

## Book Review

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### **EU CIVIL SOCIETY: PATTERNS OF COOPERATION, COMPETITION AND CONFLICT**

*Editors: Sara Kalm and Håkan Johansson*

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## Abstract

EU Civil Society provides a valuable insight into lobbying context in which civil society organisations in Brussels operate. Unfortunately, it does not analyse civil society organisations run the risk of growing detached from their local, regional and national constituencies.

## Keywords

Civil society, citizens' initiative, strategic action fields, EU policy

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In the extensive literature on civil society mobilisation, organisation and participation of civil society in policymaking at EU level, this edited volume offers a novel approach to the study of EU civil society and captivates its potential readers with its in-depth analysis on the evolution of civil society in the European Union.

From the introductory chapter, the editors persuasively argue that a relational sociological approach is important for studying civil society organisations at the supranational level. In the book, the editors use three main theoretical models: the network, the coalition and the field. Their approach in using these theoretical models are aimed to describe the different relationships between organisations and platforms which operate at the EU level. The analysis provided by the editors pays specific attention to different types of civil society organisations operating in the EU, making use of these three leading theoretical models. In this edited volume, readers will find in the book several contributions apply the Strategic Action Fields (SAFs) approach by Fligstein and McAdam.

According to this approach used in the volume, relationships with EU institutions, especially the Commission, are relatively solid. These relationships have led to important joint-initiatives which in turn have empowered civil society organisations in the EU. Showing these findings, the editors

explore the behaviour of civil society organisations by taking the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) as an example. The ECI is an important initiative introduced by the Lisbon Treaty (2009). It offers European citizens the right and tools in proposing legislative measurements to the Commission, in which they must gather at least one million signatures in seven different member states. As an empowering development for civil society organisations in the EU, the ECI receives in-depth analysis towards the final part of the book, that contains a balanced illustration of the ECIs advantages and shortcomings. Regarding the other contributions, the readers of this volume will find that the authors investigate key problems of membership and identity within organisations in the EU. This is a thorough investigation that adds a new perspective to the state of the art of civil society research

The first section of this book explores the different stages of the development of civil society representation and its evolution in the EU. The volume starts with an assessment of civil society representation from the 2001 White Paper on European Governance. It provides key insights about the works of the Convention for the European Constitution and then moves on into developments brought in the Lisbon Treaty. Contributions by Carlo Ruzza and Stefan Bernhard offer several critical assessments to developments and changes of civil society organisations. These changes are associated to the continuous developments of the EU institutional dynamics and processes at supranational and member states level that have influence organisational activity. For example, the increase of Euroscepticism, the impact of the long-lasting economic crisis, thus leading towards low support initiatives at EU level. The book gives examples of sets of policies which are more favourable than others in the current political climate. Furthermore, the book makes an important argument that organisations are fragmented. Generally, there are difficulties in finding common positions, and there is a lack of interest regarding issues of social solidarity. Håkan Johansson and Jayeon Lee in chapter 4 and Pauline Cullen in chapter 5, together with the Rosa Sanchez Salgado, offer key insights into the problems of international solidarity organisations based in the EU. International solidarity organisations have made an effort to solve social issues and bring them closer to the EU agenda, however, as the authors demonstrate, overlapping membership and thriving sub-fields tend to complicate these activities. In this part of the book, it might have helped to learn more clearly why civil society organisation risk of turn into a type of interest representation and lobbying, and as a consequence get detached from their regional and even national constituencies.

In the second part of the volume there is a focus on questions concerning identity and membership of organisations, especially when the book evaluates cases related to women, sex workers and undocumented migrants. The book provides examples of the challenges facing the EU migration policy in the current political climate and describes how different categories of migrants' coexistence in the EU. However, from the book it is difficult to verify how effective advocacy strategies can be made sustainable in the context of EU migration policy. Additionally, it was not clear which impact civil society organisations have in such policy debate at EU level.

In the case of sex workers, the book finds that there is a lack of pressure on EU institutions, because this relation provides few possibilities to apply political influence in support of sex workers. One of the most notable case in the book is presented by Ylva Stubbergaard who writes about women groups and their network. Here, readers will find that there is an interesting comparison between three selected organisations: the European Women's Lobby, the European Network of Migrant Women and the European Forum of Muslim Women. In this part of the book, the author presents the view that there is no harmony and it is difficult to find common grounds on fundamental issues like gender equality, female work and maternity leaves. As a result, there are major differences in respect to identity building, institutional connections and available, sustainable resources. Repeatedly, it becomes clear that active civil society organisations in Brussels run the risk of getting detached from concerns expressed by their local and even national constituencies. This points to a lack of connections with the world outside of Brussels, an issue which remains underexplored in EU

Civil Society. Nevertheless, the volume opens new research avenues to investigate a reoccurring problem faced by many civil society organisations operating in the EU.

The final part the book debates the theoretical options regarding the SAFs model. About the details of the implementation of the ECI can be found in chapter 10 by Luis Bouza García. In chapter 12, Elsa Hedling and Anna Meeuwisse offer persuasive arguments about the resources required to raise the potential of an ECI and its efficacy. It is clear who benefits from the potential of the ECI and how it is effective. Nevertheless, it is Justin Greenwood's contribution that stands out for its clarity in comparison to other contribution in the volume, as it gives an in-depth analysis of the issues concerning civil society initiatives in the EU. He compares the SAFs and supports its approach, providing insightful examples of problems with membership, identity building and diverging. Following Greenwood's account, there should be more focus on the advocacy coalition model; offers some examples where work on the ECI so far has not been as successful as anticipated. In the last chapter of the book, Didier Georgakakis presents a new angle by emphasising the cleavage between sectoral and territorial representation, which remains very important at the EU for future development of civil society.

Throughout the volume, interested readers and researchers in the field of EU civil society will find detailed information about methodological issues and data collection. I consider the SAF approach used by the authors as a useful analytical model for civil society research. Furthermore, the volume offers some valuable insights into discrimination of Muslim women in the EU (pp. 124-125). The book shows how civil society networks can be a useful force in informing non-Muslim citizens about Muslim women, especially about religion clothes such as the hijab headscarf. Future researchers, including anthropologists, political scientists, lawyers, sociologists and even activists who address issues related to Islamophobia, might find relevant information about Muslim women's struggle for respect and equality as citizens in the EU, as well as the right to express and maintain their identity. Furthermore, the volume may encourage a future research agenda, in particular for the Western Balkans to understand how civil society emerges in the context of European enlargement. In general, the volume provides detailed consideration of the conflicts and risks which civil society organisations face in the lobby-based Brussels context. However, EU Civil Society lacks a study of the relations with grassroots organisations and activists in local, regional and national constituencies. The challenges in remaining engaged with the outside world is an issue that deserves further study.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

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