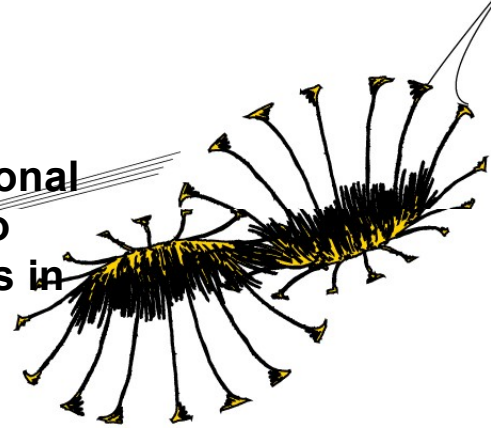


Bachelor Thesis

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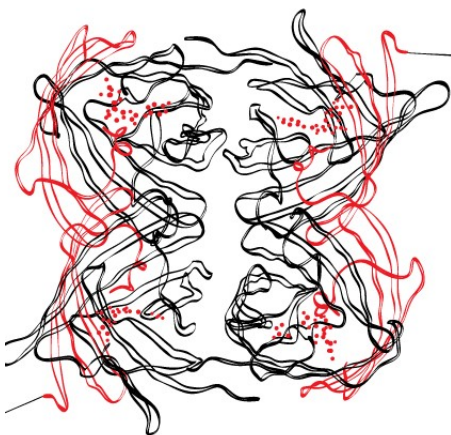
**Examining the pathways national
rectors' conferences select to
fortify their lobbying activities in
the context of Horizon 2020**



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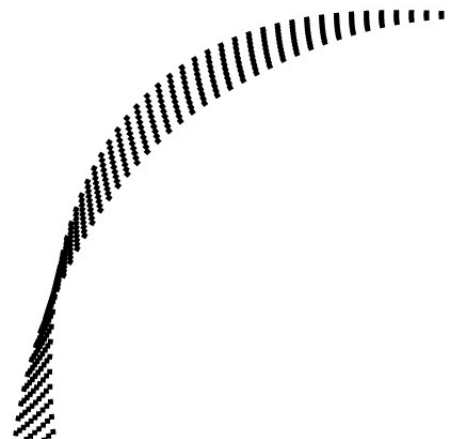


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Executive summary

This thesis examines the pathways along which national rectors' conferences (NRCs) from the Netherlands (VSNU), Finland (UNIFI), Belgium (VLIR) and Spain (CRUE) fortify their lobbying activities in the context of Horizon 2020. In order to do so, it makes use of semi-structured interviews with representatives of NRCs. The resource determinant (Dür, 2008a) and the theory on embeddedness (Beyers, 2002) suggest a number of sub factors constituting the independent variable, whereas pathway selection serves as dependent variable. Are NRCs which are relatively better endowed with suggested factors more likely to lobby at different stages, i.e. select multiple pathways? A brief description of Horizon 2020 is provided to reveal characteristics of the issue at stake, as well as to indicate the relevant political institutions to lobby at. The findings reveal that the analysed NRCs are embedded in domestic systems. Nevertheless, only VSNU is able to use this domestic embeddedness to extensively select the EU pathway. The ability to initiate lobbying activities in Brussels also depends on financial resources, human resources and the geographical location of the NRC. Furthermore, some interviews suggest that a 'nationality match' of the actors to be influenced and the number of national interest groups representing universities can be considered as additional sub factors influencing the ability to select the EU pathway.

1. Introduction

1.1 – Impact of Horizon 2020 on universities

Horizon 2020 is a recently established European Union (EU) framework programme, succeeding the Seventh Framework Programme. It aims to boost research and innovation (R&I) in general within as well as outside EU territories by implementing the Innovation Union, “a Europe 2020 flagship initiative aimed at securing Europe’s global competitiveness” (European Commission, n.d.¹). This renewed framework programme is of importance for universities as it provides funding for their research programmes. Therefore, one may expect that groups representing the interests of universities attempt to assist their members gaining access to research grants under Horizon 2020 or to ensure their members at least benefit from this newly constituted programme. Similarly, these ‘national university organisations’ or ‘national rectors’ conferences’ (NRCs²) may influence the conditions set for obtaining research grants. The context as described above suggests NRCs to promote the interests of its members by setting up lobbying activities in order to influence decision-makers. This thesis examines how NRCs conduct their lobbying activities with regards to Horizon 2020.

Policy making, decision making and implementation within the structures and institutions of the EU can be regarded as complex (Pollack, 1997). Consequently, the concept of multilevel governance (MLG) has been introduced by Marks & Hooghe (2001) to illustrate the multilevel actions of actors involved in EU policy processes.

The thesis seeks to contribute to this concept by “assessing the effect embeddedness and a privileged position within institutional contexts can have on interest group strategies” (Callanan, 2010:18). Thelen & Steinmo (1992) add that “the domestic institutional system or ‘landscape’ within which interest groups operate, as well as the resources of interest groups themselves, will be important factors in interest group strategies” (Thelen & Steinmo, 1992, as cited by Callanan, 2010:19). Kohler-Koch (1997) stresses the need for domestic interest groups to pursue a ‘dual strategy’, implying that they should consider taking two pathways to lobby: their domestic institutions and the EU. Dür (2008b) reiterates this point by stating that “in future research on interest group influence in the EU it will be essential to consider the existence of distinct pathways to influence” (Dür, 2008b: 1223). On a more general note, Eising (2008) argues that broadening the literature, like the one on vertical relations in multilevel systems, can uncover ‘important new research problems’ (Eising, 2008: 21). Applying this academic review to our case implies that NRCs, which are mainly operating in a domestic environment, could represent interests at the domestic and the EU stage.

Three of the issues mentioned above will further be analysed in this thesis. First, along which pathways do NRCs attempt to fortify their lobbying strategies? Second, what is the effect of domestic institutional persistence (i.e. domestic embeddedness) on pathway selection? Third, how do NRC’s resources relate to pathway selection?

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/Horizon_2020/en/what-horizon-2020, accessed 15 July 2014

² ‘NRCs’ appear to be predominantly used from in the European context and is therefore used in this thesis as generic term.

Thus, NRCs could select EU and domestic actors to lobby at, but we consider their resources and domestic embeddedness as factors influencing this selection.

The structure of this thesis will be as follows. First, methodological issues and the institutional architecture of Horizon 2020 will be addressed, hence the factors which may influence pathway selection will be highlighted in a theoretical framework. Thirdly the thesis incites a discussion of the main findings, followed by a conclusion and – lastly – some words on what further research should focus on.

1.2 – Research questions

As we attempt to unfold the pathways NRCs take to represent the interests of their members, the first research question of this thesis is:

- 1. Along which pathways do national rectors' conferences fortify their lobbying activities in the context of Horizon 2020?*

This question presents the dependent variable (pathway selection) and describes the actors relevant for NRCs when representing the interests of their members. Although multiple studies have tried to measure the exact influence of lobbying (e.g. Michalowitz, 1994), the reliability and validity of such studies expose dependency on case selection, measurement instruments and the appearance of spurious variables that, alongside the specific way(s) of lobbying, determine policy outcomes (Dür, 2008b). The first research question attempts to avoid this pitfall by examining the pathway selection instead of the degree of effectiveness. There might be a relation between pathway selection and the degree of effectiveness; however this relation does not fall under the scope of the research conducted in this thesis.

The second aim of this thesis is to clarify the influence of resource endowment and domestic embeddedness on pathway selection. Beyers (2002) argues that domestic institutional persistence could lead to different outcomes with regards to the employment of Euro-level lobbying strategies, i.e. selecting the EU pathway. Dür (2008a) states that resource endowment relates to the ability of successfully lobbying governmental or political actors. This relation can be modified to explore the possible effects of resource endowment on pathway selection, as sketched by Thelen & Steinmo (1992). Thus, the second research question examines the relation between resource endowment and domestic embeddedness (independent variable) on the one hand, and pathway selection (dependent variable) on the other.

- 2. What are the effects of resource endowment and domestic embeddedness on pathway selection?*

Organisations relatively better endowed with certain resources, such as human and financial resources, would be able to select multiple pathways although there is no available empirical evidence which supports this *a priori* assumption. We assume that NRCs, as interest representatives of domestic universities, are well-embedded in their domestic institutional system. These universities operate nationally and are mainly dependent on their respective government in terms of funding, leading to the assumption that NRCs primarily lobby at domestic actors. As examined by Beyers

(2002), the effect of domestic institutional persistence may have different implications for the selection of the EU pathway, as we will contemplate in the theoretical framework. Figure 1.1 presents the questioned relations.



Figure 1.1: Variables and questioned relations (marked red)

1.3 – Horizon 2020

The purpose of this section is to describe the institutional architecture of Horizon 2020, particularly its three pillars.

Horizon 2020 was formally established by Council regulation COM/2011/0809 (European Council, 2011) and serves as successor of the Seventh Framework Programme. It includes a budget of approximately 80 billion euro to boost research and innovation throughout the EU. This amount equals a 30% increase compared to its predecessor.

Horizon 2020 is part of Europe2020, a long-term strategy of the EU for sustainable development. This framework programme was established to implement the Innovation Union, one of the flagships of Europe2020 merging the previous Funding Programme for Research and Technological Development, the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology. Approximately 15 billion euro of the program is expected to be released in the 2014-2015 period. Public consultations were used to cover the necessary societal aspects of R&I.

International media coverage revealed growing national ambitions and competition among Member States in order to obtain as much funds as possible. Ireland, for example, hopes to raise 1.25 billion euro whereas approximately 950 million euro is required to achieve a break-even point with the country's total annual contribution to the EU (O'Carroll, 2014). The Dutch benefited during the Sixth Framework Programme already: each invested euro in EU R&I policies yielded 1,40 euro for R&I purposes (Rijksoverheid, 2014). An ambitious goal has been set by Denmark as well. The country aims to raise its share from 2,36% to 2,5% under Horizon 2020, which equals two billion euro (Myklebust, 2013).

Excellent Science

Innovation and research priorities are set within three distinguished areas, Excellent Science, Industrial Leadership and Societal Challenges. The Excellent Science pillar aims "to reinforce and extend the excellence of the Union's science base and to consolidate the European Research Area in order to make the Union's R&I system

more competitive on a global scale” (European Commission, n.d.²). More specifically, this pillar has four main objectives:

1. Flexible funding to individual research ‘to promise the most promising avenues at the frontier of science.’ The European Research Council provides this funding which equals a provisional amount of 13 million euro. Grants are categorised from ‘starting’ to ‘advanced’ and ‘proof of concept’ in which researchers could test the potential of their product on the market itself.
2. Future and emerging technologies (FETs) are expected to support collaborative and interdisciplinary research and accelerate development of ‘high-risk ideas’. Three supplementing lines of action have been granted a budget of 2.6 million euro for the 2014-2020 period. FET Open is meant for new technologies for which conventional approaches have been applied to a limited extent. FET Proactive henceforth attempts to seek for researchers that wish to further investigate new ideas if they have been proven successful in the FET Open stage. The most ambitious line of FET is FET Flagships: 10year flagships including 10 billion euro to find joint forces and tackle technological challenges of today, such as simulating the functioning of the brain.
3. Research trainings on career development are offered by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions. These MSCA comprise a total budget of 6,2 million euro and specifically aims at cross-sectoral mobility with innovation as main engine behind new projects. The three MSCA projects include: support for Innovative Training Networks (ITNs), Individual Fellowships (IF) and cooperation through R&I Staff Exchanges (RISE).
4. Financial support to European Research Infrastructures, including einfrastructures, to connect national infrastructures and bolster the European Research Area. Transnational collaboration and integration of national infrastructures are complex and costly, according to the European Council (Commission, 2013).

Industrial Leadership

The second pillar, Industrial Leadership attempts to approach European business, specifically small- and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Although the Excellent Science pillar is essential for universities as it involves their researchers to a high extent, most technology-based universities are increasingly cooperating within the so called Triple Helix (Etzkowitz, 1993), the triangle of innovation in which governmental actors and businesses play pivotal roles. As a result, universities are likely to profit from subsidies for innovative start-ups as well. By focusing on SMEs, this pillar underpins three main aspects:

1. Leadership in Enabling and Industrial Technologies. Primarily focuses on improving competitiveness, creating jobs and supporting economic growth in general by means of PPS (public-private cooperation) and using rapidly developing ICT opportunities. Nano- and biotechnologies as well as technological developments for space programmes are considered.
2. Access to risk finance. Generally advises companies on how to be more attractive for financial institutions and private investors. Institutions as the

² http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/Horizon_2020/en/h2020-section/excellent-science, accessed 15 July

European Investment Bank (EIB) as well as the European Investment Fund (EIF) serve as mediators and link companies to financial institutions.

3. Innovation in SMEs. This objective aims to bundle and further develop capacity of innovation management within SMEs. It relies on the SMEinstrument releasing innovation grants for businesses. It also financially supports other indirect forms of assistance to SMEs such as the Enterprise Europe Network and the EUREKA/Eurostarts Joint Programme Initiative.

Societal Challenges

The third pillar, Societal Challenges, tries to mitigate negative external effects of globalization, such as cross-border pollution, terrorism and dependency on natural resources. One of its priority areas is Health, Demography and Wellbeing. Here, maximizing efficiency and effectiveness by connecting national medical facilities and research by establishing and further developing EU wide programmes such as innovating new medicines or creating a platform for best-practice sharing regarding brain diseases. This procedure is more or less followed by other initiatives within Societal Challenges, such as food security, integrated transport systems and resource efficiency.

There is a certain connection visible among the three pillars. Whereas the basics of new technologies and products are being assisted within the Excellent Science pillar, involving researchers directly, SMEs serve as mediator between researchers and society by using new ideas and technologies to eventually develop new products for society. The third pillar connects different ranges of society, both cross-domestic and cross-sectional, in order to observe the impact of R&I. Then, the circle starts all over again with interdisciplinary research in general.

1.4 – Research design

Case Selection

Four NRCs will be analysed in this thesis: *Vereniging Samenwerking Nederlandse Universiteiten* (VSNU, The Netherlands), *Conferencia de Rectores de las Universidades Espanolas* (CRUE, Spain), *Universities Finland* (UNIFI, Finland) and *Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad* (VLIR, Flanders). The EUA maintains a member directory in which the above mentioned organisations are included as ‘full collective member’ in their respective countries. Although national contexts differ, we assume that their tasks and role as interest mediator of universities are the same. These four NRCs have been selected on the basis of geography, one of the analysed sub factors which is part of the resources factor. Would NRCs which are situated relatively far away from Brussels, be impeded to establish and maintain ties with EU actors? If so, CRUE and UNIFI would encounter more difficulties when selecting the EU pathway, whereas the geographical situation of VSNU and VLIR offers advantages.

Time constraints are the most important reason why only four NRCs have been selected to analyse in this case study. Another reason concerns the availability of NRCs: not all approached NRCs have been able to schedule an interview, either in person or by phone, and some did not provide answers to the interview protocol. Geographical constraints also played a role: the interview with UNIFI was conducted

by phone and time constraints did not allow for scheduling an interview with the representative of CRUE.

Whereas the application of different observation methods weakens the validity of the research, the relatively small number of cases (N=4) could jeopardize the reliability of the results as well. Ideally, all full collective EUA members (N=34) would have been subject of study. However the time period in which research has been conducted, together with the semi-structured interview method to effectively obtain data, did not allow for analysing 34 units.

Data collection

A cross-sectional research design will be used to analyse and compare the four selected NRCs. Data collection takes place by employing two instruments. First, the thesis relies on document analysis: documents of the European Commission (n.d.³) were used to describe the institutional architecture of Horizon 2020 whereas the resource determinant (Dür, 2008a) and the theory of embeddedness (Beyers, 2002; Callanan, 2010) will be applied to describe and elaborate the factors that could influence the pathway choice of NRCs. These factors, together constituting the independent variable, will be measured by a second instrument: semi-structured interviews.

The interview protocol (see Appendix 1) systematically measures the relation between the variables by measuring qualitative (e.g. organisational structure, decision-makers) as well as quantitative (e.g. amount of funding available, distance to Brussels) factors. Asking questions in addition to the initial interview protocol, a technique also referred to as 'probing', allows for gathering more information and is part of the interview as well. Therefore, the results obtained from CRUE were derived from a method which looks like a survey, rather than a semi-structured interview. The other cases have proven that more information can be processed in semi-structured interviews. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the data collection methods, categorised per NRC.

<i>NRC</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Method</i>
VSNU	8 May 2014	Semi-structured interview
UNIFI	20 May 2014	Semi-structured interview (phone)
VLIR	19 June 2014	Semi-structured interview
CRUE	4 July 2014	Survey (e-mail)

Table 1.1: Dates and methods of data collection, categorised per NRC

³ http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/Horizon_2020/en/what-horizon-2020, accessed 15 July 2014

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter describes the factors which play a role when selecting a pathway, according to the theory. Respectively *resource endowment* (Dür, 2008a) and *embeddedness* (Beyers, 2002) will be highlighted in Sections 2.2 and 2.3. Section 2.4 concludes with the question how these theories could be applied to the research questions of this thesis.

2.1 – Resource determinant

In his article *Interest Groups in the EU: how powerful are they?* Dür (2008a) sets out the prerequisites for interest groups to successfully influence policy-makers on the EU level. He defines four clusters of determinants: interest group resources, political institutions, strategies and issue characteristics. The *interest group resource determinant* will be analysed in the paragraph hereafter, bearing in mind that all determinants initially concern the degree of influence instead of pathway selection, which will be discussed later. This resource determinant consists of 'endowment with resources' and 'group characteristics'.

The other determinants play a role in this thesis as well, but will not be analysed. The institutional architecture of Horizon 2020, the *issue characteristics* in this thesis, has been outlined in Section 1.3. This cluster is closely related to *political institutions*, as the analysed policy field determines which decision-making procedure is used in the EU. Horizon 2020 falls within the regulatory scope of the EU institutions, but its implementation takes place on domestic levels, as outlined before. The *strategies* of interest groups are not directly analysed. However, defining lobbying targets and selecting pathways to lobby at are important prerequisites prior to setting up lobbying strategies. These prerequisites are will further be analysed in this thesis.

Endowment with resources is frequently being associated with the degree of influence an organisation exerts when lobbying governmental or political actors (Gerber, 1999; Hall & Deardorff, 2006). In the determinant of Dür (2008a) the term 'resources' includes: money, legitimacy, political support, knowledge, expertise and information. Financially supporting campaigns of distinctive politicians or having the possibility of hiring professional lobby agencies illustrate the impact money has on influencing political actors. Legitimacy could be 'conveyed' to policy-makers, especially in case they are not elected such as EC officials. Politically supporting candidates who are seeking office, entails the possibility for interest groups to push standpoints for a particular direction if the potential re-elected candidate wishes to maintain this support. Knowledge, expertise and information are "most important" (Dür, 2008a: 1214) since this factor facilitates policy-makers in their tasks (Crombez, 2002). Possessing information about policy results or knowledge about implementation effects are instruments which could be employed when conducting lobbying activities. It is expected that not all interest groups are equally endowed with resources leading to different expectations about the degree of influence these groups are able to exert.

Characteristics of the interest groups affect the *resource endowment*, according to Dür (2008a). These characteristics include: type of membership, size, the internal organisation and the geographical concentration of membership. To start with

membership, Gerber (1999) states interest groups including firms, such as the European Round Table of Industrialists, have more chance to mobilise personnel resources than interest groups consisting of individuals. Interest groups with a large member directory could easier convey legitimacy than smaller ones (Dür, 2008a), thereby connecting the resource 'size' with characteristic 'legitimacy'. The internal organisation is regarded as a dichotomous sub factor of interest group resources (Beyers, 2002) as groups dealing with multiple decision-makers encounter more difficulties when constituting common standpoints than those having a strong hierarchy. The geographical concentration of membership tends to ambiguously relate to influence. On the one hand, geographically dispersed interests, as in the case of European University Organisation (EUA), may find it easy to approach multiple actors and spread its influence over a wide area. On the other hand, concentrated interests could overcome collective actions problems and provide public goods more easily than dispersed interests (Dür, 2008a). Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the group characteristics and resources that constitute the interest group resource determinant.

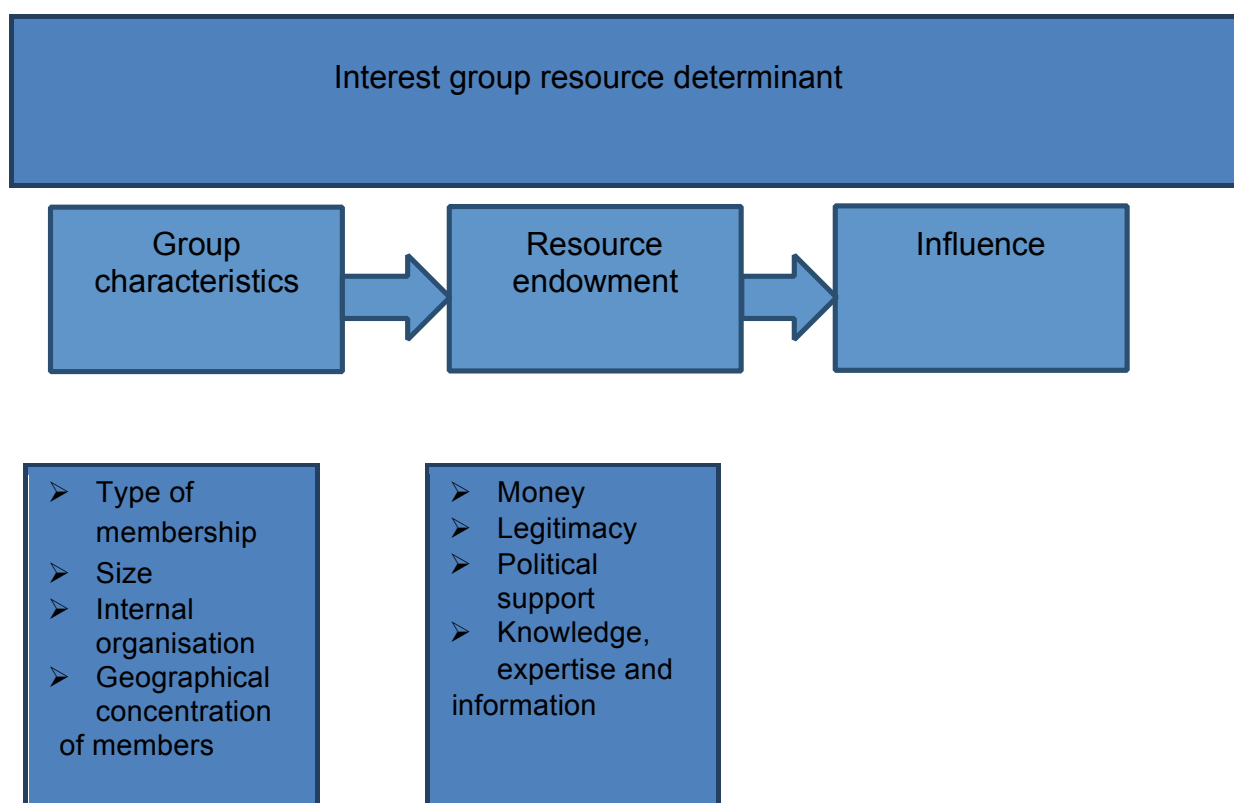


Figure 2.1: Interest group resource determinant including sub factors (Dür, 2008a)

2.3 – Embeddedness

The degree of embeddedness in domestic institutional systems, also referred to as the degree of domestic institutional persistence or simply domestic embeddedness, impacts on the ability to select the EU pathway (Beyers, 2002). The logic of NRCs pursuing their interests at the domestic stage has been explain before, but the effect of this domestic embeddedness on the selection of the EU pathway can be twofold, as we will contemplate later in this section. Examining this effect complements Dür's (2008a) resource determinant by adding another factor which influences pathway

selection. As argued by Beyers (2002) and further examined by Callanan (2010) in *EU decision-making: reinforcing interest group relationships with domestic governments?* domestic embeddedness either supports or impedes the selection of the EU pathway. Table 2.1 presents a number of hypotheses on the issue of embeddedness.

Beyers (2002) develops four hypotheses to illustrate the interaction between interest groups and their domestic government, and the implications of this for selecting the EU pathway (see Table 2.1). The ‘positive persistence’ hypothesis (1) states that embeddedness in domestic networks enlarges chances of gaining access to EU institutions, for example because domestic officials take part in working groups of the Council. These officials could provide strategic information about distinctive actions, thereby assisting domestic interest groups to accede the EU level. The ‘negative persistence’ hypothesis (2) is in line with the second view produced by Callanan (2010) and assumes interest groups remain active on the domestic level because “(...) domestic actors have historically relied upon domestic public actors” (Beyers, 2002: 594). Hypotheses 3 and 4 assume actors have no domestic access at all.

<i>Actors’ network strategies, seeking access to Europe</i>	Extensive European network strategies	Limited European network strategies
Domestic access	1. Actors’ domestic access relates to an extensive deployment of Euro-level networks Positive Persistence Hypothesis	2. Actors stay where they are, their European efforts are inhibited by domestic institutional persistence Negative Persistence Hypothesis
No domestic access	3. Actors seek to compensate at the European level (i.e. the so-called ‘boomerang effect’) Compensation Hypothesis	4. Actors stay largely disconnected Reversed Positive Persistence Hypothesis

Table 2.1: Hypotheses on seeking and gaining access (Beyers, 2002: 594)

Hypothesis 1) EU decision-making offers new opportunities for domestic interest groups. Highlighting the policy area of R&I, which is our ‘area of analysis’, policies within Horizon 2020 are initiated by the EC and demand agreement from both European Parliament (EP) and the Council. In fact, this ordinary legislative procedure as it is called, allows for ‘venue shopping’: selecting various actors within the EU pathway to get what you want. However, since the EU is regarded as additional actor,

domestic government remains of importance. Callanan (2010: 18) argues that “interest groups adapt their strategies according to the receptiveness of different points in the opportunity structure at EU and domestic levels to their views.” Applying this to the thesis, Brussels based umbrella organisations which represent the interests of domestic members, such as the EUA, fall under the scope of view 1 as well.

Hypothesis 2) Domestic embeddedness impedes access at the EU stage. Greenwood & Ronit (1994) argue that domestic governments remain the most important pathway to approach, also with regards to EU policies. Eising (2008) provides different reasons for this attitude: in terms of the policy circle, many EU policies are prepared on the domestic level, transposition of EU directives into domestic laws is a process which frequently takes place and implementation of EU policies has its impact on domestic societies and policy-makers. This view is supported by Kohler-Koch (1994) who argues that domestic institutional norms play a role when pursuing interest at the EU level.

Thus, the first view indicates the EU as new venue to lobby and considers the domestic embeddedness as irrelevant or at least not impeding the access of domestic interest groups at the EU level. Callanan (2010:19) regards the second view as domestic interest groups with “long-standing, well-established interactions with domestic governments” or those that have “a privileged institutional access at the domestic level” as organisations that suffer from such interactions as they impede the development of EU level strategies.

2.4 – Pathways

This section outlines the dependent variable of this thesis, the pathways NRCs could take in the European multilevel system. They are presented in Figure 2.2.

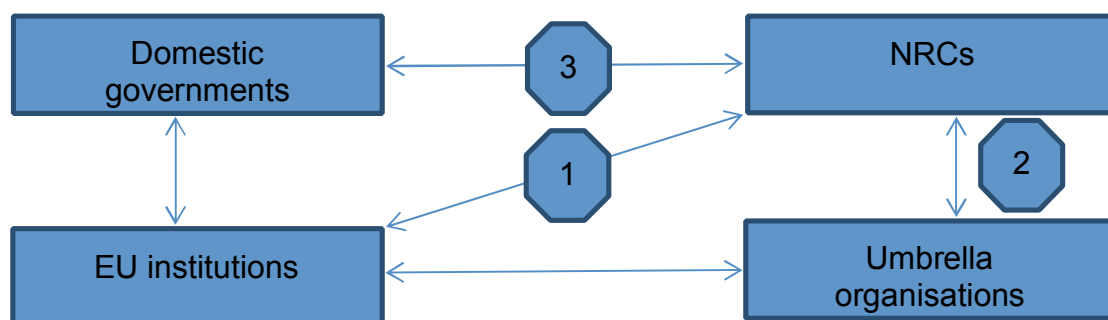


Figure 2.2: Interactions in the European multilevel system in the case of NRCs (derived from Beyers, 2002)

1) EU directly

This pathway suggests that NRCs directly approach actors within the EU institutions. Decision-makers and policy-makers (Council, European Commission and European Parliament) or politicians (European Parliament) are most likely to be lobbied. Given the fact that grant procurement within the Horizon 2020 frame as well as other

policies linked to R&I are to be decided upon in Brussels, lobbying the EU directly grants lobbyists a comfortable seat amidst influenceable actors. Nevertheless, financial resources and distance are important factors to consider when thinking of lobbying the EU directly. Approaching EU actors and maintaining contact takes financial resources, particularly if the NRC is situated far from Brussels.

2) *EU indirectly*

Brussels based umbrella organisations offer chances to grasp the latest developments in the world of R&I on the EU level. Attending meetings of the European University Association (EUA), of which all European NRCs are member, could be a possibility to network in Brussels without accessing the EU directly. Being a member of such umbrella organisations suggests that organisations know what activities take place, but their effectiveness in terms of lobbying may be questioned. Representing over 800 organisations in over 50 countries, such as the EUA, may boost legitimacy as resource, but makes it almost impossible to lobby for one organisation or country even if it is presumed that the EUA is well-connected with the policy-specific EU actors. Membership of the EU enables NRCs to gain policy updates, but its effectiveness with regards to specific lobby actions is questionable.

3) *Domestic indirectly*

This pathway suggests NRCs to maintain contacts with domestic actors, such as ministries and politicians in domestic parliaments in order to influence events on the EU level. The Council has to confirm new policies in the Horizon 2020 framework, together with the European Parliament. This implies that preparatory Council meetings on the domestic stage could be used by NRCs to indirectly exert influence on Horizon 2020 policies. Being embedded in domestic institutional systems thus allows for indirectly lobbying for EU policies, as long as domestic governments are granted competencies to express or enforce their opinion in the decision-making process.

2.5 – Operationalisation of resource sub factors

The previous sections described and explained the relevance of the independent variable, which includes the resource factor and the embeddedness factor. This section attempts to modify multiple sub factors of Dür's (2008a) determinant cluster of interest group resources, including *group characteristics* and *resource endowment*, so that the resource factor be measured in relation to the dependent variable of pathway selection. Additionally, some sub factors are difficult to measure and compare, partly due to the fact that the initial determinant connects resources with the degree of influence, instead of pathway selection.

Group characteristics include the following sub factors: type of membership, size, internal organisation and geographical concentration of members (see Figure 2.1). The membership directory of NRCs includes universities merely and these members mainly act by unanimity as we will see later. Also, all members of the analysed NRCs are 'full individual member' of the EUA, so there is no reason to assume different membership categories exist among the members of NRCs. Therefore, the membership sub factor can not be applied to NRCs. Size, in terms of the number of members (HEIs) as stated by Dür (2008a), is a sub factor which can be applied to the pathway selection. Are NRCs with relatively more members likely to select both

pathways? In addition, one could question the impact of human resources. It might be that those relatively better endowed with human resources are able to select the EU pathway. The internal organisation, whose decisions are made in a strong hierarchy or by multiple actors as dichotomised by Dür (2008a), can be operationalised. The number of actors deciding on lobbying strategies explains whether decisions are taken hierarchically or not. Possible actors include the Board, the members and the Secretariat itself. Are NRCs with relatively more decisionmakers involved less likely to select the EU pathway than those with a rather hierarchical decision-making structure? It might be that some universities are overrepresented in NRCs meaning that their actions have a relatively large impact on actions of the NRC than others, but this dynamic has not been measured in the interviews. Assessing the effect of geographical concentration is difficult, since the members of NRCs mainly operate domestically and they rely on domestic funding as well. However, it is still possible to incorporate this sub factor in our research by looking at the physical distance of the NRC headquarters to Brussels. This allows us not only to measure this factor, but also enables to draw comparisons between the organisations and partly assesses the difficulty to select the EU pathway.

The *resource endowment* sub factors include: money, legitimacy, political support and knowledge, expertise and information (KEI). Money largely determines which activities can be undertaken, so we question if NRCs relatively better endowed with financial resources are able to select both pathways. Legitimacy can be conveyed by interest groups to their targeted actor. Dür (2008a) argues that size of the membership directory indicates the degree of legitimacy. This indication implies that legitimacy as individual sub factor is irrelevant to apply anymore. Politically supporting candidates in elections is highly risky as it deteriorates the NRC's function as representative of members with possibly different views. For the sake of our new determinant we presume publicly supporting party members does not take place meaning we will not take this sub factor into account. KEI are highly important factors as mentioned by Dür (2008a) but appear to be immeasurable as we do not exactly know when and exactly which KEI is being exchanged nor do we know which KEI is relevant for obtaining influence. It is consequently impossible to compare NRCs and assess their KEI actions. Studying the discourses of interest group targets could have resolved this issue, but time constraints did not allow for that. Figure 2.3 presents Dür's resource determinant (2008a) again, but now indicating which factors are appropriate for operationalisation.

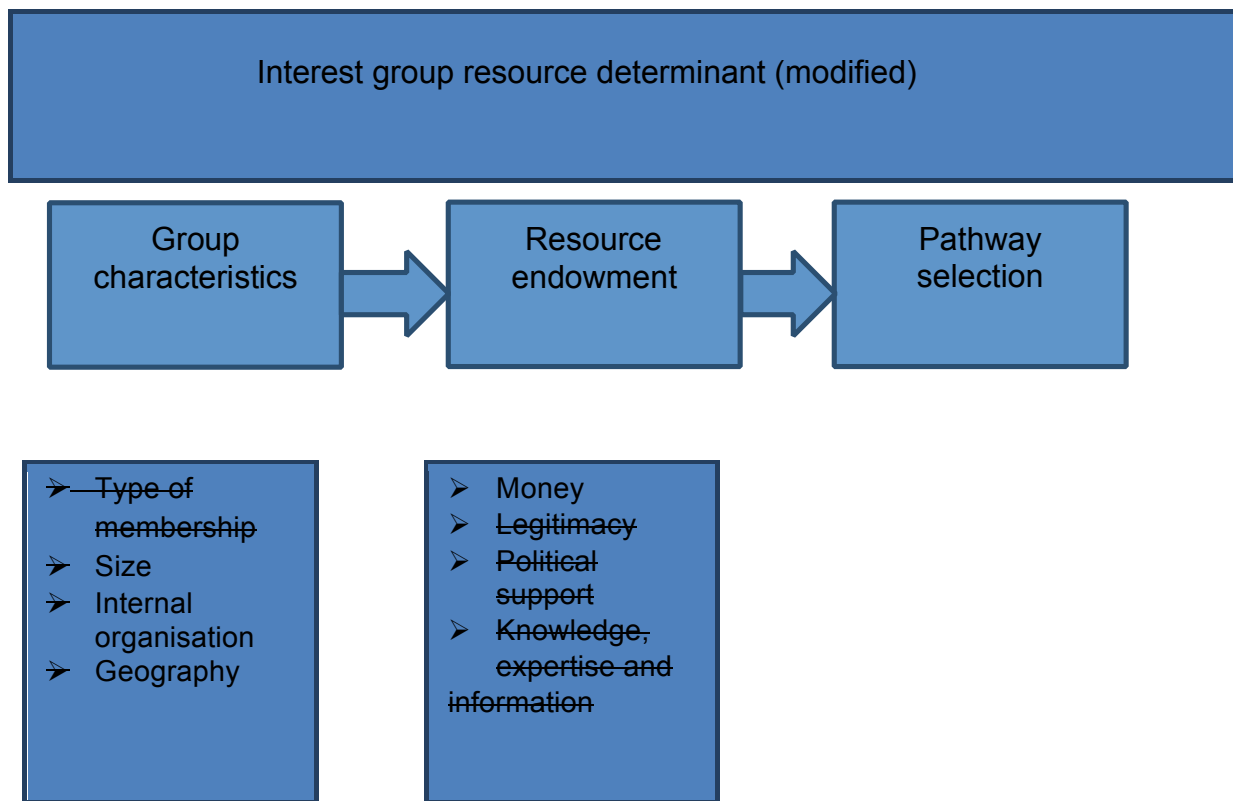


Figure 2.3: Interest group resource determinant (Dür: 2008a), indicating measurable sub factors and dependent variable

Although Dür (2008a) explained why *group characteristics* determine *resource endowment*, the particular operationalisation of their sub factors is unlikely to yield the same relation. The process of crossing out or combining factors leads to a situation in which the measurable *group characteristics* (size, internal organisation and geographical location) barely determine the remaining *resource endowment* factor: money. As the initial cluster of determinants (*group characteristics* + *resource endowment* = *interest group resources*) ends up with the same factors determining influence, there is no need to combine characteristics and resources. In other words, although the relation between *group characteristics* and *resource endowment* does not exist anymore, the remaining factors in general still (partly) determine influence, regardless whether they fall under the scope of either *characteristics* or *resources*. This is also the reason why the *resource determinant* is mentioned as one of the two *factors* influencing pathway selection and their measurable attributes (money, size, etc) are been referred to as *sub factors*, instead of group characteristics and resource endowment.

2.6 – Overview

Now we have ensured the independent variable can be measured, the remaining question is: how? The interview protocol has been addressed in the sections on methodology already. Table 2.1 presents the final sub factors which constitute the independent variable, their conceptualisation and includes the questions measuring these (operationalisation).

Factor	(Sub factors)	Operationalisation
Embeddedness		Influence of domestic government on selecting EU pathway
Resources	- Size	Number of members + number of employees concerned with lobbying activities
	- Internal organisation	Number of actors involved in decisionmaking procedures
	- Geographical location	Physical distance from NRC headquarters to Brussels
	- Financial resources	Number of financial resources available in general (in euro)

Table 2.2: Independent variable including factors and operationalisation of sub-factors (see Appendix 1 as well)

3. Main findings

This chapter presents the main findings derived from interviews conducted with the spokespersons of selected NRCs. We will first outline their situations, categorised per factor and pathway(s) selected, followed by additionally obtained information. Subsequently, two tables have been erected: the first table compares the NRCs with regards to the independent variable of this research: resources and embeddedness. The second compares NRCs in terms of pathway selection. Having outlined domestic situations and presented them schematically, the thesis provides a conclusion in which the theoretical reality sketched in Chapter 2 will be compared to the results obtained during the interviews.

3.1 – VSNU

Independent variable (resources)

VSNU was founded in 1985 and is funded by its members, which are 14 Dutch universities. It receives a total amount of 3.5 million euro per year. Its daily tasks are carried out by a Secretariat consisting 29 employees. About 20 of them undertake lobbying activities whereas remaining nine employees are in charge of administrative support. These 20 employees are all lobbyists to some extent. There is no specific budget for lobbying activities.

The Secretariat in The Hague implements decisions of the Board and also prepares the agenda for the Board. The Board consists of the chairpersons of the universities. Their meetings are led by an independent chairman, and they decide which themes are essential for the Secretariat. This work is prepared by five steering committees, consisting of members of university's Executive Boards. The internationalization committee is concerned with Horizon 2020. Employees of the Secretariat usually serve as secretary of these committees are people from the Secretariat in The Hague. Sometimes members regard interests differently, therefore VSNU articulates only those opinions which are shared by all members. Member meetings take place once per six weeks. Common opinions are formulated here and according to the interviewee it is not difficult to do this, however, there are exceptions, for example the issue of university rankings. The interviewee has stated that both the Secretariat and governors agree that this way of coordinating activities works properly.

Talking about the impact of resource fluctuations, it may be possible to get more people involved in the expert groups in Brussels, but there are no plans to realise this. Another possibility is to connect representatives from the universities with governmental actors in Brussels. Having more human resources would still mean that VSNU focuses on both The Hague and Brussels. The main source of funding comes from the Dutch government, either directly as project funding or indirectly via members. The interviewee stated this is an important fact; if funding would come from the EU, VSNU would not be based in The Hague,

Independent variable (embeddedness)

When talking about the Hague or Brussels as most important lobby venue, the interviewee stated say that the interests in the Hague are more important than in Brussels, outside the fact that lobbying in the Hague is easier than in Brussels due to distance differences. On the contrary, the Netherlands is just one of the 28 Member

States of the EU whereas talking to a civil servant working for the Commission could result in significantly more influence. One needs to have a good argument though; asking what is going on would not be enough. Exchange takes place on a continuous basis. Furthermore, the interviewee stated that establishing connections is not as easy as just 'going to Brussels' but should be regarded as long-term investment. The interviewee argues that being domestically embedded rather accelerates access to EU actors. Civil servants maintain connections with, for example the Dutch Permanent representation to the EU, allowing the VSNU to benefit.

Dependent variable (pathways)

The VSNU selects all pathways as mentioned in the theoretical framework. The ordinary legislative procedure is used to pass legislation which falls under the scope of Horizon 2020; consequently it is important to lobby both domestic and supranational actors.

The main domestic actor is the Dutch government since Council meetings are being prepared here. Specifically, VSNU is in touch with the relevant ministries to prepare new legislations and to suggest how these should look like. The organisation also maintains close contact to the Dutch parliament to monitor and engage with policy developments in general.

The most important actor on the EU level is the EC, specifically the DG for R&I. Head of this DG, Robert-Jan Smits is Dutch, which helps significantly to gain access to Commission proposals and get things done more easily in general according to the interviewee. Public consultations are an Commission instrument to formally participate in policy negotiations and is widely used. The European Parliament is considered relevant as well, for example when an amendment on the Data Protection Directive had severe consequences for medical research. In this regard the VSNU provides expertise to predict the outcomes of particular pieces of legislation. Getting to know the chairpersons of relevant committees is a way to influence more effectively. The Permanent representation of the Netherlands to the EU is concerned with formal conciliation of EU programmes, so talking to them is another way to gain influence. The EUA is difficult to use for specific policy actions, because its broad membership directory does not allow for actions that contravene preferences of other members, which is likely to occur with more than 800 members in 50 countries. Still, all bits of influence the EUA conveys in Brussels, and that suit the ideas of VSNU, are helpful, according to the interviewee.

The Brussels based umbrella organisation *The Netherlands house for Education and Research* (NETH-ER) is an essential organisation for the VSNU. NETH-ER is funded by the Dutch government to represent the interests of research and education institutes in the Netherlands. Its main task is to get in touch with EU actors and share with its members, such as VSNU, *Vereniging Hogescholen* and *Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*. In fact, NETH-ER opens doors and is in charge of other preparatory talks. The VSNU is in touch with NETH-ER regularly; at least once a week according to the interviewee. VSNU employees also visit NETHER at least once a month to discuss latest policy trends.

Additional information regarding lobbying activities

Closely monitoring policy developments and ensuring that it remains connected to policy discussions by writing papers as well as meeting policy-makers and politicians face-to-face in The Hague or Brussels, are key activities when representing Dutch universities. Providing relevant background information to policy-makers is essential for obtaining information on future plans or to assist creating new policies. This includes policy information which is not available yet or future plans of the DG for R&I of the EC.

The organisation has been active to lobby in the context of the Horizon 2020 programme in the past three years. It organised meetings to share best-practices regarding grants applications of the universities and lets these exchange views on how to deal with implications for R&I. Additionally, VSNU provides technical information about Horizon 2020 to assist its members with assessing the implications of Horizon 2020. The full legislative package of the Horizon 2020 has been adopted by the Council and the European Parliament, but the specific implementation of some elements of the programme is partly unknown due to the fact that the Commission still organises consultation meetings, and therefore VSNU remains actively lobbying for this programme.

The VSNU focuses on the Excellent Science pillar as main priority of Horizon 2020 for its members. In other words, not all proposals should be regarded as sufficiently covering excellent science. The Netherlands is performing well with regards to grant obtainments, which means other countries are not. The interviewee stated that further expanding this gap makes no sense, but the organisation should rather seek for solutions to maintain this way of performing without harming chances of other participants which do not have access to extensive financial resources. A compromise has been found by maintaining 'excellence' as yardstick but that particular parts of Horizon 2020 should aim to assist these Member States to their 'stairway to excellence', as the interviewee put it. This equal share of the programme also offers chances for VSNU to get in touch with talented researchers in East- and Central Europe.

Asking which phase of the policy considered is most important when lobbying, it appeared that they are all important. Agenda-setting cannot be done without trend watching. Also, the full legislation package of Horizon 2020 is present, though some parts of the programme have not been implemented yet. This offers chances for VSNU, for example by providing information at public consultation meetings, implying that implementation and decision-making are essential phases as well.

3.2 – UNIFI

Independent variable (resources)

The organisation was founded in 1969 as the Finnish Council of University Rectors. This name was changed to UNIFI in 2009. The organisation currently represents 15 Finnish universities. These are the main funders of UNIFI; their share is based on the number of students enrolled per university. UNIFI receives a total annual contribution of approximately 300,000 euro per year. There are no specific lobbying budgets. UNIFI works with three staff members: the Executive Director, Senior Adviser and

Secretary. Especially the Director is concerned with representing the interests of the members to governmental actors. Lobbying priorities for are set in cooperation between the Executive Director and the Board, which consists of five Rectors. Consultation moments with members take place within various organs on a regular basis. Firstly, the Board meets 11 times per year. Secondly, the General Assembly in which one representative per member is involved, meets twice per year and thirdly, the Plenary meets 3-4 per year. This organ is composed of all Rectors, but does not make decisions.

The interviewee stated that resource alterations would enable UNIFI to appoint more employees and to recruit, for example, an EU officer. This would result in the possibility of broadening current activities. Also, fragmenting the landscape of higher education representative institutions in Finland would allow for better articulating policy preferences to the Finnish government and to improve the quality of lobbying activities. Other organisations such *The Academy of Finland*, *Rectors' Conference of Finish Polytechniques* and *Centre for International Mobility* sometimes strive for the same goals, making individual efforts less relevant. The interviewee stated this state of interest defragmentation possibly thwarts the process of uploading preferences to governmental actors.

Independent variable (embeddedness)

The interviewee stated that the domestic pathway has absolutely most priority when conducting lobbying activities. There are no indications of the Finnish government assisting the organisation to connect with EU actors. This observation suggests that domestic embeddedness impedes access to the EU level and that UNIFI's possible access to European actors is dependent exclusively on resources.

Dependent variable (pathways)

The EU pathway has been used in the past to meet up with Finnish MEPs. The current Executive Director has intended to reinforce these relations after the European Parliament elections, so meanwhile there were no indications of UNIFI approaching the EU. UNIFI actively participated in EUA meetings (General Assembly, SG-meetings, and Annual Conferences) and is planning to host the EUA meeting of October 2015 in Finland. EUA is primarily used by UNIFI to forward important higher education policy issues and information to Finnish universities. The interviewee stated that the domestic pathway receives most attention in the form of meetings with policy-makers of the Ministry of Education and Culture, at least once a week, as well as regular meetings with Finnish MPs. Besides incidental contact with Finnish MEPs there is no contact with EU actors from the UNIFI side. Thus, Finnish universities are primarily expected to directly approach EU actors to ensure their interests are taken into account

Additional information regarding lobbying activities

Obviously, the most important aspect of Horizon 2020 is to let Finnish universities better benefit from funding programmes, although both the universities themselves as well as the *Academy of Finland* could play a more prominent role in that regard. This could indicate the need for Finnish universities to obtain more grants, if they increase

their efforts. Agenda-setting and decision-making are the most essential parts of the policy circle when exerting influence, according to the interviewee.

3.3 – VLIR

Independent variable (resources)

VLIR has been established in 1976 and represents six Flemish universities. Funding comes from the members themselves. A relatively small amount of its budget is acquired through project funding. Calculating financial resources is difficult since multiple activities are organised in cooperation with fellow organisations, meaning that these funds do not pertain to one organisation exclusively. As staying in touch with policy-makers is part of VLIR's daily operations there is no specific budget for lobbying activities. Currently, 8 FTEs are involved in VLIR of which 5.5 are working on the priorities that have been set by its members, these are: research, education, financial management and quality assurance. The other 2.5 FTE are concerned with administrative support.

Setting priorities to lobby for is done in close cooperation with members, without them VLIR would not exist. Members share their experiences in Working Groups. Obtaining such information helps the VLIR Secretariat to develop technical expertise that can be provided to members in return. Consultation meetings with members take place very regularly. Core groups meet every month as well several Working Groups. Other Working Groups meet on an ad hoc basis. Telephone and email contact between VLIR and its universities take place on a very regular basis. As VLIR does not foresee any significant changes in its endowment with resources in the near future, answering the question whether resource alterations would lead to selecting other pathways to lobby is extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Independent variable (embeddedness)

The findings reveal that the Flemish government plays no significant role in connecting VLIR with EU actors. Its indirect dependency on domestic public funding makes VLIR extensively selecting the domestic pathway, but there are no indications that contacts with domestic actors result in the employment of EU strategies.

Dependent variable (pathways)

The Flemish government, particularly the ministries and administrations for Education, Science & Innovation are the most relevant actors to VLIR. Since research and education portfolios are increasingly delegated away from the Belgian federal level to regions, connections with the Flemish government are regarded as more important than those with the federal government. Since members are funded by the Flemish government and VLIR is funded by its members, VLIR regards the Flemish government, or the regional pathway in this regard, as more important than the EU pathway.

Relations with EU actors are mainly maintained by using VLEVA (Vlaams Europees Verbindingsnetwerk). The primary task of this organisation is to maintain connections with relevant EU policy-makers and to follow the latest policy trends on the European level. VLIR is a regular participant in EUA meetings, in which the organisation participates as Flemish Rectors Conference. Prof. Ignace Lemahieu from the Ghent

University is a member of the Research Policy Working Group (RPWG) of EUA. The interviewee states that having one of its vice chancellors in a prominent Working Group allows VLIR to gain information about the latest policy trends very quickly. It also contributes to a direct and effective sharing of relevant information among VLIR, the RPWG, and EUA.

Additional information regarding lobbying activities

VLIR is also actively supporting its members to better understand the implications of Horizon 2020. For this reason it recently established the European Affairs Working Group to serve as 'best-practice sharing' platform by sharing expertise on technical details about the program and discussing common interests. The group is still in start-up. Although Flemish universities perform well (KU Leuven is ranked 9th as EU university grant recipient) VLIR aims to further expand the Flemish share within Horizon 2020. The interviewee further states that universities have their own experts and support to guide applications but that the EU Affairs working group provides a new opportunity to share knowledge and best-practices. Also, as working with policymakers takes place on a regular basis, all phases of the policy process are important

3.4 – CRUE

Dependent variable (resources)

CRUE was founded in 1994 and currently represents 75 universities: 50 public and 25 private ones. The organisation is funded by the members themselves, although no answer was provided to the exact amount of funding. There is no specific budget for lobbying activities. About 13 employees are working for the organisation, although no distinction has been made between administrative employees and those representing the interests of members. The President, standing committees and the General Assembly are involved in setting priorities, and thus indirectly for lobbying activities. Consultation moments are primarily the General Assembly meetings, which are organised 6-8 times per year.

Dependent variable (embeddedness)

The survey did not indicate that the Spanish government assists CRUE selecting the EU pathway.

Independent variable (pathways)

There are sporadic relations with EU officials in Brussels, but CRUE actively participates in EUA meetings. The Education and Science Ministry, as well as the Economy and Competitiveness Ministry are relevant domestic actors to stay in touch with. Decision-making is regarded as most important phase of the policy-circle and the organisation currently seeks for new funding possibilities in order to assist Spanish universities in R&I activities.

Additional information regarding Horizon 2020

The main aim of CRUE' is to encourage the participation of Spanish universities and to increase their obtained funding.

3.5 – Comparison tables

The tables below schematically present the main findings of the conducted interviews. Table 3.1 presents the findings of NRC's endowment resources. The indication of + suggests an organisation is situated nearby or in Brussels, whereas the – suggests it is relatively more difficult to overcome the distance. Table 3.2 assesses the impact of the dependent variable on selected pathways, thereby indicating the degree of embeddedness from - to ++.

	VSNU	UNIFI	VLIR	CRUE
Size - members	14	15	6	75
Size - employees	20	3	6	13
Size - finances (€ p/y)	3.500.000	300.000	(unknown)	(unknown)
Internal organisation - actors involved	Secretariat, Board, Steering Committees	Secretariat, Board	Secretariat, Members, Working Groups	Presidency, Standing Committees
Internal organisation - freq. of consultation moments (1x per)	6 weeks	5 weeks	month	1.5 - 2 months
Geography - distance to Brussels (km)	+	-	++	-

Table 3.1: Resource endowment findings, categorised per NRC

	VSNU	UNIFI	VLIR	CRUE
EU - directly	++ (DG R&I, EP)	-	-	- (sporadically)
EU - indirectly (umbrella organisations)	++ (NETH-ER, Permanent Representation NL, EUA)	+/- (EUA meetings to monitor trends, intention to approach domestic MEPs)	++ (VLEVA, EUA)	+/- (active player EUA)
Domestic - indirectly	++ (Education, Culture and Science / Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation)	++ (Education and Culture, Finnish MPs)	++ (Flemish government, Education, Science and Innovation)	++ (Education and Science, Economy and Competitiveness)

Table 3.2: Pathway selection findings, categorised per NRC

4. Conclusion

The primary aim of this thesis was to examine whether resources and domestic embeddedness influence the pathways NRCs take to fortify their lobbying activities. The interest group resource determinant constituted by Dür (2008a), initially attempting to explain influence of interest groups, has been applied to examine the pathways selected in order to influence policy-makers, decision-makers and politicians. Additionally, findings of Callanan (2010) suggest being domestically embedded may lead to different pathways. The secondary aim of this thesis was to provide the reader with more insights into the functioning of multilevel governance in general, presenting NRCs as actors dealing with different layers of government in the case of Horizon 2020.

This chapter first describes the relation between the different pathways and the analysed NRCs. Second, we recap the selected sub factors and present additional factors, derived from the interview findings, which tend to play a role as well. Third, the embeddedness hypotheses of Beyers (2002) will be applied to the NRCs. The research questions will be answered in Section 4.5 and we finish with a brief note on what further research should focus on.

4.1 – Pathway selection (dependent variable)

EU directly

It turned out VSNU is most active on the EU pathway. The DG for R&I, led by a Dutch, is seen as an important organ to upload preferences in the context of Horizon 2020. Further, VSNU provides advice to MEPs in case implementation effects are unknown. In general, other NRCs do not or only sporadically make use of this pathway.

EU indirectly

Using NETH-ER as interest mediator opens doors in Brussels and thus further connects VSNU with relevant actors inside the EU. Preparatory meetings of the Dutch Permanent representation to the EU are attended to provide expertise on decision-making in the Council. VLIR has frequent contact with VLEVA, a Flemish umbrella organisation aiming to connect Flemish organisations with EU actors, conducting lobbying activities for VLIR. The EUA is gaining importance for VLIR's lobbying activities, since a board member of the University of Ghent obtained a seat in the EUA RPWG. VSNU, VLIR and CRUE also mention the EUA as important organ to participate in, but this did not lead to the development of specific lobbying activities in cooperation with the EUA, despite the fact that these organisations also do have a national representative in the EUA RPWG (EUA, 2014).

Domestic indirectly

NRCs represent domestic universities which are dependent on domestic public funding, therefore this pathway is considered as most important by the observed NRCs. It turned out that connections with one or multiple ministries are being maintained at least once a week. UNIFI regularly talks to Finnish MPs as well.

4.2 – Resource determinant (independent variable)

Size

The size of the organisations in terms of members did not lead to remarkable observations. Having 75 members, CRUE is substantially larger than VSNU (14), UNIFI (15) and VLIR (6) however no relation between the size of the membership directory and pathway selection was found. It turned out there is a certain relation between financial resources and pathway selection. Whereas UNIFI (300,000 euro) does not select the EU pathway, VSNU has a budget ten times as high and actively lobbies on the EU stage. Reiterating the fact that the Flemish interviewee stated that the costs of human resources take the largest share in annual budget plans, one observes that the largest organisation in terms of human resources, VSNU, is able to afford selecting all pathways.

Internal organisation

Dür (2008a) notes that discrepancies may appear among hierarchical organisations and organisations with multiple actors participating in the decision-making process. Specifically, observed hierarchical ones were better able to upload preferences. The case of NRCs yielded results which were not very different from each other. All NRCs regularly meet their members who set the priorities, to be carried out by the Secretariat and working groups or steering committees providing technical information. It did appear that the smallest organisation in terms of members (VLIR) sometimes encounters difficulties to let its members cooperate. Furthermore, NRCs never take a common position if members do not agree with each other, for example in the case of the VSNU regarding the issue of 'rankings'. It might be that CRUE with 75 members is more likely to encounter internal conflicts than the other observed organisations, but no evidence for this has been found, nor did we measure any impact on pathway selection as mentioned above. The observed NRCs do not deviate much from each other and there is no reason to assume a relationship between internal organisation and pathway selection exists.

Geography

VLIR and VSNU, which are situated closely to Brussels, are more likely to approach the EU than UNIFI and CRUE. Publicly funded umbrella organisations as NETH-ER and VLEVA are particularly used to access the EU institutions. Remarkably, VLIR's headquarters is less than two kilometers away from the EU institutions, yet it does not select the EU pathway directly for Horizon 2020 matters. The VSNU, situated in The Hague, turns out to be most actively selecting the EU pathway having multiple employees maintaining contact with EU actors at least monthly, but not exclusively for Horizon 2020 matters. Thus, from the observations one may derive the conclusion that geography is an important factor, but this importance tends to diminish when the distance to Brussels becomes smaller.

Endowment alterations

The Finnish interviewee (UNIFI) stated that having more financial resources would enable the organisation to hire an employee who is concerned with EU activities. This comment highlights the impact financial resources have on pathway selection. Also, fragmentation of organisations representing the interests of Finnish HEIs would allow for speaking with a stronger voice towards the Finnish government and EU actors.

The spokesperson of VSNU emphasized the importance of having a Dutch person leading an important DG and stated that new lobbying practices were needed in case a person with another domesticity would take over this position. VLIR followed this line by stating that having a Belgian person in the EUA RPWG made it significantly easier to obtain policy information, but also to upload information to the RPWG itself. Remarkably, representatives from Finnish and Spanish universities are represented in the RPWG as well, but their NRCs did not explicitly mention this as asset when conducting lobbying activities.

4.3 – Redefining the resource determinant

Having reviewed the impact of all factors on pathway selection and having processed additional information obtained in the interviews, we can re-define the interest group resource determinant.

Without financial resources NRCs cannot operate at all, let alone select pathways to influence actors in different layers of government. Human resources are required in order to practically exert influence. The size of the NRC's membership directory or the internal organisation appears to have no relation with pathway selection. And despite the rapid development of internet and social media in the last ten years, physical distance remains an important sub factor to assess whether lobbying on the EU level is an affordable and feasible activity.

The empirical findings of VSNU, UNIFI and VLIR also suggest factors that determine pathway selection which have not been incorporated in Dür's (2008a) determinant: domesticity (VSNU, VLIR) and degree of fragmentation of interest groups (UNIFI). It appears that domesticity plays a role for some associations. This also concerns the fragmentation of interest groups, which has been addressed by the Finnish interviewee as one of the key factors. Yet, the influence of these additional factors on pathway selection has not been recognized by all NRCs. Figure 4.1 presents the final resource factors, derived from empirical findings.

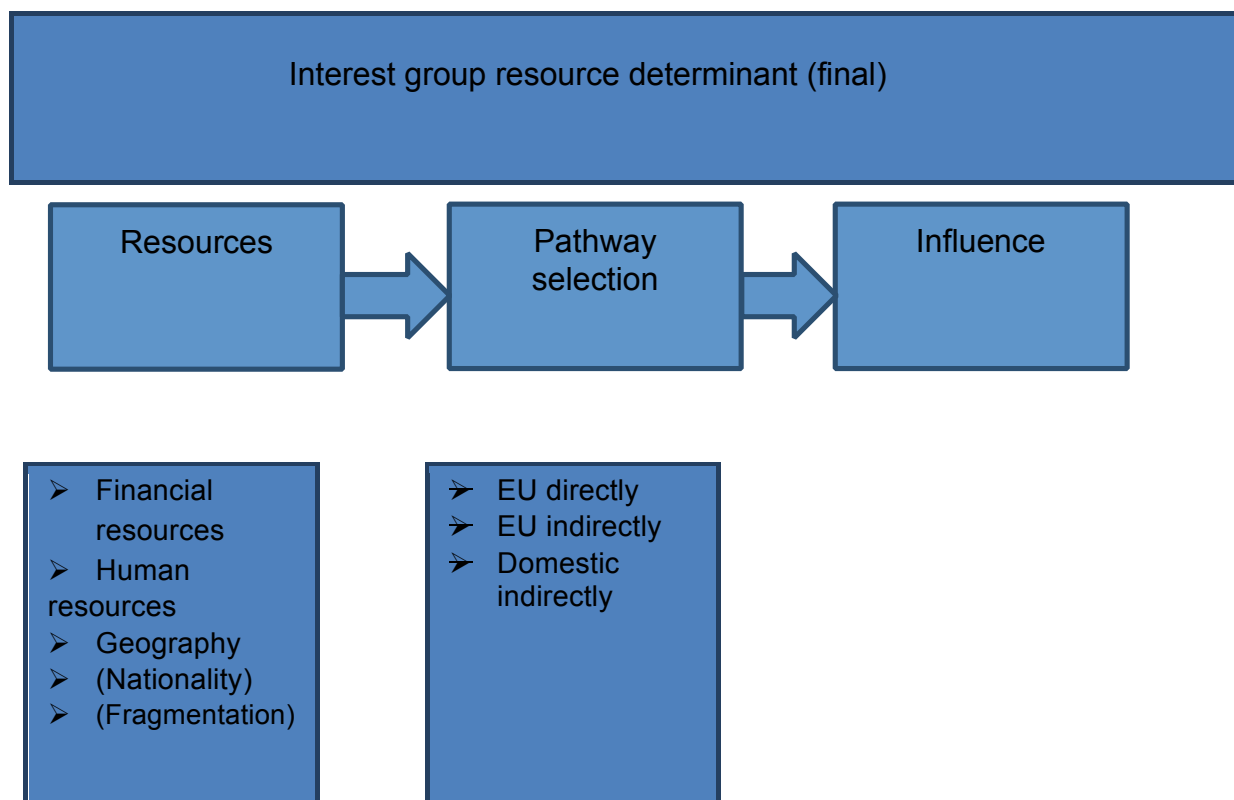


Figure 4.1: NRCs resources determining pathway selection, based on interview findings

4.4 – Embeddedness (independent variable)

As outlined by Callanan (2010), the influence of domestic embeddedness on EU pathway selection appears to be dichotomous. Interest groups which are positively persisted are able to use domestic connections in order to accelerate the process of uploading preferences to the EU level. The negative persistence hypothesis regards interest groups as entities entrenched in domestic systems as well. However this type of embeddedness impedes access to the EU level, for example because interest groups are too dependent on their domestic government. Also, it might be that domestic governments are not able to provide expertise to interest groups in order to connect them with EU actors.

<i>Actors' network strategies, seeking access to Europe</i>	Extensive European network strategies	Limited European network strategies
Domestic access	1. VSNU Positive Persistence Hypothesis	2. UNIFI, VLIR, CRUE Negative Persistence Hypothesis

Table 4.1: Outcomes of domestic access on EU pathway selection (derived from Beyers, 2002: 594).

Table 4.1 presents the persistence hypotheses and their effects on EU pathway selection. In the context of Horizon 2020, the findings suggest NRCs are primarily domestically embedded, as expected. Their funding is based on university contributions, whereas universities themselves are almost entirely dependent on

domestic public funding. This indirect financial dependency makes most NRCs acting as suggested in the view of the negative persistence hypothesis: the EU is significantly less relevant than domestic actors whereas these actors do not actively support NRCs pursuing European network strategies.

However, VSNU is the mere NRC which domestic government assists to approach EU actors, particularly by setting-up an umbrella organisation in Brussels (NETH-ER). In Flanders, VLEVA resembles NETH-ER, nonetheless it appears that VLEVA does not connect VLIR with EU actors. There are no connections between VLIR and EU actors, whereas VSNU maintains extensive relations with EU actors thanks to financial contributions of the Dutch government and NETH-ER. This indicates the reason why the negative institutional persistence can be applied to VLIR and not to VSNU. UNIFI is involved in talks with Finnish MEPs, but there are no indications of the Finnish government actively supporting this action. Furthermore, these actions take place to a limited extent in comparison to VSNU.

4.5 – Research questions

This research aims to answer two questions. We will address them one by one.

- 1. Along which pathways do national rector's conferences fortify their lobbying activities in the context of Horizon 2020?*

NRCs have the possibility to select three pathways to fortify their lobbying activities in the context of Horizon 2020. The first one is to approach the EU directly, that is, to get in touch with policy-makers, decision-makers and politicians on the EU level. Examples are: civil servants working for the DG for R&I and MEPs asking for expertise, for example if they insufficiently foresee national implementation problems. This pathway is frequently selected by VSNU. It approaches the DG for R&I and advises the European Parliament on policy implications. UNIFI regularly speaks with Finnish MEPs. VLIR and CRUE do not select the EU pathway directly.

The second possibility is to lobby the EU indirectly either via domestic umbrella organisations in Brussels, such as NETH-ER and VLEVA, or via international umbrella organisations such as the EUA. VSNU and VLIR, the organisations situated closely to Brussels, select this pathway to a large extent. NETH-ER, the Dutch umbrella organisation, also ensures that VSNU gets connected with EU actors directly, whereas VLEVA rather acts as individual interest group of the Flemish universities at the EU stage.

The third possibility is to engage with actors on the domestic level in order to influence EU policies indirectly. As preparatory meetings for intergovernmental bodies of the EU, such as the European Council, frequently take place in domestic capitals, it may be useful to select this pathway. Other possibilities within this pathway include domestic politicians or ministries dealing with matters such as R&I, Science, Economic Affairs or Competition. The findings strongly indicate that the analysed NRCs regard this pathway as most important compared to the options at the EU stage. Specifically, ministries are important targets to lobby extensively, as

mentioned by the analysed NRCs. Additionally, VSNU also uses preparatory meetings of the Council to exert influence.

2. What are the effects of resource endowment and domestic embeddedness on pathway selection?

The research conducted in this thesis suggests that the following resource sub factors, ranked in order of relevance, determine whether direct access to the EU institutions is possible: financial resources, human resources, the physical distance between Brussels and the headquarters of the NRC, the nationality of actors to be influenced (VSNU, VLIR) and the degree of fragmentation of the domestic higher education interest group landscape (UNIFI). Findings confirm our assumption that NRCs endowed with relatively more resources are able to select multiple pathways.

Findings also support the assumption that NRCs are domestically embedded. It appears that UNIFI, VLIR and CRUE are negatively persisted. This means that their efforts to select the EU pathway are inhibited by a primary focus on domestic actors to influence. There are different reasons why this domestic embeddedness impedes access at the EU stage. First, domestic actors do not actively support NRCs to set up lobbying activities in Brussels. Second, universities operate within national borders requiring NRCs to devote most of their time to domestic targets instead of initiating EU strategies.

Furthermore, resources and embeddedness as individual factors can be combined. An improved endowment with resources, particularly financial and human resources, determines whether NRCs could transform themselves as actors which are positively persisted to its domestic environment. This means that NRCs are not just approaching domestic actors because their members are financially dependent on these, but that connections of these actors can be used to incite European network strategies as well. In addition to that, if domestic actors concerned with EU matters are relatively better endowed with financial resources, they might set up umbrella organisations, such as NETH-ER and VLEVA, in order to incite NRCs to actively select the EU pathway. Findings show that VSNU and VLIR gain more (in)direct access to EU institutions when using such organisations. Thus, whereas NRCs are initially negatively persisted, their governments could directly (providing more financial resources) or indirectly (setting-up umbrella organisations) support them in order to be able to select the EU pathway and to use connections of domestic actors to become embedded in the EU as well. The idea of assisting NRCs to play an active role in Brussels may be beneficial to domestic governments themselves when NRCs function as national gatekeeper in Brussels and provide continuous policy information to their domestic governments.

4.6 – Further research

A next step in assessing the behaviour of NRCs with regards to their lobbying activities, is to examine their degree of effectiveness in terms of influence. It would be recommendable to uncover which factors and which pathways yield the most effective results.

Therefore, obtaining insights in the functioning of targets (government officials, politicians) would be a valuable asset as it provides more details about the effect of knowledge, expertise and information. This particular resource has been marked as most essential by Dür (2008a) when practising the art of lobbying, but measurement problems did not allow for applying it to this research. On a general note, the application of different conceptualisations and methodological frameworks yield incomparable and possibly ambiguous outcomes, as sketched by Dür (2008b). Elaborating Dür's determinants (2008a), which are the result of existing interest group analysis review, is a serious starting point to erect a new determinant combining the resources and embeddedness factors.

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Appendix I – interview protocol

Resource factor

- Where does funding come from, e.g. members or domestic government?
- Could you specify the exact amount of money you get per year?
- Is there a specific budget for lobbying activities? If yes, how much?
- How many employees does your organisation have and how many of them are concerned with lobbying activities?
- Within your organisation, who decides on which lobbying activities will be undertaken?
- What is the founding year of your organisation?
- How many times per year do you have member meetings? Do you use their opinions/experiences when formulating lobbying strategies?

Embeddedness factor

- Would you consider your domestic government more important than EU institutions when conducting lobbying activities?
- Does your domestic government provide assistance to approach EU actors?

Pathways selection

- Do you have any direct relations with EU officials in Brussels?
 - If yes, how, why, whom and how frequently?
 - If no, why not?
- Do you have any direct relations with Brussels based (university) organisations, such as the EUA?
 - If yes, how, whom, why and how frequently?
 - If no, why not?
- Do you have any direct relations with Finnish policy-makers, such as those working for the Ministry of Education or another ministry that is in charge of research and science?
 - If yes, how, whom exactly, why and how frequently?
 - If no, why not?

Endowment with resources

- Imagine your endowment with resources would change next year, e.g. more funding available, more staff or more members, would you reconsider the pathways you have taken in the past?
 - If yes, changes in which resources play a key role?
 - If no, do resources play any role when formulating lobbying strategies?

Additional information regarding Horizon 2020

- Concerning Horizon 2020, what are/were your key preferences?
- Do you assist your members to increase their chances of obtaining research funds?
 - If yes, how?
- In terms of the policy circle (agenda-setting, decision-making, implementation), which phase would you consider as most important when influencing policy-makers?