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Government within governance? Polish rural development partnerships through the lens of functional representation[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Functional interest representation, which relates to the representation of discrete sectoral or professional interests, is a fundamental concept underpinning the organisational methodology of EU governance and programmes such as LEADER. The policy rationalisation of LEADER is premised on creating alliances between diverse functional interests so that development can be approached in an integrated way. However, the analytical vantage point of the governance and rural development literature heretofore has been dominated by theories of territorial interest representation with comparatively less focus on the importance of functional interest representation *sui generis*. A prevalent research emphasis has been on interactions between partners and development outcomes of LEADER partnerships. Little research effort has been devoted to discerning the primary functional interests of those who become involved in LEADER partnerships in the first instance, and there is an absence of clear criteria by which sectoral representatives are classified. Our article, presenting empirical research undertaken in post-socialist Poland, presents an analysis of the membership composition of all LEADER LAG decision-making committees nationally, identifying the dominant sectoral affiliations of members. Next we examine the extent to which the thresholds stipulated by EU rules in order to promote balanced representation of statutory, private and third sector interests are actually achieved. We find that while many LEADER partnerships officially appear to adhere to balanced tri-partite membership, more than half of all partnerships are in reality prone to domination or monopolisation by statutory actors. We draw from qualitative interviews to identify explanatory factors for partnerships' failure to represent diverse functional interests. Tensions between territorial and functional interest representation are highlighted and we find that embedded structures within territories can, through relational dynamics such as professional dependency, tokenism and clientelism, impede the realisation of governance processes.

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1. Introduction

Governance, representing a shift from hierarchical top-down government to structures that include non-statutory actors as decision makers in local development processes, is increasingly prominent in the development policy of the EU and further afield (e.g. Rhodes, 1996; Jessop, 1998; Stoker, 1998; Woods, 1998a; Buček and Smith, 2000; Herbert-Cheshire, 2000; Edwards et al., 2001;

Valentinov, 2008; Lu and Jacobs, 2013; Wellbrock et al., 2013; Stead, 2014; Macken-Walsh, 2016). A widely discussed example of EU governance is the European Union's LEADER initiative, which first emerged as a rural diversification initiative in 1991 (Storey, 1999; Ray, 2000; Convery et al., 2010; Pollermann et al., 2014a). The Analyses of the LEADER programme approach highlighted two fundamental principles underpinning its operationalisation: decision-making taking place as close as possible to the site of implementation (principle of subsidiarity); and hierarchical decision-making structures being replaced by mechanisms involving representatives from a wide range of statutory and non-statutory groups (principle of partnership) (Osti, 2000, p. 172). It was envisaged that through adherence to these principles, the governance approach could disrupt the state's traditionally powerful role as the 'local strongman' (Andersson and van

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Laerhoven, 2007) and provide for the representation of diverse sectoral stakeholders at the local level necessary for an integrated and locally appropriate development response (Curtin and Varley, 1997; Shucksmith, 2010). While the principles of subsidiarity and partnership are mutually supportive in achieving governance and rural development aims, they nonetheless correspond to two discrete types of representation. Subsidiarity corresponds to territorial representation (the representation of local interests) while partnership corresponds specifically to functional representation (the representation of different occupational, civic or personal interests).

Functional representation has been frequently conflated with or eclipsed by territorial representation in analyses of governance and rural development heretofore. This may be partially explained by the most radical characteristic of the transition from government to governance laying in its adherence to the principle of subsidiarity, launching important theoretical discussions of territorial (endogenous and neo-endogenous) (Ray, 2006; Shucksmith, 2010; Dax et al., 2016) and place-based development (Wellbrock et al., 2013) based on local needs and knowledge (Adamski and Gorchach, 2007; Floriańczyk et al., 2012; Pollerman et al., 2014a). Functional interest representation, originating in theories of political pluralism, takes a related though different focus. The concept recognises actors' interests as corresponding primarily to what they actually do (their occupations and membership of interest groups) rather than to characteristics such as where they physically live (Vieira and Runciman, 2008, p. 105). Functional interests are crucial to the LEADER development approach and LEADER partnerships' representation of a triad of third, private and statutory sectors underpins the 'transverse inter-sectoral debate' upon which innovative and integrated characteristics of development outcomes depend (Caspar et al., 1997, p. 7). The critical question of 'who represents whom?', posed by Goodwin's (1998, p. 8) interrogative article in this journal, requires ongoing and careful consideration.

The conflation of territorial and functional forms of interest representation is identified as problematic because it leads to neither the individual dynamics of these discrete forms of representation nor their interplay taking the subject of specific analysis or debate (Piattoni, 2011). The "territorial-functional cleavage in the common literature" is acknowledged as a widespread research deficit (Knodt et al., 2011, p. 351), which has not been rigorously addressed in the governance and rural development literature heretofore. In this article, we seek to go some way towards addressing this research deficit by presenting in the first instance a discussion of the particular theoretical contribution that a focus on functional interest representation makes to the governance and rural development literature. We follow this discussion with a presentation of empirical research analysing the membership composition of all 336 decision-making committees of Polish LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs). We analyse a comprehensive official dataset detailing the sectoral affiliations of all members and compare these data with secondary and primary data analysed with the objective of substantiating the official data. We apply the concept of functional representation as a classification tool to profile the primary functional interests of members and on that basis we establish the extent to which balanced interest representation of the third, private and statutory (public) sectors is achieved in membership of decision-making committees of Polish LAGs. We then present an analysis of qualitative data from interviews with members of 45 randomly selected LAG committees to gain insights to factors underpinning the dominance of some functional interests in decision-making bodies and impacts arising on the development processes and outcomes of Polish LEADER programmes.

2. Interest representation and policy relations in EU rural governance

Differences between the concepts of functional representation (interest representation) and territorial (geographic) representation are elaborated for instance by Chubb (1983); Knodt et al. (2011); Piattoni (2011) and Wolff (2013). Functional representation focuses on the representation of groups of actors with one or several shared social, economic or political interests in decision-making processes and territorial representation focuses on the representation of geographic constituencies (e.g. electoral districts) and their territorial interests (Chubb, 1983). Both in policy and in practice, the concepts of functional and territorial interest representation are often conflated, which is partly due to how territorial interests may be defined by particular functional interests and vice versa. For instance, the issue of tourism development is a definitive functional interest while also possibly constituting a territorial interest where a geographic region wishes to develop a specific type of tourism using local resources, for example. However, despite the legitimate grounds upon which functional and territorial interest representation may be conflated, they are different and both are considered necessary for achieving 'composite representation' for good governance (Wolff, 2013, p. 4).

The central concept of functional representation is that peoples' interests are defined by what they do, rather than only by where they do it (Vieira and Runciman, 2008). Examples of functional interest groups are trade unions that represent employees; various civic associations that represent people who have shared hobbies; and interest groups that represent specific concerns, such as minority issues. According to Wolff (2013) groups' different functional interests frame various issues of participation and representation that arise for different social groups, such as for publically and privately funded NGOs; business interests; and expert communities. Myriad issues, such as power relations and resources, impact differently on individual functional interest groups and how they succeed in consolidating, organising and representing their interests in decision-making processes (Macken-Walsh, 2016).

Cooperation and negotiation between different functional as well as territorial representatives in various partnership bodies is a key mechanism of governance processes in European Union policy-making and the management of EU funds (Dąbrowski, 2013; Wolff, 2013; Pollermann et al., 2014a; Prager et al., 2015). For example, different functional interests – such as science, industry, and civil society representatives – are increasingly represented in EU-led knowledge and policy creation initiatives. In the political science literature, Knodt et al. (2011) discuss the emergence of an 'EU model of interest representation' that includes functional interests, independent of territorial or electoral systems becoming represented in influential policy making circles. How different functional interest groups gain prowess, legitimacy, and power in these circles of influence is analysed in this literature. Different attributes of functional interest groups, such as material resources, knowledge, competencies, capacities to act and interact, and tendencies towards entrepreneurship, are associated with the 'success' of some functional interest groups and the 'failure' of others (Knodt et al., 2011, p. 352).

Diverse functional interests are also strategically drawn into governance and rural development programmes and are identified as crucial for generating the "transverse inter-sectoral debate" needed for identifying innovative and integrated development solutions (Caspar et al., 1997, pp. 7–8; Shortall, 2008; Hudečková and Lošťák, 2008; Derksen and Bock, 2009; Halamska, 2011; Delin, 2012; Marquardt et al., 2012; Fatkowski, 2013; Pollerman et al., 2014b; Teilmann and Thuesen, 2014; Prager et al., 2015). It is specifically claimed that partnerships of multi-sectoral interests give

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