

Noble Networks? Advocacy for Global Justice and the “Network Effect”

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Acronyms

ALTER–EU	Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation at the European Union
BAE	British Aerospace
BBC	British Broadcasting Company
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CBI	Confederation of Business and Industry
CEO	chief executive officer
CFS	Cooperative Financial Services
CORE	Corporate Responsibility Coalition
DFID	Department for International Development, United Kingdom
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry, United Kingdom
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECCJ	European Coalition for Corporate Justice
ECGD	Export Credits Guarantee Department
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
EU	European Union
FoE	Friends of the Earth
FoI	Freedom of Information
G8	Group of Eight
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
IASB	International Accounting Standards Board
IFRS	International Financial Reporting Standard
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOC	international oil company
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MP	Member of Parliament
KPMG	Klynveld-Peat-Marwick-Goerdeler
NGO	non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFR	Operating and Financial Review
PWYP	Publish What You Pay
SEIC	Sakhalin Energy Investment Company
SEW	Sakhalin Environment Watch
SG	Steering Group (CORE)
SIN	Sakhalin Island Network
TJM	Trade Justice Movement
UK	United Kingdom
UNCAC	United Nations Convention Against Corruption
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWF	Worldwide Fund for Nature

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Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

Civil society organizations in Western societies are widely reported to have significant political power. Policy makers increasingly emphasize the important role of such organizations as “equal players” in the political process, while outside institutional politics, civic advocacy recently regained attention through the rise of global and transnational social movements.

This paper draws attention away from individual engagement in social movements and from single non-governmental organizations (NGOs), toward inter-organizational networks of civil organizations and their role in public policy processes. Taking an inter-organizational perspective on civic advocacy, the paper starts with a theoretical reflection on two bodies of literature: social movement theory, and the literature on inter-organizational networks. The combination of insights from these two areas builds the theoretical background for analysing the “network effect” for joint advocacy by civil organizations in networks. The network effect, as discussed here, builds on a set of propositions about how organizing in networks affects the network members themselves, as well as how networks change the role of civic action in the policy process. These propositions are presented and discussed from two different angles: inside and outside networks.

The empirical data for the assessment of network effects derives from four civil advocacy networks working in the United Kingdom in the area of economic policy with implications for international development. The data for each case were collected by means of document analysis and a combination of interviews, as well as a survey including respondents from all four networks and representatives of their counterparts in the policy process. The presentation of each proposition is followed by a discussion based on the empirical data. While the propositions made from an “inside” perspective on the network effect are primarily discussed in light of the direct perceptions of network members, the paper draws upon the perceptions of public policy officials in order to validate the discussion of the external perspective on the network effect.

Starting from a classic resource-based perspective on social movements, the paper discusses the impact of network effects on resource pooling and mobilization. Following the “exchange theory” proposition that networks not only facilitate exchange between different actors but also lead to the creation of new network-specific resources and skills, this discussion is complemented by an assessment of the effects of networks on inter-organizational learning and the building of a shared identity. The authors state that the governance of a network is critical for the use of these internal network effects: governance can “steer” collective action and facilitate strategic alignment of individual organizations.

The paper then examines the potential of networks to influence their external context. It also looks at how joint action impacts on network members’ perceptions of political opportunities in the policy process; this is compared with the perceptions of actors, such as government officials, whom the networks engage in the policy process.

The findings indicate that the network effect on civic advocacy primarily functions inside networks, as it changes the way network participants perceive their role in the policy process. By working through networks, individuals in participating NGOs can exert some additional influence over public policy on global inequality. However, by comparing current practice with the networks’ promises identified in existing studies of organizations and social movements, it appears that many of the potential benefits are not being systemically realized by network participants. Instead, participation in such networks appears as a strategy by individuals to deal with a lack of focus on systemic, cross-cutting issues by their NGO, rather than a comprehensively resourced strategy from their organization. A consequent resource scarcity leads to a lack of investment in network learning and strategic planning, so that these civic

networks do not utilize the network effect to its full extent. As a result, the impact of the network effect outside networks appears limited. The reasons for the limited impact identified in this paper were unintended consequences of organizing in networks: network activities appeared to be driven by governmental agendas rather than by the NGOs' strategic goals; the aims of campaigns repeated existing political compromises and narratives rather than introducing challenging discourses; and coalition building through networks was prematurely curtailed.

While networks could be a mechanism for empowering civic organizations within existing societal structures, this would likely require an enhanced effort to align participant organizations with network-related activities, and the involvement of more groups who shape inequality, as well as those who suffer from it. Consequently, the authors draw the preliminary conclusion that some civic networks demonstrate a potential to enhance civic advocacy in policy processes, yet generate concerns over legitimacy and effectiveness. They may therefore appear to some people as inert and elite clubs of intelligent civic professionals—"noble networks". The paper explores two of these concerns with civic network advocacy in the final section, and recommends a shift from a "noble" to a global strategic network approach. This conclusion is particular to the type of civic organizations researched, and greater connections to other civic organizations, such as trade unions, may help address some of the challenges identified.

The paper makes a contribution to the emerging field of critical and normative inter-organizational relations, and identifies some key areas for further work. It will aid understanding of how NGOs relate to social movements through their networks at a time when struggles for financial justice are set to grow.

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Résumé

De l'avis de nombreux milieux, les organisations de la société civile ont un pouvoir politique non négligeable en Occident. De plus en plus, les décideurs politiques insistent sur l'importance du rôle de ces organisations dans le processus politique, dans lequel elles sont "acteurs à part égale", au moment où, hors des institutions politiques, les activités citoyennes de sensibilisation suscitent depuis peu un regain d'intérêt avec l'essor des mouvements sociaux mondiaux et transnationaux.

Ce document attire l'attention non pas sur l'engagement individuel dans les mouvements sociaux ou sur des organisations non gouvernementales isolées (ONG), mais sur les réseaux d'organisations citoyennes et leur rôle dans la définition des politiques publiques. Considérant les activités citoyennes de sensibilisation sous l'angle des relations entre les organisations, ses auteurs commencent par mener une réflexion théorique sur deux corps de littérature: l'une sur la théorie des mouvements sociaux et l'autre sur les réseaux d'organisations. Les enseignements conjugués de ces deux littératures constituent la toile de fond théorique sur laquelle ils analysent "l'effet réseau" qui se fait sentir lorsque des organisations de citoyens en réseau font un travail commun de sensibilisation. L'effet réseau est traité ici sous la forme d'une série de propositions expliquant comment le fait de s'organiser en réseau a une incidence sur les membres du réseau et comment les réseaux changent le rôle de l'action citoyenne dans le processus politique. Ces propositions sont présentées et commentées sous deux angles différents: de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur des réseaux.

Les données empiriques qui ont servi à évaluer les effets réseau proviennent de quatre réseaux travaillant au Royaume-Uni pour sensibiliser les esprits à la politique économique et à ses

conséquences pour le développement international. Dans chaque cas, les données recueillies proviennent de l'analyse de documents et de divers entretiens, ainsi que d'une enquête réalisée auprès de représentants des quatre réseaux et de leurs homologues de la sphère politique. L'exposé de chaque proposition est suivi d'un commentaire qui s'appuie sur des données empiriques. Si les propositions faites "de l'intérieur" sur l'effet réseau sont essentiellement commentées à la lumière des perceptions directes des membres du réseau, les auteurs s'appuient sur les perceptions des responsables des politiques publiques pour valider le commentaire sur l'effet réseau vu de l'extérieur.

Après avoir étudié les mouvements sociaux selon la démarche classique, en interrogeant la documentation à ce sujet, les auteurs traitent de l'impact des effets réseau sur la mise en commun et la mobilisation des ressources. Conformément à la "théorie des échanges", ils posent que les réseaux non seulement favorisent les échanges entre différents acteurs mais aboutissent aussi à la création de nouveaux talents et de ressources propres aux réseaux, puis ils en évaluent les effets sur l'apprentissage interorganisationnel et la formation d'une identité commune. Ils estiment que la gouvernance joue un rôle déterminant dans l'exploitation des effets réseau à l'intérieur de celui-ci: elle peut "piloter" l'action collective et favoriser l'alignement stratégique d'organisations isolées.

Les auteurs examinent ensuite la capacité des réseaux à influencer leur environnement extérieur. Ils étudient aussi l'incidence de l'action commune sur la manière dont les membres du réseau perçoivent les opportunités qui s'offrent dans le processus politique et ils comparent cette perception avec celle des acteurs, par exemple des hauts fonctionnaires du gouvernement, qui sont les interlocuteurs politiques des réseaux.

Ils concluent que l'effet réseau sur les activités citoyennes de sensibilisation se fait surtout sentir à l'intérieur des réseaux, car il change la manière dont les participants au réseau perçoivent leur rôle dans le processus politique. Les réseaux permettent aux individus qui travaillent dans les ONG participantes d'exercer plus d'influence sur la politique publique capable d'agir sur l'inégalité dans le monde. Cependant, si l'on compare la pratique actuelle avec les promesses des réseaux telles qu'elles ressortent des études des organisations et des mouvements sociaux, on s'aperçoit que bien des avantages potentiels des réseaux ne sont pas exploités de manière systématique par ceux qui en font partie. Au contraire, la participation à ces réseaux apparaît davantage comme une stratégie adoptée par les individus pour compenser le manque d'attention portée par leur ONG aux problèmes systémiques et intersectoriels que comme une stratégie à laquelle les organisations consacrent toutes les ressources nécessaires. Ces ressources étant insuffisantes, elles n'investissent pas assez dans l'apprentissage et dans la planification stratégique, de sorte que ces réseaux citoyens n'exploitent pas à fond l'effet réseau. L'impact de l'effet réseau hors des réseaux apparaît en conséquence limité. Les auteurs l'expliquent par les conséquences involontaires de l'organisation en réseau: les activités des réseaux semblent régies davantage par les programmes gouvernementaux que par les objectifs stratégiques des ONG; loin de tenir un discours qui interne les campagnes répondent, dans leurs buts, les compromis

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