or provide expertise to the process. For instance:

...we are working very closely with the officials of the Commission, those who write the proposals, and then more and more with the politicians in the Parliament (SFIF, interview).

With regard to such direct lobbying, both politicians and officials were deemed important. In line with such developments, CEPI described how they use all tools available, ranging from formal to informal, depending on what is most suitable for the occasion and issue. Similarly, as another of the interviewees described:

Initiatives come from politicians who then put it in the officials’ hands in order to further develop it, give it a little more structure, and see what it can get for impact. We try to listen to what is happening and have a lot of contact with the politicians, but we also get to listen to the officials in order to learn what is going on. This happens on different levels. Those who ultimately make the decisions are the politicians, while those that govern the decisions that politicians should make are the officials, so you can’t separate them or say that one is more important than the other. You need to embrace the whole process so you can have different ways of reaching influence (Company A, interview).

4.3. Parallel Attempts to Reach Influence: Internal and External Strategies in Organisations

Interviewees also discussed specific strategies for managing the divergences that may exist among different national members with regard to the possibilities to reach coherent lobbying positions. When associations or members hold different views, CEPI described that they aim to develop dialogue to resolve the issues and cultivate a coherent understanding that can be communicated. According to several of the interviewees, CEPI avoids presenting a positions paper if there is a divide among the members (CEPI, SFIF, Company A, interviews). If divided, they choose not to take a stance on the issue (SFIF, interview). When divergences occur, CEPI often sets up meetings to discuss the issue

internally and devise a new position, for instance among the Association Directors' Group. The CEPI representative exemplified:

Linking to the debate on whether biomass is carbon neutral, on this debate two years ago, CEPI came out with a position that stated that they wanted a legal and harmonised sustainability criteria. Then, a year later, Sweden and Finland started expressing different views on that issue and as soon as they started communicating different views CEPI stopped communicating. CEPI didn't say that Sweden and Finland did not agree, the association just stopped saying anything on sustainability criteria on biomass and then convoked an internal meeting with the Swedes and Finns to discuss the issue and see if it could be solved internally ... and then CEPI came up with a new position (CEPI, interview).

The interviewee from SFIF also noted that there had been some tensions inside CEPI in the past, mainly due to the bioenergy issue, but now identified less tension and thereby, possibilities for CEPI to become more proactive on these issues.

While CEPI's daily presence in Brussels gives them an advantage in reflecting the European position, CEPI noted that national members always have the possibility of approaching European institutions to express their own view if this is seen as necessary or desirable. However, CEPI sees this as potentially jeopardizing possibilities of developing a coherent European position. Such "parallel acting" is rare, according to the interviewee from CEPI, but the interviewee admitted that it may occur with regard to issues where the northern part of Europe has different preconditions and thereby, has different interests than the rest of Europe. In other cases, the CEPI position may, however, instead be of extreme importance to SFIF, and so SFIF may also choose to accompany CEPI's efforts with their own resources to ensure that the position will go through. SFIF also follows the processes in parliament carefully since the national members are assumed to manage the dialogue with the parliamentarians from their own countries (see section 4.1.).

With regard to the national level in Sweden, coordination is perceived to work well, both among the forest companies themselves and inside the SFIF. SFIF is regarded as a strong trade association nationally and is observed to be well organised and representative of its members. Many of the companies note that this is a pre-condition for reaching influence on the European-level, for instance, that "there is a strong link between the members and the organisation in Stockholm" (Company B, interview).

Other types of coordination that are perceived by interviewees as working well on the national level are those with other forest actors such as the forest owners organizations, and sometimes even with environmental interests. However, according to one of the interviewed company representatives, this type of broad coordination is not yet possible on the European level. Nordic cooperation is also perceived as working well: Nordic meetings are arranged regularly, which supports coordination e.g., by Sweden and Finland on issues they deem as important in CEPI. As one of the interviewees expressed:

We (Sweden and Finland) know that we need to promote ourselves powerfully in these kinds of issues; our national associations profile themselves on issues where we differ, when our interests are different from the rest of the EU (SFIF, interview).

On the European level, the European organisations try to cooperate when it is possible, depending on the issue, as the different organisations may not agree on all issues. If possible, CEPI will work with the trade associations in the “forest family” and sometimes with NGOs. CEPI recently cooperated with the forest owners and the woodworking industries on joint positions in requests for actions to mobilise biomass, including forest biomass.

More coordinated actions, such as more cooperation between the European organisations in the forest family, were also supported by some interviewees. It was noted that forest industries in other countries are also members of CEPI and a powerful coordination exists between the various forest industries through the built-in system in CEPI. However, as an interviewee noted with regard to lobbying weight, “it would have been better if the whole industry, including forest owners, would be represented together in the policy process” (Company A, interview).

Beyond developing the work through CEPI and other trade associations, an additional strategy is to work through their own networks. For instance, when it comes to the Forest Technology Based Platform, SFIF noted that it is important for the Swedish forest industries to take on tasks and contribute to the work as well as contribute Swedish knowledge and representatives to working groups and committees. Along with the European organisations, SFIF also occasionally work in Brussels with the Confederation of Swedish Enterprises on issues that are not only of importance for the forest industry but for Swedish industry in general.

The representative from CEPI stated that the impact of Swedish forest industry and the SFIF on CEPI’s regular work could be seen as relatively large, which may imply that it also has an impact in the next step, *i.e.*, the legislative processes in Brussels. One reason for this may be personal connections: the CEO of SFIF is a previous CEO of CEPI, and so knows and may have access both to CEPI and relevant contacts in Brussels better than many colleagues in other national associations. Furthermore, SFIF has also maintained a large role with regard to CEPI, for instance, in working groups (as representatives in both organizations noted). According to the CEPI representative, the Swedish companies are also regarded as well-coordinated internally in SFIF (in comparison with many other member states companies and national associations).

The representative from SFIF further explains Sweden’s, but also Finland’s, strong mandate in the CEPI due to the fact that the Nordic interests pay for “half of the budget”:

When I say half the budget I mean either directly by the country they are most active in, or indirectly through other national unions (SFIF, interview).

In this regard, the interviewee exemplifies with Stora Enso as a company with Finnish origin and a specific interest structure, but currently active in multiple countries. Company structure and affiliations may thus also provide the forest industry in Sweden and Finland a comparatively strong position in CEPI.

In general, all of the interviewees thus felt that the Swedish forest industry has an impact and can influence the European policy processes, to at least some extent, due to their ongoing collaborations in CEPI. As one of the interviewees noted:

We could have a lobbyist seated in Brussels, we would be able to afford it, but I think we would have very little influence in that way. Although it is a large company, I think it’s the wrong attitude to work through our own efforts. We build up our strength through the

Swedish Forest Industries Federation. In the SFIF nationally and in CEPI in Brussels we are able to find alliance partners who have the same views on important issues. A classic question may be the issue of transport. It is not just us, but it is a lot of industries that are major transport users and that may have the same opinions that we have, and thus, we are seeking alliances with them and driving issues in this way (Company A, interview).

However, one of the Swedish forest companies in this study also complement their work with SFIF and CEPI with its own staff in Brussels and, when needed, consultants and legal representatives hired specifically to protect and promote specific company interests. While one interviewee noted that such an orientation may be related to the question of resources that a larger company can spend, several of the interviewees also saw it as a possibility to have to extend their own international focus in the future: for instance, to have their own resources placed in Brussels and perhaps become more niche-specific in their work (Company B). This in particular applied to a focus on strengthened or extended Nordic cooperation. For instance:

Somehow it feels like it might not be enough that we affect the Swedish politicians who, in turn, go to Brussels and work for the Swedish issues, but maybe we need to be in place more in Europe or at least cooperate with other countries, mainly Finland. Then, at least Sweden and Finland are aligned in their work (Company C, interview).

5. Concluding Remarks and Areas for Future Research

This explorative study has investigated the ways in which Swedish forest-based industries work towards influencing decision-making at the EU level. The study illustrates a focus on lobbying where the lobbying strategies for the European and Swedish trade associations for forestry are based on formal and informal as well as direct and indirect measures. There is an explicit preference for informal and direct measures that allow early entry into policy formation. These findings are supported by earlier research which verified these as the kind of strategies used by other interest groups and trade associations [5,38–40]. However, as previous studies have mainly focused on lobbying activities in policy areas that are formally regulated by the EU, this study provides additional insights into preferred lobbying strategies in a case where the EU has no or limited formal competence. The present study also contradicts the findings of Constantelos (2007) [11], as it illustrates that collective lobbying via the companies peak association is still preferred (both nationally and on EU-level) in this case. With regard to attempts at gaining influence both on specific decisions and the policy processes on an EU level, the institutionalised collaborations in the national association, SFIF, and the European association, CEPI, is perceived as crucial for the Swedish forest industry (this is indicated also by the larger original number of invited interviewees referring to these as the partners to whom they have delegated this responsibility). CEPI is judged to be able to protect and promote the interests of the Swedish forest industry, at least on a general level.

Internal communication between the national members is expressed as relatively well developed, with CEPI adjusting its official position when one or more members take a divergent position [9]. However, there is always a risk that the lowest common denominator will determinate the collaboration and hamper the strength of the common positions in CEPI. This study has illustrated that

the lobbying by SFI and CEPI may compete with or play parallel roles in forming lobbying content and strategies on an EU level. This can strengthen the position of the forest industry if the message that is put forward is the same, but could weaken and jeopardize the European position if the messages that are put forward are not coordinated or they contradict one another; for instance, due to the different forest conditions in Sweden and Finland in comparison with the rest of Europe. This suggests that parallel acting should be placed more in focus in future studies of lobbying, since it can be an indication of internal communication failure in the European trade associations.

In addition, the internal communication between other actors within the “forest family” is somewhat unclear, not least due to the relatively few common positions papers CEPI have produced over the last 10 years. Especially in relation to the wishes for more cooperation in the forest sector on a European level, expressed by some of those interviewed, it could be important to emphasise and analyse the internal and horizontal communication in future studies.

The horizontal communication and cooperation in forming EU-level coherence on forest issues could thus potentially be improved, especially since there is an outspoken ambition in CEPI to work together as broadly as possible on forest-related issues on a European level. Current limitations could indicate difficulties in attaining broad cooperation which may be further complicated if lobbying at the EU level on forest issues may gain more national character in the future, or as forest issues become more institutionalised [36]. Today, lobbying at the EU level is potentially limited by the diverging positions of trade association members, as well among the different trade associations themselves. The challenge for the future thus lies in how different trade associations inside the forest family can and will coordinate and co-operate to strengthen the forest sectors’ positions.

It may be that SFIF and the forest companies will have a larger role than they would have had if the state system was more integrated and proactive for forest-related issues in the EU [36]. According to Eising (2009), the Swedish forest industry organisation and lobbying strategies can be related to the unitary state of Sweden and its long history of corporatist traditions. The forest industry used to pursue their interests collectively rather than independently and had direct and formal dialogue with the bureaucrats [39]. Interest groups, in this case, the forest industry, want political influence, while the bureaucrats and the politicians, who ultimately have the control, have an interest in establishing a relationship with groups who control valuable resources [41]. This could be described as a “corporate integration”, and it takes place as part of a resource exchange between groups and governmental figures. As interest groups seek influence and decision-makers seek access to group resources, groups with valuable resources are able to attain a privileged position and increase their options for utilising the administrative strategy [31].

As the relationship between the European Commission and the stakeholders, in this case the forest-based industries, is becoming more symmetric, potentially with some form of inter-dependence between the European Commission and the stakeholders, we can ask whether lobbying on an EU level may be changing from traditional one-way communication to more of a two-way communication, where learning processes and exchanges become more centralised; potentially, also, with implications for legitimacy and accountability.

The Swedish forest industry has corporate resources and chooses to target bureaucrats to a great extent, supporting the suggestions of Binderkrantz (2008) [31]. Yet, they do not refrain from engaging in other forms of activities. In fact, their level of engagement in the parliamentary strategy may have

increased over time. In line with Constantelos' (2007) findings [11], one can detect a growing interest for lobbying among the Swedish forest companies, but not conducted on their own as Constantelos suggested, but rather in other, more broad constellations than CEPI. One of the companies expressed the need to complement their collaborative work with CEPI with their own Brussels office and through having representation such as Brussels-based public relations consultants who would influence legislations and decisions of particular relevance specifically for their company. Whether this should be seen as an exception or as an indicator of an upcoming change, only the future can tell.

Future studies should include small and medium-sized companies to make it possible to conduct more thorough analyses of preferred lobbying strategies among all types of Swedish forest companies. For the majority of the Swedish forest companies, being involved with SFIF and CEPI seems to be how they choose to cope with EU-initiated legislation. However, it would be relevant to next study the outcome of these interactions and what impact the Swedish forest industry may in practice have on the legislation processes in the EU.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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