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How corporatist institutions shape the access of citizen groups to policy-makers: evidence from Denmark and Switzerland

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ABSTRACT

Traditional corporatist groups such as business groups and unions still play an important role in many countries, and the rumors exaggerate the decline of corporatist structures. Nevertheless citizen groups have grown in number and political importance. The authors show that Danish and Swiss citizen groups have gained better access to the administrative and parliamentary venues in the period 1975–1985 through 2010, but with Swiss citizen groups more successful than their Danish counterparts, particularly with regard to the parliamentary venue. Danish and Swiss neo-corporatism has confronted similar socio-economic and political challenges during this period, but the political opportunity structure is more favorable towards citizen groups in Switzerland than in Denmark. The Swiss referendum institution makes parliamentarians more open to popular demands while in Denmark strong unions, a strong parliament and frequent minority governments make it more difficult for citizen groups to be heard.

KEYWORDS Citizen groups; corporatism; Denmark; political opportunity structure; Switzerland

Introduction

Despite profound socio-economic and political changes, neo-corporatist systems in Europe have remained relatively resilient since the 1970s in terms of interest group intermediation and policy-making (Armingeon 2011; Binderkrantz and Christiansen 2015). Interest groups remain indispensable for governments in the implementation of public policy even if many governments have attempted to grant greater autonomy to organized interests. While much has been written on the fate of corporatist structures and actors, less is known about the integration of citizen groups in political and administrative decision-making processes.

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The traditional corporatist partners are unions and business associations but also include professional groups and institutional groups. Through corporatist intermediation, the most powerful organizations have traditionally enjoyed a particularly privileged position. In the European context, Lowery *et al.* (2015: 1221–4) note that corporatist intermediation systems are, by definition, the ultimate form of bias, as they clearly privilege venue access and policy influence to a limited number of favored groups. In this light, one might speculate as to how different corporatist heritages affect the advent and possible political positions of citizen groups that enter the decision-making arena from somewhere other than society's economic sector. Berry (1999) claims that citizens are increasingly engaged in non-economic groups, such as environmental groups, consumer rights, elderly groups and the promotion of civil rights. This raises questions as to whether their chances of being integrated into the political and administrative decision-making processes are affected by the prevailing national corporatist traditions.

This cross-country study compares the presence of traditional insiders (business associations, trade unions, professional groups and institutional groups) and citizen groups (public interest, identity and religious groups) in the administrative and parliamentary venues in the decade 1975–1985 versus 2010 in two different corporatist settings. It is based on comparative data on access of interest groups to the two venues. Access focuses on presence or absence of groups in decision-making structures. It does not capture the influence of groups in policy processes. Access to institutional venues is a precondition for any policy influence and political power, however, for which reason it deserves attention (Eising 2007).

The next section introduces the literatures on corporatism and political opportunity structures as a theoretical point of departure and develops two main expectations. First, citizen groups have strengthened their positions in decision-making processes of both countries. Second, Swiss citizen groups have been more successful than their Danish counterparts in gaining access to administrative and parliamentary venues. We then present the empirical set-up and the study's data. Finally, we discuss the main findings and put them into perspective.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses: common trends, different political opportunity structures

Corporatism is defined as the 'institutionalized and privileged integration of organized interests in the preparation and/or implementation of public policies' (Christiansen *et al.* 2010: 28). The logic of privileging some interest groups at the cost of others is straightforward. In a corporatist system, policy-makers need a selected group with whom they can deliberate, negotiate and bargain. Over time, some groups succeed in becoming accepted partners

that can be trusted to engage in ongoing relationships. Groups enjoying such privileges will fight to maintain their monopoly representation by keeping competitors and newcomers away from the decision-making arenas.

The stock of all mobilized groups is an imperfect mirror of the society from which they emanate, as political access for these groups is biased (Lowery *et al.* 2015). The heavy weight carried by unions, business associations and institutional groups in the first three quarters of the twentieth century reflects the enormous societal efforts invested in the development of modern agriculture, industries and services in the private sector, as well as education, health and social services in the public sector. The development of modern production systems mobilized groups based on economic and reproductive issues.

While economic associations remain important, the mobilization of groups has shifted over the past four decades. We have witnessed the advent of new values (e.g., environmentalism), new cleavages (e.g., authoritarian–libertarian) and new political issues (e.g., immigration, morality or cultural issues), all of which are not or loosely related to neo-corporatist issues. Even if collective action problems are more difficult to overcome for groups mobilized on these bases, new groups are actually formed (see Jordan *et al.* 2012 for the United Kingdom [UK] and United States of America [USA]; Fisker 2015 for Denmark; Gava *et al.* 2016 for Switzerland). Citizen groups may not be as strong as economic associations in terms of delivering expertise, but they do possess some of the resources demanded by decision-makers (e.g., information about public mood, legitimization of political decisions and electoral support, cf. Binderkrantz *et al.* 2015), and they challenge traditional corporatist structures.

In order to understand what can happen when a corporatist system confronts new groups from outside the economic sector, we draw on literatures on corporatism and political opportunity structures (POS). We compare two corporatist countries with different POS at two different times. We argue that their corporatist structures have been exposed to roughly the same pressures, and we then ask whether their POS affect the opportunities available to citizen groups to gain access to decision-making arenas. We thus exploit a co-variational approach (cf. Blatter and Haverland 2012: 33ff.): if we observe co-variation between the access of citizen groups and the differences in POS and there is no plausible co-variation between citizen group access and other control variables, we may conclude that the POS probably have an impact on the rise of citizen groups.

Common trends: the rise of citizen groups and pressure on neo-corporatist systems

Interest groups are important for decision-makers because they can deliver valued goods in exchange for access to decision-making arenas. Defined

simply, access goods may be either *information* or *political support/resistance* (Binderkrantz *et al.* 2015). Economic groups obviously control both resources. Citizen groups have unique knowledge about the segment of society they represent, and they may support or oppose decision-makers' agendas in important issues, such as environmental policy, consumer matters or social policies.

Between-group competition is supposedly less intense in corporatist systems than in pluralist environments because some insider groups have exploited their access goods to obtain privileged access to political actors and tend to be more resourceful in terms of members, finance and expertise. Citizen groups enjoy less favorable access to decision-making arenas in corporatist countries than in pluralist countries. The propensity to form citizen groups is lower and the costs of access to decision-making venues higher in corporatist systems (see Fisker 2015). We cannot test this claim here because we examine two corporatist systems. We can, however, investigate what happens when corporatism comes under pressure. This happened in Denmark and Switzerland during the last four decades. Besides the affirmation of new citizen groups, four transformations at work represent more favorable opportunities for citizen groups to gain access to decision-makers.

First, *retrenchment policies* have come to take up much more space on the government agenda. Evidence from Denmark (Blom-Hansen *et al.* 2012) and Switzerland (Häusermann *et al.* 2004; Sciarini 2014) shows that retrenchment decisions are difficult to carry out within corporatist structures, partly due to the related logic of exchange between corporatist partners.¹ On the other hand, such decisions put corporatist actors, especially trade unions, under pressure: retrenchment policies possibly give specific citizen groups (humanitarian groups, disability organizations or associations for the elderly) incentives to mobilize against cuts and program curtailments.

Second, the *mediatization* of politics implies that the media are increasingly shaping political processes (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999). Clear traces of mediatization are found in Denmark (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010) and Switzerland (Landerer 2014). Mediatized processes contrast closed and secret negotiations among neo-corporatist partners, which have a low news value. Mediatization is therefore increasingly incompatible with corporatist policy-making. Mediatized policy processes may enhance citizen groups who have a comparative (but not absolute) advantage in gaining media access (Binderkrantz *et al.* 2015: 105–6).

Third, a *re-parliamentarization* process with possible consequences for group advocacy strategies has been at work. The famous Rokkan quote 'votes count, resources decide' (1966: 105–6) hinted that the administrative venue was more important than the parliamentary venue for corporatist groups. This may have been true, but we observe a relative shift in the balance between the two venues (Rommetvedt *et al.* 2013). The Swiss and

Danish parliaments have increased their power *vis-à-vis* the government. They have introduced permanent committees, and MPs have specialized in selected policy areas. Interest groups – including citizen groups – are thus expected to invest more intensively in the parliamentary venue because of MPs' increased competencies (Eichenberger *et al.* 2016; Sciarini *et al.* 2015). Like the media arena, the parliamentary arena grants citizen groups a comparative advantage in terms of access because they can offer parliamentarians information and support (or resistance) (Binderkrantz *et al.* 2015: 105–6).

Fourth, the *Europeanization* of public policies has moved some decision-making power from the national to the EU level, and groups have increasingly been forced to orient themselves towards Brussels (Christensen 2010). Switzerland has adopted parts of EU law in order to be part of the Single Market (Gava and Varone 2014). Swiss decision-making processes are also directly affected by Europeanization, as is obviously also the case for EU member state Denmark. In Europeanized policies, pre-parliamentary negotiations between national neo-corporatist actors are weakened (Mach *et al.* 2003; Sciarini 2014), parliamentary oversight of Europeanized processes is increasing over time, and citizen groups aim at contributing to this scrutiny exercise (Gava *et al.* 2016).

The increasing role of citizen groups since the 1970s and the structural pressures on corporatist regimes have contributed to transforming the policy-making process towards increased openness to citizen group participation. The joint effect leads to the first hypothesis, according to which *present-day citizen groups in Switzerland and Denmark have better access to political arenas than in the 1970s and 1980s.*

Differences in political opportunity structures

While our first hypothesis postulates that citizen groups challenge the corporatist groups' strong positions in both countries, the next question is how this challenge is spelled out in two corporatist societies with different political opportunity structures.

The POS literature analyses the variations with which social movements are integrated into social and political structures. Kitschelt (1986: 63) points out a number of factors that determine the openness of a political system towards new demands from organized interests. To these factors belong the patterns of intermediation between interest groups and decision-makers and the extent to which they are 'pluralist' or not. Kriesi *et al.* (1992) distinguish between three POS properties that determine how a political system includes or excludes social movements: formal institutional structure, informal procedures and strategies with respect to how challengers are met and, finally, the 'configuration of power relevant for the confrontation with challengers' (Kriesi *et al.* 1992: 220). By the latter, they refer to strategies pursued by

existing insiders (i.e., corporatist groups) and their possible effect on the challengers' prospects for success (i.e., citizen groups).

Despite similar corporatist characteristics, Denmark and Switzerland have important differences in their POS that might affect the political integration of citizen groups.

First, they differ in how they configure power. Whereas Denmark represents the social version of democratic corporatism (strong labor movement and a strong social democratic party), Switzerland belongs to the liberal version, with weak unions and politically strong business associations (Katzenstein 1985: 104–5, 129).

Danish corporatism dates back to the early 1900s, when labor unions had grown strong enough to enter into agreements with the main employers' organization on basic labor market rules (Christiansen and Nørgaard 2003). Corporatist structures later developed to cover policy areas such as education, judicial policy and environmental policy, and institutional groups such as Local Government Denmark or the Association of Danish High School Leaders grew strong. Danish corporatism is characterized by strong business and labor organizations, strong institutional groups and close relations to the state. In Switzerland, economic peak associations have traditionally been considered influential political actors. In a context of an underdeveloped central state, weak national political parties, and a weakly professionalized parliament, major economic interest groups have played a key policy role due to their resources (in terms of finances, membership, expertise and institutional recognition). By contrast, trade unions remained fragmented along confessional and professional cleavages and never reached Danish unionization levels. Trade unions were not integrated in corporatist structures until the 1930s (Eichenberger and Mach 2011).

Danish social corporatism grants trade unions a much stronger position than in Switzerland. Since strong unions already represent or incorporate the demands of some citizen interests, it is probably more difficult for Danish groups to win access than for Swiss citizen groups.

Second, some central formal institutions distinguish both countries, which might affect citizen group access to the decision-making process. First, Denmark is a unitary state with a strong central government, whereas Switzerland is a federal state with a comparatively weak central state, largely relying on the collaboration of civil society groups. Second, direct democracy in Denmark is in practice confined to EU-related issues, whereas Switzerland has unique traditions for frequent popular referenda that makes the Swiss political élite more permissive towards new demands from different groups. Third, Switzerland has a (still) weakly professionalized parliament, with many MPs linked to various groups, whereas the Danish parliament underwent professionalization earlier. Such differences might affect the connections of MPs to interest groups and their access to the parliamentary venue.

Finally, while Bloodgood *et al.* (2014: 724) underline that restrictive regulations towards NGOs are much more developed in corporatist countries, Switzerland appears to be the only corporatist country with permissive regulations towards NGOs. The POS appear to be more open to citizen groups in Switzerland than in Denmark.

If we take into account the differences between both countries concerning their formal institutions and informal practices towards citizen groups, as a second hypothesis, we expect that *Swiss citizen groups have been more successful than Danish citizen groups in establishing access to decision-makers in the period from the 1970s/1980s to 2010.*

Data

To assess empirically if and to what extent citizen groups have succeeded in gaining access to the administrative and parliamentary venues, we have gathered comparative data documenting group presence for both countries in the 1970s–early 1980s, the height of corporatism in both countries, and in 2010, 30–40 years later, a period marked by the affirmation and consolidation of new citizen groups and important pressures on corporatist regimes. **Table 1** overviews data.

The *administrative venue* is often considered the most important, as this is where groups may achieve the strongest positions via membership of public committees, regular negotiations with civil servants and so forth. Expertise concerning the government machinery and putting legislation together rests with the administration, and groups may be involved in formulating political advice, preparing legislative decisions or implementing policy programs. Groups also supply politically relevant information and support that is valuable for administrators because of pending political processes in and around the parliament.

Table 1. Overview of the data gathered.

Access to institutional venue	Administration		Parliament	
	Pre-parliamentary committees and public consultations		Parliamentary committees and Plenum	
	Permanent access	Ad-hoc mobilization	Permanent access	Ad hoc mobilization
Denmark	Seats in extra-parliamentary committees (1975 and 2010)	Answers during consultations (2009/2010)	MPs employed by interest groups and MPs with leading IG positions (1975 and 2010)	Letters to legislative committees (1975 and 2010)
Switzerland	Seats in extra-parliamentary committees (1980 and 2010)	Answers during consultations (2010)	MPs paid officials of IGs or leading positions (1985 and 2010)	Interest ties of MPs in legislative committees (1985 and 2010)

The *parliamentary venue* is also important, but far fewer MPs are policy specialists, which renders it more difficult for groups to establish strong relations with MPs and, thus, gain a hand in setting the agenda and formulating policy (Binderkrantz *et al.* 2015). Some groups may establish close relations with MPs by having them on their board or payroll.

Data capture two main categories of groups. Corporatist groups include: (1) unions; (2) business associations; (3) institutional groups (e.g., Local Government Denmark); and (4) professional groups (e.g., Swiss Medical Association). Citizen groups include: (1) public interest groups promoting common goods (e.g., World Wildlife Fund); (2) identity groups representing a delimited constituency (e.g., women, tenants, minorities, patients); (3) religious groups (e.g., Swiss Evangelical Alliance); and (4) leisure groups (e.g., scout groups).

Empirical analysis

Administrative venue

In both countries, committees have been an important venue for corporatist policy-making throughout the twentieth century, which has been viewed as the strongest indicator of the strength of corporatism. To the extent that numbers count, the 1970s are the strongest hour of both committee systems (Christiansen *et al.* 2010; Germann 1985).

Two major changes have occurred in the committee system since the 1970s (cf. Table 2). The first is a substantive drop in committee numbers in both countries: from 327 in 1975 to 251 in 2010 in Denmark, and from 298 in 1980 to 217 in 2010 in Switzerland.²

The second change concerns the function of the committee system. In 1975 in Denmark, 46 per cent of all committees were somehow involved in policy preparation, either with the function to recommend or even draft policies to handle a politically defined problem. Today, only 10 per cent are occupied with policy preparation (Christiansen *et al.* 2010). Today, policies are prepared within the ministerial hierarchies under the full control of ministers

Table 2. Seats in permanent extra-parliamentary committees: distribution across group types.

Committee seats (%)	Denmark			Switzerland		
	1975	2010	Change	1980	2010	Change
Corporatist groups	87.5	83.8	-3.7	83.1	76.0	-7.1
Unions	28.7	25.4	-3.3	19.7	19.6	-0.1
Business	46.1	39.2	-6.9	43.6	36.3	-7.3
Institutional	10.4	14.2	+3.8	12.4	14.4	+2.0
Professional	2.3	5.0	+2.7	7.4	5.8	-1.6
Citizen groups	12.5	16.2	+3.7	16.9	24.0	+7.1
Total seats occupied by IG representatives	1,073	1,622		1009	480	
Total Committees	327	251		298	217	

and civil servants. Groups are consulted and sometimes involved in negotiations, but the close, institutionalized integration of groups in policy-making through committees is an almost closed chapter.

Despite fewer policy-preparing committees, the Danish committee system as a whole remains viable as 251 permanent committees remain in 2010, and as [Table 2](#) shows, groups have more seats in 2010 than in 1975 despite the lesser number of committees. Even if citizen groups have more seats in 2010 than in 1975, corporatist groups are more overrepresented in the present committee system if we take the entire population of interest groups into account.³

In sum, the Danish committee system is still viable as a venue for the integration of groups into administrative and advisory tasks. Groups even have more seats today than in 1975, and citizen groups have a larger share of the groups today compared to 1975, even if they remain heavily underrepresented.

Switzerland has also seen a dramatic drop in the number of extra-parliamentary committees, and they play a less important role in the legislative process because of the revalorization of the parliament and the increasing difficulty of reaching compromises during the pre-parliamentary phase ([Häusermann et al. 2004](#); [Sciarini 2014](#)). Contrary to Denmark, however, the number of group representatives has significantly declined in line with the reduced number of committees. Furthermore, business associations have clearly declined, whereas the position of trade unions remains stable and the number of citizen group representatives has increased. Swiss citizen groups have fared better than the Danish. For example, the traditionally very corporatist Committee for Economic Affairs, which was only composed of representatives of business associations and trade unions (with a few economics professors), has been enlarged since 2000 to also include representatives of consumer associations and environmental and humanitarian groups.

A second indicator of the relation between groups and bureaucracy is how interest groups react to administrative consultations. In both countries, the government sends out draft bills for comments before they are presented to parliament. Invitations are sent out broadly, mostly to public authorities and groups, and it is also possible for non-invited groups to respond.

The consultation procedure is probably more important in Switzerland than in Denmark because of the optional referendum: i.e., the opportunity to contest the parliament's decision in a popular vote. The aim of this external consultation is, thus, to 'test' the political acceptability of a legislative proposal by the main stakeholders. If key actors voice strong opposition to the proposal, the bill will most likely be revised in order to avoid an *ex post* optional referendum.

Unfortunately, we do not have data for the 1970s. [Table 3](#) shows group participation in the consultation procedure in 2009/10 in Denmark and 2010 in

Table 3. Answers to administrative consultations: distribution across group types.

Answers to consultations (%)	Denmark 2009/10	Switzerland 2010
Corporatist groups	78.8	68.2
Unions	20.0	4.4
Business	41.1	42.7
Institutional	14.9	5.0
Professional	2.8	16.1
Citizen groups	21.2	31.8
Total Answers	1692	2206

Switzerland. In Denmark, 416 unique groups submitted 1,692 substantial responses. The distribution of answers is not very different from the distribution of group seats in committees. Corporatist groups produced almost 80 per cent of the answers, slightly more than half of which are produced by business associations (Binderkrantz *et al.* 2014). Swiss business associations produced 43 per cent of 2,206 answers, whereas trade unions, which enjoy privileged access to extra-parliamentary committees (20 per cent of seats), are not very active in the consultation procedures (4 per cent). The reverse is true for professional groups, with no privileged access to extra-parliamentary committees (5 per cent of seats), but which are more present during ad hoc consultations. Finally, Swiss citizen groups are much more active in administrative consultations (32 per cent) than in extra-parliamentary committees (24 per cent) and much more active than the Danish citizen groups.

On the whole, Danish and Swiss administrative venues are still dominated by corporatist groups, even if citizen groups have improved their foothold slightly, particularly in Switzerland. Citizen groups are also more present during consultation procedures than in the extra-parliamentary committees, where corporatist insiders continue to dominate.

Parliamentary venue

The parliamentary venue is also important for groups, as it has the power to amend proposals put forward by the government and ultimately passes legislation. Groups that failed to affect administrative proposals and decisions may compensate by trying to affect MPs' legislative behavior. Some groups may have privileged relations to parties because they share similar goals or to individual MPs because they entertain direct relations, such as employment relations or occupying leading positions.

As in other neo-corporatist countries, major Danish and Swiss parties have historically had close relations to economic associations, such as business associations, trade unions or farmers' associations. This common legacy should, however, be nuanced concerning the statute of the parliament and how MPs are connected to groups. Whereas the Danish Parliament underwent an early professionalization process, the Swiss Parliament remained an outlier

in the European context due to its weak professionalization. Until the 1990s, Swiss MPs were remunerated very modestly according to the ‘militia principle’, meaning that they are not full-time politicians and still exercise a main professional occupation alongside their parliamentary mandate. This largely explains the economic interests of Swiss MPs, especially through leading positions in business associations and trade unions, board memberships or as CEOs.

As regards the permanent access of groups to the parliament, MPs may have previously been employed by or held leading positions in a group. Such historic relations create unique opportunities for access by and receptiveness towards groups. When such relations are still intact – via a leading position or type of employment – the relevant groups are even more privileged in terms of access and potential influence.

A comparison of the number of paid officials from groups and MPs in leading group positions reveals pronounced differences between the two countries. Whereas paid officials were completely absent in the Danish Parliament already in the 1970s, such associative officials remain present in the Swiss Parliament in 2010. Around 12 per cent of Swiss national councilors were salaried by an interest group in the 1970s, and 7.5 per cent (15 out of 200) were still paid officials of groups in 2010 (Table 4).

The two countries also differ considerably in terms of leading positions held by MPs. In Denmark, party–interest group relations crumbled during the late twentieth century. The Liberal Party looked for new voter groups to replace the still fewer farmers, while the Social Democrats correspondingly looked for replacements for the shrinking manual workers. At the same time, formal organizational ties with the unions disappeared (Allern *et al.* 2007). In 1975, 47 per cent of Danish MPs had held a leading position at some point (e.g., as board chair, member or elected shop steward), and 19

Table 4. Leading positions and paid officials in groups for MPs.

	Denmark: MPs occupying leading positions (% of total MPs)			Switzerland ^a : MPs as paid officials (% of total MPs)			Switzerland ^a : Proportion of leading positions held by MPs (% of total leading positions)		
	1975	2010	Diff.	1980	2010	Diff.	1985	2010	Diff.
Corporatist groups	8.4	2.2	–6.2	7.0	5.0	–2.0	72.2	40.2	–32.0
Unions	5.0	.6	–4.4	2.5	2.0	–0.5	9.8	4.0	–5.8
Business	2.2	.6	–1.6	4.5	3.0	–1.5	42.2	22.3	–19.9
Institutional	.6	1.0	+6	0	0	0	17.3	7.7	–9.6
Professional	.6	0	–6	0	0	0	2.9	6.2	+3.3
Citizen groups	10.6	13.4	+2.8	1.5	2.5	+1.0	27.8	59.8	+32.0
Total	19.0	15.6	–3.4	8.5	7.5	–1.0	100	100	

Sources: Denmark: 1975: *Folketingets Håndbog*. 2010: *Folketinget efter valget*. Switzerland: Eichenberger *et al.* 2016 (paid officials); *Registre des liens d'intérêt* 1985 and 2010 (leading positions).

^aOnly National Council for Switzerland. Total leading positions in *national* interest groups (local and regional interest groups excluded): 1985 = 182 (9 missing), 2010 = 323 (16 missing).

per cent still held such a position while in Parliament (data not presented here). In 2010, far fewer MPs had previous experience from corporatist groups, while more had previous experience with leading citizen group positions. Looking at MPs' positions while in parliament (Table 4), the picture also changes. Leading positions have gone from few (8 per cent) to almost none (2 per cent) for corporatist groups, while the level has increased slightly for citizen groups (from 11–13 per cent).

In the weakly professionalized Swiss parliament, MPs much more frequently hold leading positions in various groups. The presidents of some top economic associations have repeatedly been MPs during the twentieth century. While the number of paid officials has declined, the number of leading positions in groups occupied by MPs has clearly increased from 1985 to 2010. We also observe a profound development in the leading positions assumed by MPs. MPs are increasingly linked more closely to citizen groups than to corporatist associations. In 2010, citizen groups represented 59.8 per cent of all leading positions in interest groups among MPs.

Regarding policy-related access, we look at contacts made in relation to specific attempts to affect the policy agenda and decisions of MPs. For Denmark, the empirical indicator refers to the number of letters written to parliamentary committees in 1975 and in 2010. Danish parliamentary committees scrutinize bills and discuss general matters regarding relevant issues. The committee or its individual members pose questions to the minister, many of which appear to originate from letters from groups (Pedersen *et al.* 2014). We have identified all letters sent from nationwide groups in the two parliamentary years (359 letters in 1974/75 and 1,071 in 2009/10).

Not surprisingly, Table 5 shows that the mobilization pattern in 1975 was dominated by corporatist groups. However, unions and institutional groups are heavily overrepresented compared to their population share, while

Table 5. Letters or representatives 'sent' by groups to parliamentary committees.

	Denmark: Letters (%) sent to committees			Switzerland: % of leading positions in IGs occupied by MPs in CEAT ^a			Switzerland: % of leading positions in IGs occupied by MPs in CSSH ^a		
	1975	2010	Diff	1985	2010	Diff	1985	2010	Diff
Corporatist groups	73.8	50.4	-23.4	73.5	60.1	-13.4	84.6	47.2	-37.4
Unions	27.0	15.8	-11.2	0.0	7.3	+7.3	11.5	5.6	-5.9
Business	31.5	24.1	-7.4	26.5	36.4	+9.9	38.5	30.6	-7.9
Institutional	10.3	8.4	-1.9	41.2	7.3	-33.9	26.9	2.8	-24.1
Professional	5.0	2.1	-2.9	5.9	9.1	+3.2	7.7	8.3	+0.6
Citizen groups	26.2	49.6	+23.4	26.5	39.9	+13.4	15.4	52.8	+37.4
Total (DK: Letters sent; CH: Leading IG positions)	100%	100%		100%	100%		100%	100%	
	359	1,071		35	55		26	36	

Sources: Registre des liens d'intérêt 1985 and 2010.

^aCEAT: Economic affairs and taxation committee; CSSH: Social security and health affairs committee.

professional associations are underrepresented. The picture has changed significantly in 2010. Corporatist groups in both countries are now underrepresented, whereas citizen groups are overrepresented.

Even though Swiss groups also send letters to parliamentary committees or are heard by these committees, we do not have similar systematic Swiss data concerning the mobilization of groups. As a functional equivalent, we have measured the number of MPs with formal ties to national groups and, at the same time, seats in specialized parliamentary committees that are particularly relevant for groups.⁴ Decisive debates about government legislative proposals take place in these specialized committees. It is therefore crucial for groups to intervene at this stage. The distribution of group ties across various specialized parliamentary committees provides an indication of the strategic presence of groups in the committees.

For corporatist groups, two parliamentary committees are of particular importance: the economic affairs and taxation committee (CEAT) and the social security and health affairs committee (CSSH).⁵ The number of leading positions in citizen groups occupied by MPs has increased in both committees, but much more in the CSSH than in the CEAT (+37.4 per cent versus 13.4 per cent, see [Table 5](#)). In 2010, the CEAT members were much more connected to corporatist groups than the average MP (60.1 per cent versus 40.2 per cent, [Tables 4 and 5](#)). This was already the case in 1985.⁶ In comparison, the committees of less relevance for economic associations, such as the legal affairs and political institutions committees, consist of MPs who are much less connected to economic organizations, whereas the environmental and energy committee is populated by MPs entertaining ties to environmental associations (data not presented here). If there is a clear increase in citizen groups' access to Parliament, it should be nuanced according to the domains of responsibility of the committees. Corporatist groups remain overrepresented in the committees dealing with economic and social policies.

The revalorization and increasing importance of the Parliament, especially its legislative committees, have induced groups to reinforce their presence in the parliamentary venue. They follow a deliberate strategy to 'send' and recruit MPs in relevant parliamentary committees to intensify their influence in this venue (Eichenberger *et al.* 2016).

Comparison and discussion

The empirical data largely support our hypotheses. Our first expectation – that citizen groups increase their presence – is generally supported, even if more for the parliamentary than for the administrative venue. Concerning the latter, we observe a significant decline in the number of extra-parliamentary committees in both countries. As for the composition of these traditional

corporatist structures, changes are not so notable, and both countries exhibit similar trends. In Denmark, corporatist groups (business associations and unions in particular) continue to dominate the administrative venue, as they had privileged access both in 1975 and 2010, but citizen groups have made some minor inroads in terms of increased access. The presence of Swiss business groups in extra-parliamentary committees is also declining, but they remain dominant. Swiss citizen groups are much better represented over time, however, while the position of unions remains stable. Furthermore, business associations are the most active groups during the administrative consultations organized in 2010. Nevertheless, citizen groups formulate about one-third of all comments on specific bills. It is worth noting that Swiss unions are very passive in this step of the pre-parliamentary phase.

Concerning the revalorized parliamentary venue, we notice an increased presence of both corporatist and citizen groups. In Denmark, citizen groups gained increased access to the parliamentary venue as more MPs have a trust link to such organizations than to corporatist associations. In addition, significantly more letters are sent by citizen groups to legislative committees. In Switzerland, the shift is even clearer: while business associations largely dominated in 1985, citizen groups have since strongly increased their connections to MPs. This observation should be nuanced, however, since the absolute number of MPs connected to economic associations has also increased, illustrating their more active strategy towards the parliamentary venue, and corporatist groups are better represented in specialized committees dealing with economic and social policies.

In both countries, citizen groups have clearly become much more present and active in both venues, but particularly in the parliamentary venue. The difference between the administrative and parliamentary venues can probably be explained by a strategy of venue specialization: corporatist groups still dominate the traditional administrative venue, considered as the best arena to negotiate compromises. Business associations in particular are better represented and probably more influential in the administrative venue (Culpepper 2011), whereas citizen groups (have to) follow a strategy of conflict expansion at the parliamentary level and develop strong links to political parties and individual MPs (or, in Switzerland, make use of direct democratic instruments).

Our second expectation – that citizen groups will fare comparatively better in Switzerland than in Denmark – also receives support. In the 1970s–1980s, the composition of extra-parliamentary committees clearly distinguishes the social version of corporatism in Denmark with the much stronger presence of trade unions and the liberal version in Switzerland dominated by business associations. The differences are less clear 30 years later as regards the balance between business associations and trade unions in extra-parliamentary committees, but the difference has grown as regards citizen group

representatives, with 24 per cent of all seats in Switzerland compared to 16 per cent in Denmark (Table 2). The more strongly mobilized Swiss citizen groups are also materialized for administrative consultations. However, the greatest differences are found in the strategies of citizen groups towards the Parliament. Even if access is measured differently in the two countries, the growing presence of Swiss citizen groups in decision-making arenas appears much more outspoken than the Danish.

Conclusion

This study is innovative, as it combines the literature on corporatism and political opportunity structure to cover the rise of citizen groups and the pressures on corporatist systems at two points in time with a 30–40-year interval.

As expected, we observe a general trend towards institutionalization of citizen group participation in administrative and parliamentary venues, which reflects a pluralization of both corporatist systems. Corporatist groups remain the most active by far, but citizen groups have won greater shares of access to decision-makers. This is likely indicative of a more general trend affecting Western societies, including the two countries included in our study.

The case studies on Denmark and Switzerland reveal that the destabilization of traditional corporatist structures has contributed to the affirmation and clearer recognition of new citizen groups highlighted by stronger presence in both the administrative and parliamentary venues. However, increased representation in corporatist structures does not automatically imply more political influence for citizen groups, as corporatist arrangements are playing a less important role in policy-making processes. On this point, it should again be stressed that our comparative study only captures the presence of interest groups and does not allow us to draw conclusions on changes in the power of both categories of interest groups. To address this question, we should consider the power balance within corporatist arrangements and in other institutional venues and policy arenas.

In the new context of mediatized politics, for instance, traditional corporatist insiders, especially business interests, must adapt their political strategies. They cannot rely only on their dominant position in the administrative venue but have to diversify their strategy in order to be more present in the increasingly important parliamentary venue, in the media or at the international level. Some emblematic examples illustrate this trend, such as the media presence of the recently founded think-tank *Avenir Suisse*, financed by multinational companies, or the massive presence of the Danish Federation of Industries in the media (Binderkrantz 2014, 192).

The corporatist heritages of both countries probably reduce the speed with which citizen groups can access decision-makers. Some group entrepreneurs

may renounce start-up groups to whom they ascribe low success probability for influence and organizational survival. However, Denmark underwent fewer changes than Switzerland, where citizen groups have gained more presence and positions in both venues. Because of its more open POS, especially the frequent use of referenda, Switzerland is more open towards popular demands and consequently also towards citizen groups. Swiss politicians are encouraged to be more receptive and responsive towards organized citizens. Swiss direct democracy often leads to the integration of citizen groups in extra-parliamentary committees or to stronger connections with MPs. A strong Danish labor movement itself brings some citizen group issues to the decision-makers, for which reason responsiveness towards citizen groups may be less in Denmark. Examples include the establishment of housing co-operatives, sports clubs and scout-like youth organizations related to the labor movement. Leisure education closely related to the labor unions is another example (Pedersen 1989: 271f.) that may leave fewer opportunities for non-labor movement suppliers of leisure education. Danish labor unions were more than just unions; they became involved in people's lives in many ways. Finally, the more professionalized Danish Parliament and the almost endless minority governments – some of which are weak – may be less in demand for citizen group inputs in the fight for intra-government discipline and government survival.

The present study also provides evidence of important changes in presence and mobilization of interest groups in the administrative and parliamentary venues of the law-making process. This finding paves the way for further studies focusing on 'multi-venue' strategies of interest groups. Concretely, it would make sense to compare specific legislative processes in Switzerland and Denmark (see Pedersen *et al.* 2014) and investigate if and to what extent different (types of) interest groups participate in both administrative consultation (bill preparation) and parliamentary committee activities (bill treatment). Such a process-tracing design should demonstrate if interest groups 'venue shop' and, consequently, if there is a clear revalorization of the parliamentary venue, or if some interest groups still accumulate privileged access to both administration and parliament. Interviews with both corporatist and citizen groups are required to identify their advocacy strategies. In particular, it is worth investigating if increased presence of citizen groups in the parliamentary venue is a deliberate strategy and if it increases policy influence.

Finally, we need to explore if the transformation of corporatist arrangements is similar in all policy domains. Such a policy-contextualized approach raises the question of whether or not citizen groups compete with traditional corporatist associations on similar policy issues or if they rather mobilize on different topics. Differences could also relate to differences regarding the mobilization and access of corporatist versus citizen groups could be more important between policy domains within the same country than across countries.

Notes

1. Conversely, Schnyder and Jackson (2013) stress the dialectical and paradoxical connection between neo-liberal reforms and the preservation of corporatism in Sweden and Germany.
2. We only include permanent extra-parliamentary committees, not ad hoc committees created for a specific task and for which it is difficult to gather systematic information.
3. Corporatist groups dropped from 71 per cent to 58 per cent of the population of groups from 1975 to 2010, but their share of committee seats only dropped from 89 per cent to 84 per cent. Unions are still the most overrepresented group compared to their share of the group population, but they have lost ground to business groups. Altogether, citizen groups make up 42 per cent of all groups, but they only occupy 16 per cent of all committee seats.
4. Permanent parliamentary committees have existed since 1979, but with limited resources, and ad hoc parliamentary committees remain important. The 1992 reform reinforced resources of specialized committees.
5. These committees can be considered least likely cases to test the hypothesis about citizen group access, as they deal with economic and social issues of central importance for traditional corporatist associations.
6. The number of MPs with leading positions in major economic associations peaked in 2010, when the presidents of the Swiss federation of trade unions (USS), the Swiss Industry and trade association (USAM) and the Swiss farmers' association (USP) were all members of this committee.

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