

Chapter 15

Lobbying in Scandinavia

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Abstract

This chapter is a tour of the Scandinavian lobbying landscape providing the state of the art for research on a contested and necessary activity. We discuss the particular context of the Scandinavian countries and current trends relevant for lobbying. Lobbying is often juxtaposed with the corporatist channel which implies institutionalised contact patterns between politicians and organised interests. The corporatist channel has, however, declined in importance while a number of trends have led to more diverse interest group systems, and new actors have assumed a more prominent role in Scandinavian lobbying. Besides discussing such trends, we also present some of the main findings about strategies and techniques used and what similarities and dissimilarities exist between the countries.

Keywords: lobbying, interest groups, corporatism, professionalisation, diversity

Introduction

Political influence comes in many shapes. It is wielded through votes and engagement in political parties; but lobbying – whether by organised interest groups or other actors – is also a prominent source of influence. This type of activity can involve meetings to provide views and information to policy-makers but also more long-term cultivation of relationships and indirect lobbying, for example, in the shape of media campaigns and mobilisation of members (Binderkrantz, 2005). Lobbying is simultaneously a necessary and contested activity. It is necessary because policy-makers need viewpoints on the consequences of certain policies, which makes lobbying an important part of policy advisory systems (Craft & Howlett, 2012). It is contested since lobbying is often hidden from public scrutiny and might skew the influence of resourceful actors at the expense of the principle of “one person, one vote”. It is, however, indisputable that how interest groups and other actors use their policy capacity (Daugbjerg et al., 2018) and how policy advice and interest advocacy is balanced in the political

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system (Öberg, 2015) have a profound impact on a community's public policy (Thelen, 2019). To put it differently, studies of lobbying illustrate "the edges and boundaries of representative democracy" (Scott, 2018: 7).

In this chapter, we discuss the state of the art in Scandinavian lobbying and in the literature addressing the role of interest groups and lobbying. Our main focus is on a number of important trends changing the contours of the lobbying landscape in the last decades; on this basis, we discuss the present-day use of different types of lobbying strategies and the challenges for the literature on Scandinavian lobbyism. Reflecting the corporatist tradition, Scandinavian research on interest groups historically focused on formal participation in government committees and government agency boards – that is, "corporatism". More recently, there has been growth in the number of studies of lobbying as well as related phenomena such as the shift towards different types of group mobilisation and new types of actors (Binderkrantz, 2005; Binderkrantz et al., 2016b; Christiansen et al., 2010). This literature forms the core of the discussion in this chapter.

Internationally, especially in countries where corporatist elements in the political system were always rare, there is a relatively large research literature on lobbying (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998; Baumgartner et al., 2009; Dür & Mateo, 2016; Godwin et al., 2013; Scott, 2018). While several of the findings from this international research have relevance in a Nordic setting, they often relate to different political contexts, be it the presidential system in the US (Hojnacki et al., 2015) or the multilevel system of the European Union (Joos, 2016; Klüver, 2013). Studying Nordic lobbying requires sensitivity to the political, economic, and cultural traditions of the region.

This chapter focuses on the three monarchies in the region: Denmark, Norway, and Sweden – or Scandinavia, as the trio is called. This choice of focus is due to how the Scandinavian countries are relatively similar in the sense that they are social-democratic welfare regimes with long democratic traditions (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Language-wise, as well as in their choice of government model, the Scandinavian countries set themselves apart from Finland and Iceland (Arter, 2016; Bengtsson et al., 2014).

First, we clarify some key terms in this chapter, and then we discuss the particular context of the Scandinavian countries and current trends relevant for lobbying, lobbying strategies and techniques, and one of the challenges for research on lobbying, namely measuring influence. We draw heavily on existing research (e.g., Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2015; Binderkrantz et al., 2014; Christiansen & Rommetvedt, 1999; Christiansen et al., 2010; Espeli, 1999; Gulbrandsen, 2009; Rommetvedt, 2017a; Öberg et al., 2011) to discuss the similarities and differences between the countries. We also contrast them with other Western European democracies (e.g., Binderkrantz et al., 2016a; Binderkrantz & Pedersen, 2017; Bitonti & Harris, 2017) to discuss the merit of the

notion of exceptionalism of the Nordic region. The chapter ends with some ideas for further research on lobbying in the region.

Definition of key terms

As stated above, lobbying deals with attempts at political influence, the latter defined as an ability to shape a political decision in line with one's own preference (Dür, 2008). In short, lobbying is "*an effort designed to affect what the government does* [emphasis original]" (Nownes, 2006: 5). In the interest group literature, lobbying is usually discussed under the term "influence strategies", and scholars distinguish between insider and outsider strategies, or direct and indirect strategies (Beyers, 2004; Binderkrantz, 2005). In other literatures, lobbying may be seen as related to terms such as "public affairs" (Harris & Fleischer, 2017) or "political public relations" (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2019). Lobbying, then, is frequently described as a subset of such overarching approaches. Public affairs, for instance, would also include community relations and corporate social responsibility (Harris & Fleischer, 2017). Such activities are designed to help organisations achieve their goals. In this mix, lobbying is ultimately directed at political decision-makers and politicians as well as bureaucrats. The aim of lobbying is either to change or maintain policies through direct and indirect actions that influence the policy community. Lobbying can involve putting an issue on the political agenda, in addition to attempts to influence the decision-making and implementation phase of politics.

It is often assumed that many lobbyists would prefer to work the back channels of politics and keep issues away from the public eye (Culpepper, 2011). In other instances, however, lobbyists might go in the opposite direction and try to influence politicians through media coverage or grassroots initiatives. Such indirect lobbying might have a mid-term goal to involve people in advocating a cause to political decision-makers (Trapp & Laursen, 2017). Some researchers prefer to call this "outside lobbyism" (Kollman, 1998), while others argue for a narrow approach, reserving the notion of lobbying for direct contact with politicians (Hermansson et al., 1999). We, however, follow the European Commission and others and define lobbying as "all activities carried out with the objective of influencing the policy formulation and decision-making processes" (Commission of the European Communities, 2006: 5).

Lobbying may be conducted by any political actor, but special attention has been devoted to the lobbying carried out by interest groups, often defined as an organised group not seeking public office and not being a public institution (Beyers et al., 2008). Together with individual corporations, often included in the definition of interest groups by American scholars (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998), these actors are usually the most active and influential lobbyists (see

below). However, it is also important to keep in mind that there are many voluntary associations that refrain from activities aimed at influencing public policy (Arvidson et al., 2018b), and that social movements and even temporary groups of individuals – for example parents of children in schools under threat of closure – can pursue more or less advanced lobbying strategies (Öberg & Uba, 2014). In addition – and as will be discussed later – new actors, including think tanks and public affairs companies, have increased in importance in Scandinavia.

Political and social context

As argued in the introductory paragraph and reflected elsewhere in this book, there are certain political, economic, and cultural traditions that set the Nordic countries apart and that are crucial for understanding the political communication in these countries; we highlight some of these aspects that have particular importance for lobbying strategies. Scale is key, since the formation of elites and how they interact with each other and with grassroots differs between smaller and larger countries (Bengtsson et al., 2014; Katzenstein, 1985; Maktutredningen, 1990). Many informal connections in small personal networks can open up doors for lobbyists (Tyllström, 2017) while simultaneously limiting access to policy-makers for citizen groups outside homogenous networks with strong elements of elite consensus (Christiansen et al., 2018). In addition, while a number of countries have (or are preparing) legislation that regulate lobbying activities, the Scandinavian countries have not introduced similar regulation (Crepaz et al., 2019). Rather, regulation in Scandinavia is relatively limited with a focus on anti-corruption and rules about donation to parties, although stricter rules and the introduction of lobbying registers are debated from time to time.

The Scandinavian countries are also comparably decentralised – though less so than federal systems with autonomous legislatures at the subnational level – and belong to a group of countries that have the highest level of municipal autonomy, with extensive fiscal autonomy and control over large policy scopes (Ladner et al., 2016). This, of course, has implications for lobbying strategies, for example, within welfare policies where an exclusively national focus dominates in other countries (Arvidson et al., 2018b). Closely related to this is the fact that Scandinavian countries have a high proportion of publicly funded welfare, which makes public policy-makers particularly interesting lobbying targets for actors within that sector (Svallfors, 2016). In addition, parallel with the development of large welfare states, associations of local authorities have assumed central roles both as organising the providers of welfare state services and as lobbyists vis-à-vis the central authorities (Blom-Hansen, 2002).

The often-emphasised Scandinavian political culture where consultation, cooperation, compromise, and consensus are central values (Arter, 2016) is

significant for incentives and strategies of lobbying as well. These values have been clearly visualised in the corporatist tradition with the formal involvement of interest groups in public policy-making as well as policy concertation involving organised labour, trade, and industry (e.g., Christiansen & Rommetvedt, 1999; Hermansson et al., 1999; Öberg et al., 2011). It is important to understand that the corporatist system provided advantages but also challenges for interest groups engaged in lobbying decision-makers. While corporatism provided interest groups with opportunities to influence politics, some scholars argue that groups also became part of the established system, limiting their opportunities for challenging the system (Eriksen et al., 2003). Over the last decades, the corporatist structure has been in a stage of rupture (Öberg et al., 2011), and societal pluralisation has increased (Rommetvedt, 2017a), but it is important to keep in mind that parts of the old structure still exist (Christiansen et al., 2010). For example, trade union density and membership rates are still much higher than in most other countries (Crouch, 2017).

Hence, there are several political and social aspects that most certainly condition lobbying in the Scandinavian countries. Still, how and to what extent this matters more precisely for lobbying as a particular aspect of political communication is mostly unknown and should be a subject for further research. In addition, several new trends impact these factors and create new conditions for lobbying in the Scandinavian countries, which is something we elaborate on in the next section.

Trends and changes: Increasing professionalisation and more diversity

In the last decades, Scandinavian interest representation has changed in notable ways, from well-organised interest group systems centred along political lines of division to present-day politics where news actors have become more prominent and traditional interest groups have professionalised and diversified their political work. We will discuss some of these trends and how they matter for lobbying in the region.

First, a shift in the dynamics of political representation has affected voting, group membership, and patterns of group mobilisation. While workers would traditionally join trade unions and vote for left-wing parties, today, voting and interest group membership crosscuts traditional social divides. The traditional left-wing divide remains strong in Scandinavian politics, but new political issues such as environment, immigration, and “law and order” have gained in importance (Elgenius & Wennerhag, 2018). In effect, relations between political parties and interest groups have gradually weakened. Thus, for both parties and interest groups, it is less functional to withhold strong bonds, although trade

unions and business groups have maintained relations to particular parties to some extent (Allern & Bale, 2012; Christiansen, 2012). Additionally, there is a shift towards a larger role of citizen groups – representing constituencies outside the labour market – as citizens increasingly join groups based on new political issues. Welfare policies have also given rise to new forms of citizen representation vis-à-vis the state since client groups representing patients, for example, have proliferated (Amnå, 2006; Fisker, 2013; Lundberg, 2012; Opedal et al., 2012). A Danish study thus finds that citizen groups constituted 42 per cent of all active interest groups in 2010, compared to 29 per cent in 1975 (Binderkrantz et al., 2016b).

Second, as politics has become increasingly mediated, interest groups have responded with a general professionalisation. Researchers have observed that more and more of society's institutions value media attention and adapt to media logic to meet their goals (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Rommetvedt et al., 2013; Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014). Taken together, this creates a new situation for organisations seeking political influence. More and more, organisations must pay attention to the media, news cycles, and news values. This has accelerated the need for people with particular knowledge about such processes, and consequently, all major interest groups have established large public relations departments. While groups previously recruited staff based on shared political goals, now generalised skills are more important as groups hire increasing numbers of professional policy strategists, public relations advisors, and communication experts (Öberg & Svensson, 2012).

Third, new types of policy actors have become important. In a comparative perspective, traditional interest groups have played a particularly dominant role in Scandinavia, and although private corporations, local authorities, and other actors have also lobbied (Christiansen & Nørgaard, 2003), their political role has been less prominent than in most other countries. More recently, research has described how interest group members – such as large businesses – prefer lobbying directly rather than mobilising through their group (Drutman, 2015; Gulbrandsen, 2009). Also, many municipalities and counties have begun to hire public relations agencies to help influence national politicians. Media coverage has documented the use of many conventional lobbying tools and techniques in this regard (Allern, 2015; Ihlen & Gullberg, 2015). The tendency for the State to lobby the State has been noted (and criticised) in Denmark as well (Hegelund & Mose, 2013). In present-day politics, think tanks have also become more important, as they increase in number and media prominence, particularly in Sweden (Blach-Ørsten & Kristensen, 2016).

Fourth, due to a combination of the trends described above, the so-called revolving-doors phenomenon has increased in importance in Scandinavian countries. Historically, career shifts from, for example, major trade unions to social democratic parties were not uncommon, but in recent years, there are

indications that former members of parliament take up positions in a broader range of political organisations (Tyllström 2019; Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017). With the rise of public relations agencies, the job market for politicians has grown as they utilise their political capital and knowledge of the political system. Research in Norway has shown how politicians from all political parties (except the Green Party) have found jobs in public relations agencies, and that all the major agencies have teams where former political rivals work together for the interests of the paying client. In the spring of 2015, this included four former cabinet ministers and eleven former state secretaries (Allern, 2015). Overall, more people are working professionally with lobbying, something that is also reflected in the growing number of practical handbooks (e.g., Esbensen, 2012; Gramnæs, 2018; Raknes & Solhjell, 2018). Some argue that this development has even created a new political class: policy professionals (Garsten et al., 2015).

Fifth, increasing globalisation has also opened up new international arenas for lobbying by Scandinavian actors. These increasing attempts to influence international organisations, for example the European Union, seem to copy many of the strategies used on local and national arenas but still call for new knowledge of politics and policy and other kinds of alliances, which together change the context for lobbying at other levels as well (Dellmuth & Tallberg, 2016; Johansson et al., 2018; Tallberg et al., 2018). At the same time – but still to a limited extent – international actors such as multinational companies have made their appearance in Scandinavian politics.

Summing up, a number of trends have led to more diverse interest group systems, and new actors have assumed a more prominent role in Scandinavian lobbying. Still, there is a very large element of stability. For example, while the revolving-doors phenomenon clearly exists, most former members of parliament find occupations outside of lobbying (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017). Relatively speaking, public relations agencies still do not have a huge role in Scandinavia, and scholars have even remarked that the media attention to these agencies belies their influence (Rommetvedt, 2014). Traditional actors such as business associations and organisations, trade unions, and organisations of local authorities still control the majority of economic and personnel resources, and even though union membership has declined, it is still at relatively high levels (Binderkrantz et al., 2014).

Lobbying strategies and techniques

While the previous section focused on change over time, this section presents the current state of the art in Scandinavian lobbying. In other words, what do we know about lobbying in the political situation that is an effect of the trends identified?

The international literature points to a range of different strategies and techniques used by lobbyists (Binderkrantz, 2005). Baumgartner and colleagues (2009) list inside advocacy (personal contacts with members of parliament, dissemination of external research to policy-makers, etc.), outside advocacy (public relations campaigns, paid ads, etc.), and grassroots advocacy (mobilising mass membership, organising a lobby day, etc.). Godwin and colleagues (2013) argue that three activities take up most of a lobbyist's time: monitoring what policy-makers are doing, supplying information to policy-makers, and building relationships with policy-makers and other lobbyists.

Research in Scandinavia finds that organised interests typically use a combination of many methods – both lobbying politicians and pursuing media coverage – while less conventional activities such as protests or demonstrations are less widely used (Binderkrantz et al., 2014; Opedal et al., 2012; Thesen & Rommetvedt, 2009). There are strong indications in the literature that strategy choices are constrained by political opportunity structures as well as by the particular identity of the interest group (Arvidson et al., 2018b). For example, in a study of Swedish trade unions, Peterson and colleagues show that these organisations have only marginally and slowly changed and diversified the repertoire of actions that they use in the postwar period. Since the main specificities of the Scandinavian labour market regime persist, traditional ways to influence politics are still the most important (Peterson et al., 2012).

A finding in both Denmark and Norway is that lobbyists often grasp the opportunity to let the politician “shine” in the media even though a proposal might be theirs originally (Figenschou & Fredheim, 2019; Kværna, 2011; Trapp & Laursen, 2017). With the advent of social media, organisations have acquired an additional tool for political influence, although we still have limited insight into what extent lobbyists use these and with what effects. Potentially, organisations are not as reliant on traditional news media as previously when they want to influence political decisions. Several recent examples show how campaigns are launched and build momentum on social media before gaining coverage in legacy media (Ihlen & Gullberg, 2015). One might also hypothesise that social media provide initial framing control, and hence is a better strategic choice in the initial stage of a lobbying campaign compared to using legacy media. The best and most powerful actors, however, are able to utilise all arenas (Binderkrantz et al., 2014; Figenschou & Fredheim, 2019) – a finding in line with international research (van der Graaf et al., 2015). Contrary to claims in American research (i.e., Baumgartner et al., 2009), resources are indeed important to gain access to the bureaucracy, the Parliament, and the media in Denmark (Binderkrantz et al., 2014). Money, members, and employees are vital, and resources may even be more important in today's lobbying environment with the focus on professional communication. At the same time, “citizen groups report a higher level of agenda-setting

success and a lower level of decision-making influence than economic groups” (Binderkrantz & Pedersen, 2017: 92).

Research on Norwegian health policy has shown how Twitter is an important tool for addressing politicians directly. Lobbyists attempt to get politicians to respond to them in public and make promises (Figenschou & Fredheim, 2019). When politicians say something publicly that the lobbyist disagrees with, the latter might ask for a meeting to present his or her critical arguments in private. There is, however, a general feeling that if you use the media to chastise politicians, the case is lost since the positions then become firmly established and the politicians need to stand their ground, save face, or both (Figenschou & Fredheim, 2019; Kværna, 2011). Such findings have a parallel, at least in the US, in how efficient lobbyists do not rely on crisis mongering and are less inclined to use pathos. Ethos, or credibility, is the most important, since lobbyists want to be the ones that politicians seek out for advice (Baumgartner et al., 2009). In a seminal study, Berry (1977) argued that if you seek confrontation, you have accepted that you will not become an insider.

Effective lobbying is seldom performed solely based on the interests of the client, as the interests of the politicians must also be taken into account; just as any sales person, lobbyists must convey the usefulness of “the product” (Kværna, 2011). Lobbyists tend to argue from facts and science, efficiency, equity, or a combination (Vining et al., 2005). A staple strategy is to argue that a proposal will serve the public interest (Ihlen et al., 2018; Rommetvedt, 2017a); correspondingly, the use of self-interested arguments has dwindled (Uhre & Rommetvedt, 2018). This finding is not peculiar to the Norwegian setting. In general, legitimacy is based on the ability to align “the self-interested socio-political claims of the organization with a view of the public interest held by at least some influential segments of society” (Oberman, 2017: 484). A recent study of group appearances in the news media confirms that interest groups often frame their concerns in public terms, although references to membership interests are more common among Danish groups than British groups (Binderkrantz, 2020).

Still, the notion of the public interest is slippery, and furthermore, “rivals are highly likely to counter such arguments by making use of a conflicting social value” (Baumgartner et al., 2009: 147). Thus, it becomes important for lobbyists to build alliances. The parties in a lobby alliance do not need to agree on everything, but the alliance must be sufficiently strong (Rommetvedt, 2017a). At least two of the practical handbooks argue that the best alliances are those that bring together surprising partners – partners usually thought of as adversaries (Heglund & Mose, 2013; Raknes & Solhjell, 2018).

Differences within and between Scandinavian countries

It is important to acknowledge that while the Scandinavian countries are often lumped together as examples of a democratic corporatist model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) – and there are indeed many other similarities – this may obscure important differences that also have consequences for lobbying. One of the more important dissimilarities is the organisation of state administration, where Sweden differs from the other Nordic countries, except for Finland. Sweden has an organisational divide between government ministries and central government agencies (Ahlbäck Öberg & Wockelberg, 2016); in contrast to countries with ministerial rule (like Norway and Denmark), Swedish ministries can only steer government agencies through legislation and control of finances and are not allowed to interfere in particular cases when agencies exercise public authority. The fact that administrative agencies enjoy a high degree of independence and discretion means that some decisions that can be influenced through politicians in Denmark and Norway must be directed towards civil servants in Sweden.

The Scandinavian countries are also said to have different versions of corporatist arrangements. For instance, some hypothesise that “more consensual roll calls will be found in Denmark as compared to Norway and Sweden” since the two latter countries have reduced the number of implementing corporatist committees to a larger degree (Christiansen et al., 2010: 36). Governments in Sweden and Norway have traditionally been stronger than in Denmark; hence, parliament lobbying might be stronger in the latter (Christiansen et al., 2010).

Another difference is that Norway has stronger localised media systems and, together with Sweden, a higher network readiness than Denmark (Baller et al., 2016). Thus, local and regional media are likely to be more central in lobbying media strategies in Norway than in Denmark and Sweden, and accordingly, local and regional media are often used to build an agenda in Norway (Figenschou & Fredheim, 2019). In addition, there are differences in decision-making competences on various levels (Ladner et al., 2016) and even variations within countries. Lobbying on the local level, for example, must be adjusted to different civil society regimes in municipalities in the same country, based on how local governments integrate civil society in public social welfare (Arvidson et al., 2018a).

Challenges to lobbying research: Measuring political influence

Depending on the lack of transparency that characterises lobbying, research in this field faces several challenges. One of the most important but difficult issues is to measure the effects of lobbying, which we often understand as political

influence. This is challenging for interest group research in general, but while other strands of interest group research can study participation (and assume or draw inferences about influence from those observations) and – maybe more importantly – policy processes, those options are seldom available, or at least more complicated, for lobby researchers.

We do know that Scandinavian politicians are, in general, positive towards lobbying (Rommetvedt, 2014; Strömbäck, 2011). It is easy to get access to politicians, and anecdotal evidence suggests that this often comes as a surprise for organisational representatives from abroad. Furthermore, the lobbying system ensures that a wider range of interests are heard compared to those represented in the corporatist system (Rommetvedt, 2014). Still, the Norwegian members of parliament do think that the most resourceful organised interests have too much influence compared to weaker interest groups (Rommetvedt, 2014). It is, however, necessary to be critical towards sources based on the involved actors. Politicians are biased because it is pivotal for trust in politicians that they make decisions based on their own judgement and not on skewed information they coincidentally found, or even worse, was provided by interest groups. Hence, politicians tend to view lobbying as unproblematic and providing important or even essential policy advice. They often “welcome all information”, since they – according to themselves – have the ability to process information from interest groups and take policy positions after serious deliberation (Hermansson et al., 1999). This picture might be true, but it might also be a natural way for politicians to legitimate themselves (intentionally or not). Simultaneously, lobbyists, especially public relations agencies, are often secretive about whom they represent, what they do, how they do it, and what they have achieved, often referring to customer confidentiality or enterprise secrets. When they are asked general questions about lobbying and democracy (Hermansson et al., 1999), their answers are similar to those of politicians, but the lobbyists frequently emphasise successes of political influence. Again, it might be a true picture, but it might also be biased towards promoting the service from which they make their living. A similar mechanism is present and might produce bias when member-based organisations are studied; how can you recruit members for your organisation unless you argue that you are excellent and professional in influencing politics and policy and are generally successful?

The challenge of measuring the influence of lobbying has been discussed by many, and important advances have been made, for example, by mapping access to political arenas or linking group preferences to political outcomes (Bernhagen et al., 2014; Dür, 2008; Pedersen, 2013; Klüver & Mahoney, 2015). Still, as Helboe Pedersen (2013) argues, we are probably left with getting at certain aspects of influence through correlation and triangulation of methods.

Conclusion

Much international attention has been lavished on the Nordic region due to the seemingly social and economic success built on strong democracies, welfare states, and high trust. The notion of exceptionalism has been debated in this regard, with some scholars arguing that the Nordic countries as a whole are not much different from any other Western European democracy (Bengtsson et al., 2014). They are, for instance, certainly not the only small, stable countries with welfare systems. These authors do, however, agree that the Scandinavian countries have high levels of trust, voter turnout, and satisfaction levels among citizens. A Scandinavian model of corporatism might have been a fitting description in the 1960s and 1970s, but even then, substantial differences existed (Rommetvedt, 2017b). Others have pointed to a Scandinavian model built on high work effort, small wage differentials, high productivity, and a generous welfare state (Barth et al., 2015). By and large, however, it is argued by others that the myth of exceptionalism is typically journalist driven (Arter, 2016). Even the often-mentioned value of egalitarianism, especially touted in Norway, has been described as a myth (Korsnes et al., 2014).

Still, there is a need for more research that would describe the similarities and differences between the Scandinavian countries themselves and the similarities and differences with countries outside the region. A hypothesis could be that lobbying in the Scandinavian countries is not that much different from other small welfare states. In many such states, the economy is open and the elite tend to know each other. As indicated above, there are even some lobbying techniques that seem to be staples in many countries. The existence of the public interest argument might function as “exhibit A” (Ihlen et al., 2018).

Research has concluded that the lobbying styles in the US and Europe differ, but this is mostly due to the dissimilar institutional contexts (Hanegraaff et al., 2017). Still, it would be worthwhile to explore, for instance, the political and cultural values that lobbyists might be able to draw on in their communicative construction of the public interest. In the Norwegian setting, the application of the seminal work of Rokkan (1967) seems obvious. That is, his work described the political landscape with a model of political cleavages. The original lines of cleavage in the Norwegian system were “territorial and cultural: the province opposed the capital, the peasantry fought the officials of the King’s administration, the defenders of the rural cultural traditions spoke against the steady spread of urban secularism and nationalism” (Rokkan, 1967: 437). Interesting research could be conducted focusing on how lobbyists are able to frame and utilise these cleavages – that is, if they are still relevant. An expectation is that regional politics and interests are more important in Norway than in Sweden and Denmark and that this will be an important element in the framing of lobbyists. Jobs in the district are a trump card in many Norwegian political

discussions, while the centralisation processes have been much stronger in Denmark and Sweden. A particularly interesting question that remains is how these cleavages are holding up against the mentioned trends, especially the new international arenas for lobbying.

In fact, most of the mentioned trends do merit more research. A case in point is the rise of new policy actors as well as the professionalisation of lobbying and the role of public relations agencies. Such agencies are sometimes considered to constitute “hired guns” working for individual corporations, local authorities, or even traditional interest groups, and the work of such agencies is generally less transparent than the lobbying of organised interests (Allern, 2015; Helgeson & Falasca, 2017; Tyllström, 2013). The latter point is troubling from a normative democratic perspective.

Another example where more research is needed concerns the mentioned use of social media. How widespread is this use? What influence does it have? The mentioned Norwegian study channels (Figenschou & Fredheim, 2019) stem from the health sector, but we do not have much knowledge from other sectors and policy fields. Similarly, with only a few exceptions (e.g., van der Graaf et al., 2015), research has not really addressed the democratic implications. Is social media yet another tool for those who have influence? Or, is it the “poor person’s” lobbying channel?

Other unanswered questions relate to studies of “knowledge use” in politics more generally (Lundin & Öberg, 2014). There are, for example, formal and informal rules which regulate access for lobbyists to decision-makers. Some politicians instruct their assistants to sort between the actors who try to contact them. How do these and other obstacles for lobbyists vary and work in practice? While politicians often argue that they have the ability to evaluate information from lobbyists, there is scarce knowledge about how this is done and the conditions for deliberation over these policy advices. How important is it that politicians have resources to produce or find information on their own? Does it make a difference if their ways of organising services for parliamentarians differ? Is it more difficult for politicians with strong and clear ideological positions to evaluate information from lobbyists? Are professional or more experienced politicians less susceptible to biased information than amateur politicians? Do different ways of inviting advisories and advocates, for example to public hearings, mitigate an otherwise biased, selected, or fragmented flow of information from lobbying actors trying to influence policy decisions, or are they only window dressing, and a waste of time in that regard? While research has progressed, we still need more explorations of how the edges and boundaries of representative democracy impact politics and policies.

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