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Are there 30.000 lobbyists in Brussels? A sociological approach of the European directories of interest groups since 1960.

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Summary : In 1992, the European Commission published its famous communication about an open dialogue with the special interest groups. The day after, the media have started to quote a lot of numbers (“3000 interest groups”) trying to show how Brussels was at the time the biggest place of lobbying in the world. How can we count the actors or the organizations representing interests in the EU? How can we think about them? We need two tools to answer these questions. We must refuse the institutional categories (the directories of the European institutions – the Commission and the Parliament – are producing confusion) and find the right statistics. And we must make a critical sociology (our sociological questions can’t be those of the actors) and use operational concepts. With the data collected in the 7 editions of the directory edited by the Commission since 1960, it is possible to demonstrate that they are more continuities than « stop » or changes in the interest representation space. It doesn’t mean that it is a stable space. The main transformations are symbolic, economical and political. This long term approach allows to show a permanent issue : the « Consultation » and its different meanings. It is also an opportunity to observe what was going on before the Delors’s era and the transformation of the European treaties.

A lot of specialists need numbers to justify or demonstrate a fact when they speak about politics. Have you ever heard of this assertion? “80% of the national law is a product of the EU”. Did you read this sentence? “Eurolobbying generates 90 millions euros”. Is it possible to read a paper concerning interest groups in Brussels without this old story? There are 2000 - 3000 interest groups and 10.000 - 30.000 lobbyists?

The problem is that we don’t doubt all these figures. Even more, it seems difficult to open this black box which is full of data. Today, I propose to start with this fact: most of the political scientists maintain that there has been a “lobby boom” at the end of the 80’s and in the early 90’s. I propose to explore this phenomenon and to focus on the 60’s where the first lobby boom of the European construction has taken place.

The quantitative theories concerning interest groups in the UE

During more than twenty years, some political scientists have developed a *scoring activity* concerning interest groups. They give the number of interest groups acting, living or mentioned by the Commission. After, they formulate hypothesis concerning the origin and the growth of lobbying. In the beginning of the 90’s, they have found a thesis, attractive but complex: it’s what I call the “*lobby boom theory*”. This thesis shows that at the end of the 80’s and during the first part of the 90’s, interest groups have grown and composed a dense and powerful interest groups system. This thesis compose now a kind of common sense: journalists and political scientists rarely take the time to verify the numbers they are using. I propose to return to this numbers and to try to find what they mean.

In this way, my first interrogation is: how many data can we find when we want to know the numbers of interest groups? In fact, we can find three kinds of numbers¹. The main and older source is the official one. We can calculate the number of interest groups thanks to the seven interest groups directories published by the European Commission². To my great surprise, there is sometime a slight

1. Berkhout J., Lowery D., « Counting organized interests in the European Union : a comparison of data sources », *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15:4, 2008, p.489-513.

2. See Courty G., Devin G., *La construction européenne*, Paris, La Découverte, 2010, 3è édition.

difference between the data published by political scientists even though they find them in the same book. It is difficult to understand and to analyze them.

Data base of the official lists published by the European Commission concerning the interest groups.

[1.] Commission, DG du marché intérieur, *Répertoire des organismes communs créés dans le cadre de la CEE par les associations industrielles, artisanales et commerciales des Six*, Avant propos de F. Ortoli, Bruxelles, 1960.

[2.] Commission des communautés européennes, *Répertoire des organismes communs créés dans le cadre des Communautés européennes*, 1969, 2^e édition

[3.] Commission des communautés européennes, *Répertoire des organismes communs créés dans le cadre des Communautés européennes par les Associations industrielles, artisanales, commerciales et de service des six pays ; associations de professions libérales ; organisations syndicales de salariés et groupements de consommateurs*, avant-propos de R. Toulemon, Bruxelles, 1973, 3^e édition.

[4.] Commission des communautés européennes, *Répertoire des organisations professionnelles européennes dans la CEE*, Bruxelles, Delta, 1990, 4^e édition ; 1992, 5^e édition.

[5.] Commission européenne, *Répertoire des groupes d'intérêt*, Luxembourg, Office des publications officielles des Communautés européennes, 1996.

[6.] Commission européenne, Base de données Coneccs, 2004

[7.] Commission européenne, Registre des représentants d'intérêts, juin 2008

A second source can be used, a non official and mixed one, scientific and commercial also, because some political scientists and some consultancies have published their own directory of interest groups. A. Butt Philipp published his first one in 1991³ and now we also have 20 editions of the European public affairs directory published by Landmark. Comparing the official source with the non official one shows a huge difference and we have to analyze it (see table n°1).

Newspapers and press releases reveal quite frequently the numbers of lobbyists or interest groups: this third source, the media one, seems to be based on rumors. These figures are completely different and there is a new huge gap between them and the two others.

Today, I will only take the institutional data and look after the formulation of the two theses concerning interest groups⁴.

Table n°1. The variation of interest groups scores

	1960's	1970's	1980's	1990's	2000	Mid 2000's	2009
Official source : The European Commission directory	138	286		503 (1990) 597 (1992) 633 (1996)		737	1451 (15.05) 1657 (8.07) 2100 (01.11)
Political science survey	273 ⁴ 350 ⁵	300 ⁶ 350-400 ⁴	500 ⁷ 321 ⁴	700 ⁴ 585 ⁸ 693 ⁹	889 ⁴ 1450 ¹⁰	881 ⁴	
Informational source			3000		2000 2.600		3000

What conclusion can be drawn from this table n°1 ? Firstly, the gap between official and non official source is relatively slight at beginning of the European construction and is becoming wider. There is a constant problem of statistics concerning interest groups which can explain these slight differences : where one political scientist counts one organization, another colleague considers there are two

3. Philip A. B., (éd.), *Directory of pressure groups in the European community*, Harlow, Longman, 1991.

4. This communication is a part of a collective research program which is analyzing all the sources (see <http://projetpressure.blogspot.com/>)

5. E. Kirchner offers an overview of the research made before. See, *Trade unions as a pressure group in the European community*, Westmead, Saxon house, 1977, p.18.

The first figure (273) is the sample of F. Fischer, the second (350) L. Lindberg's one, the third (350-400) D. Sidjanski's one.

6. Feld W. J., *Transnational Business Collaboration among Common market Countries, Its implication for political integration*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1970,

7. Balme R., Chabanet D., *European governance and Democracy. Power and protest in the EU*, Plymouth, Rowman & Littlefield publishers, 2008, p.4.

8. B. Kohler-Koch says that there is 525 in the 1990 edition of the European commission register (« Changing patterns of interest intermediation in the European Union », *Government and Opposition*, 29(2), 1994, p.175)

9. This figure is the sum of the official source and of the Landmark one. See Greenwood J., Aspinwall Mark, éd., *Collective Action in the European union. Interests and the new politics of associability*, Londres, Routledge, 1998, p.1.

10. Greenwood J., éd., *The Effectiveness of EU business associations*, Antony Rowe, Chippenham, [Ernst and Young Association management], 2002.

interest groups (ie : an international trade union and the European secretariat of this organization can be "1" or "2" organizations). Another explanation is that sometime, a writer converts a rumor into a quasi official figure. Twenty or forty years after, we do not know what really mean some figures. For example, in 1970, W. Feld asserts that there are 300 interest groups in the 60's but it is quite impossible to know where does this number come from.

We must pay attention to a second difference: the gap between institutional sources. Political scientists count as the European institutions register. But, even though they are trying to do their best, they don't speak about the same sample. The gap is here. Before the end of the 90's, when the European Commission registers only the European organizations, political scientists add new categories (the national organization for example). Even more, it becomes normal to add the interest groups recorded by the Commission and those published by Landmark. After, as the Commission does not pay attention to individuals, political scientists include consultants.

First discussion concerning interest group scoring: what does the year of creation mean?

Some Political scientists consider that a European directory of pressure groups can give a picture of the EU system (ie Chabanet, 2008, p.77). Another conception can be explored because when we compare all the pictures (all the directories), we discover continuity and changes. In fact, the picture is full of flattering poses and can't be analyzed like an objective view. A registration form is a strategic presentation of an interest group. The date of creation is not a simple or "natural" fact: it is a choice between a lot of dates and the people who write the registration forms can choose the date that they think appropriate. The test is very easy: an interest group declares different dates of "birthday". Sometime, they change the date because the interest group changes: when they write a new statute, when they change their acronym, when they merge. Sometime, people don't remember exactly what is the real date: they are taken in by appearances or they make a mistake because the date of creation is embedded in the most ambiguous political circumstances (ie : the French trade unions and the second world war era).

We need to understand that interest groups have as many "birthdays" as they need. The date of the first meeting is often different from the date of the approbation of the status¹¹. The date of the International organization is far from the European structure. Some interest groups have more than three structures (European secretariat, federation, committee...) : each have a date which can be used. Occasionally, you can find the date of the election of the first president which is considered as the "real" date.

With this strategic approach, a new conception emerges: there has been a lobby boom but it is an old one which is hidden in the history of the European construction process. Graphs n°1 and n°2 show that it becomes more and more difficult to follow the interest groups footsteps. What averages of creation are not able to show is displayed by Graphs n°3 and 4. They reveal the boom of 1958-62 even though there is not the same amplitude in the different directories.

To find a lobby boom in the 90's, you must draw one curve¹², calculated with one edition of the European commission source (it's a one shot curve). But when you compare the curves of each European Commission directories, the 90's are a time of turmoil.

If you look at the graphs, you can see five curves : i count the date of creation of interest groups (a very traditional statistical approach). But when you count each time the interest groups officialized by the Commission you can see that these curves are becoming flatter. So three analysis can be explored.

11 L. Badel (*Un milieu libéral et européen, Le grand commerce français 1925-1948*, Paris, Comité pour l'histoire économique et financière de France, p.411) shows that the FIGED was created in 1956 but the statutes were adopted in 1959.

12. See the curve starting in 1843 in Beyers Jan, Eising Rainer, Maloney William, "Researching Interest Group Politics in Europe and Elsewhere: Much We Study, Little We Know?", *West European Politics*, 31:6,2008, p.1113.

- The creation of interest groups does not vary automatically with the revisions and the modifications of the treaties.
- The creation of eurogroups is the non-deliberate consequence of two histories: the one of the international groups and the other of the Common market.
- The space of interest representation has its own dynamic: among a great amount of groups created during the European construction, only a few (but how many?) are mobilized.

Second discussion about the explanation of the lobby boom : what decade and what causes?

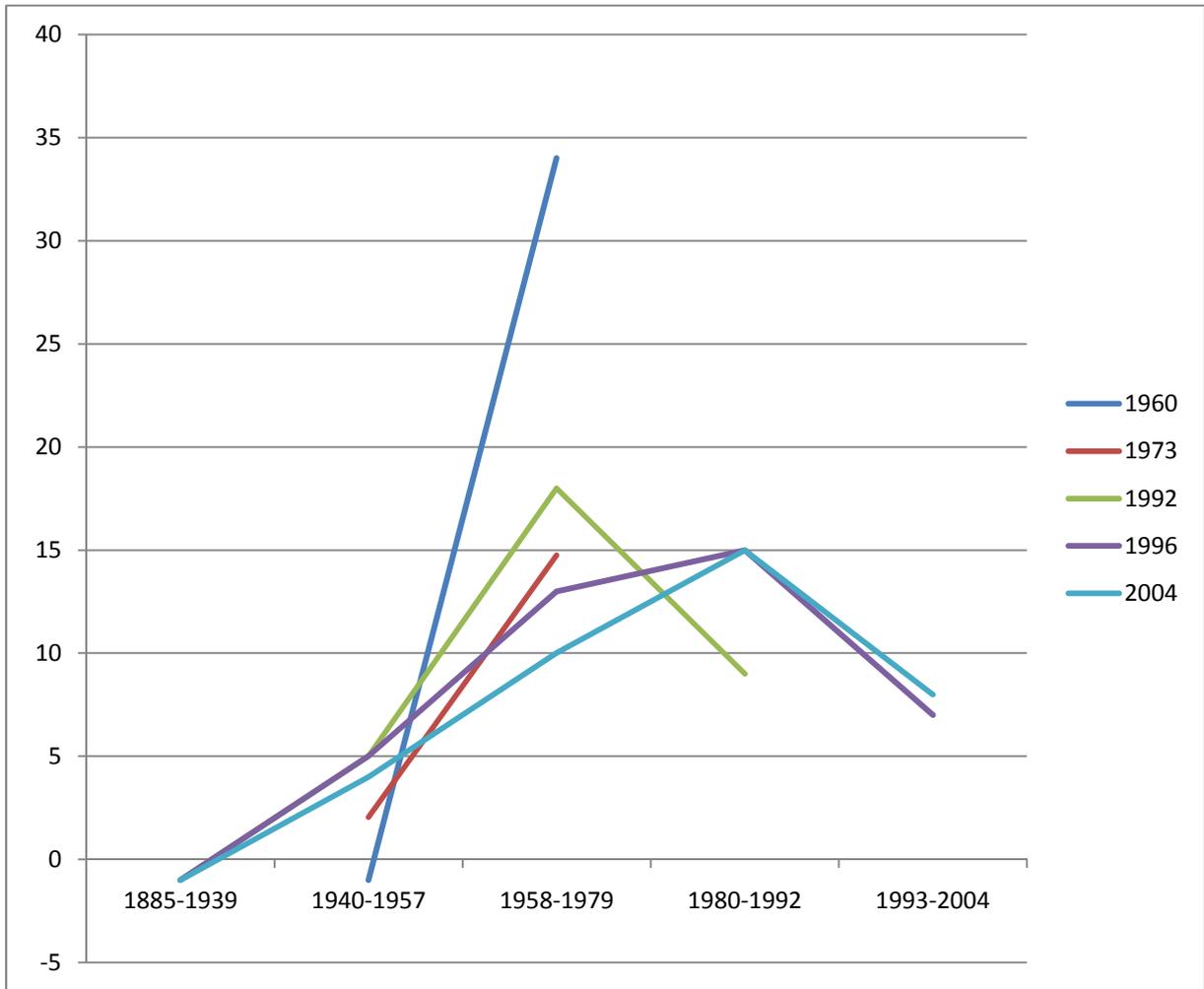
The lobby boom of the 90's has been described by many political scientists. In the most part of the literature, they say that the increase was about 100%: around 300 interest groups in the 70's became 600 in the mid 1990's. But as you can see in the table n°2, if we calculate the growth rate between each scores, we find that the most intensive growth was in the 60's (+186%) and not after. To find the lobby boom at the end of the 80's, you must take the mixed source of data because the official registers don't allow us to assess such a conclusion.

Table n°2 : Growth rate of interest groups in the EU.

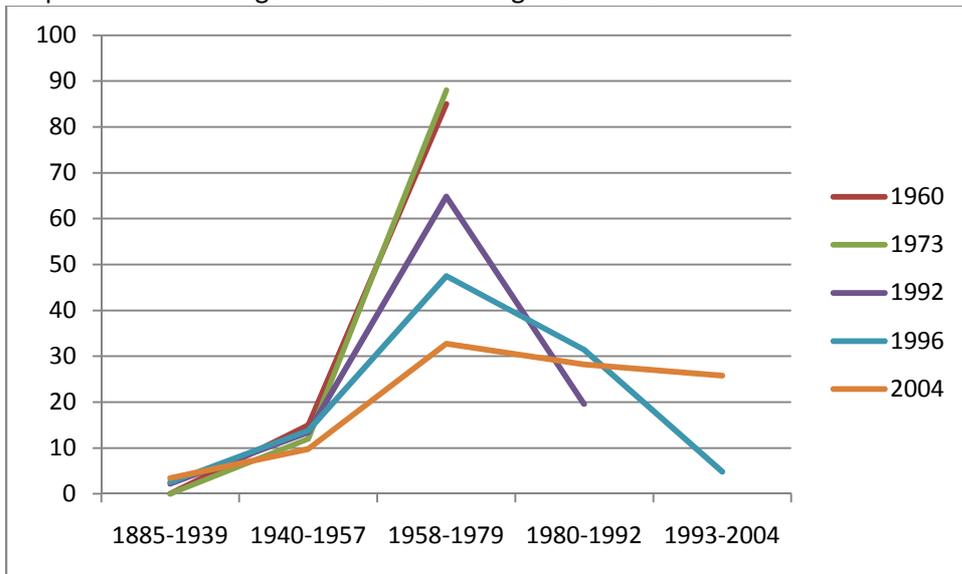
	1960's	1970's	1980's	1990's	2000	Mid 2000's
Growth Rate EEC Commission data	+186%	+107%	-	+110% (1973-1990) +18,5% (1990-1992) +6% (1992-1997)		+16,4%
Chabanet's data			+66%	+40%	+27%	

We can make the same conclusion examining the intensity of creation: even if the peak becomes less important, it is always in the 60's that we observe the higher score. Comparing graph 1 and 2, we can see that the peak of the 60's is higher when we use the % of creation.

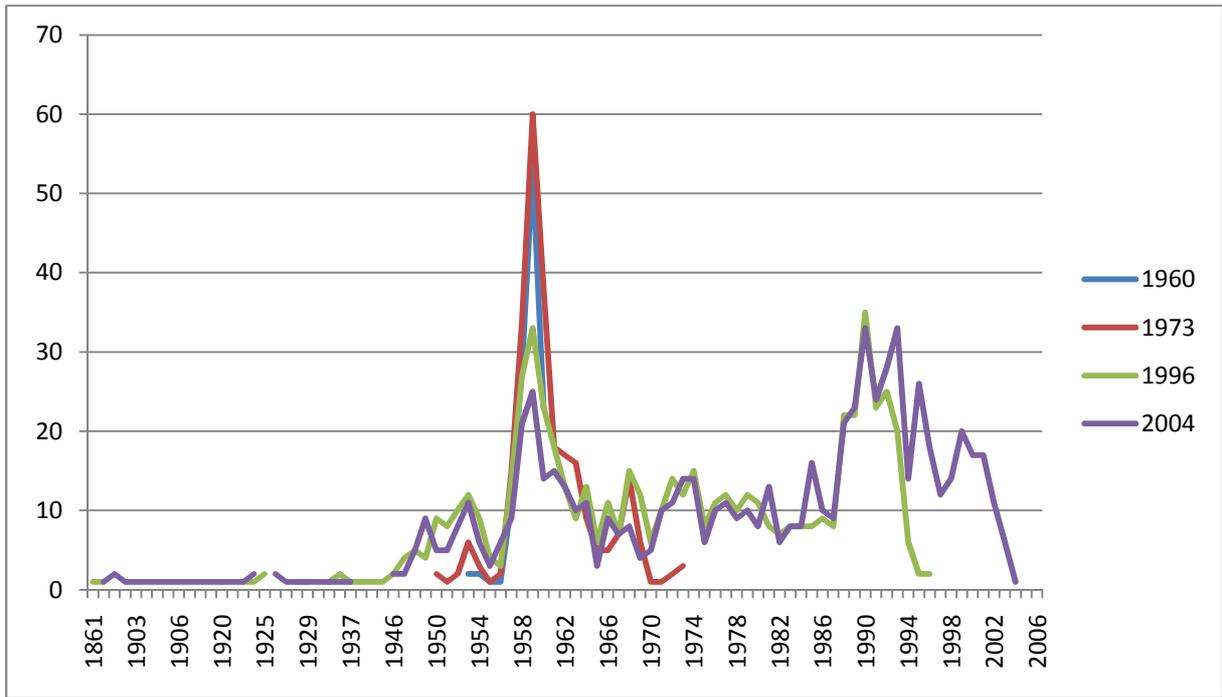
Graph n°1 : average of interest groups created during the era of the European construction



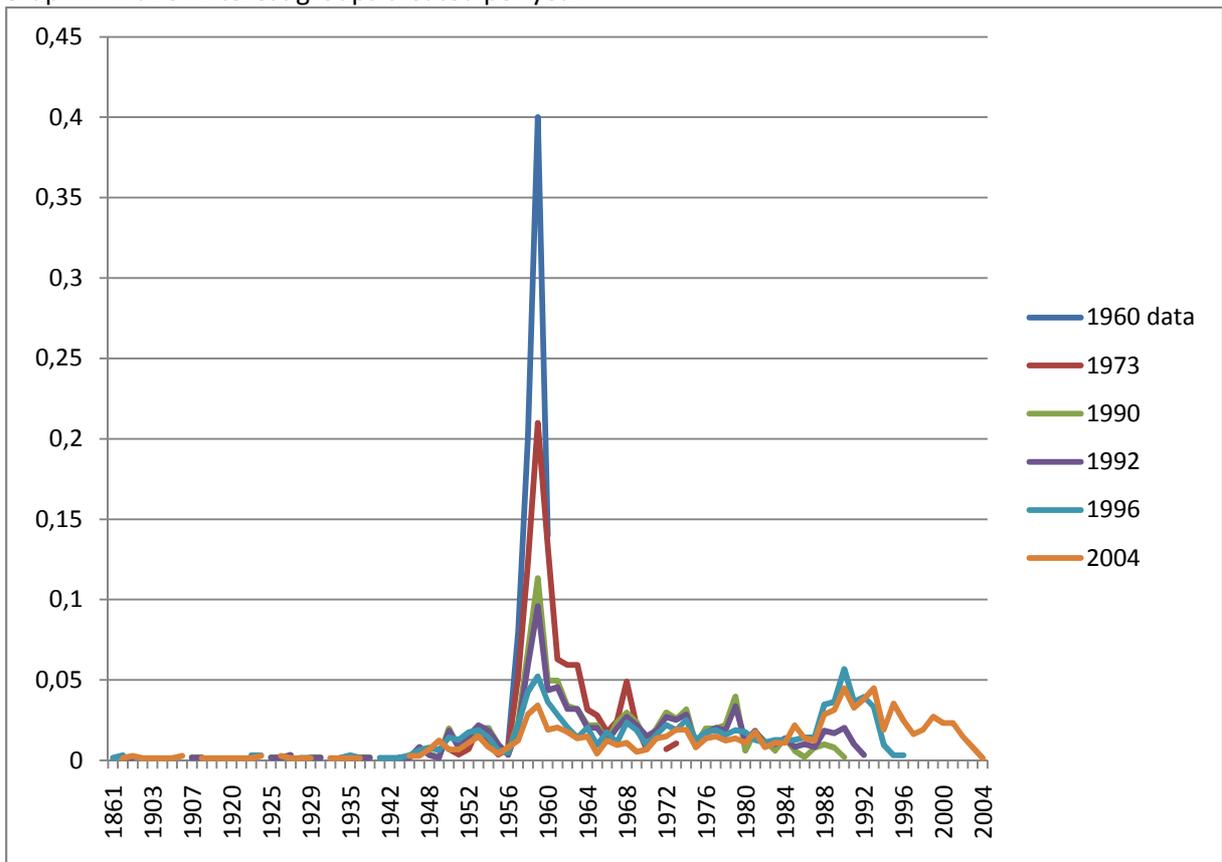
Graph n°2. The average of % created during the main era.



Graph n°3. Scores of interest groups created per year



Graph n°4. % of interest groups created per year



What could have been the lobby boom? What is the beginning of the European interest groups? First possibility, the boom is (and was) the sign of a big transformation: the faith in the power of the EU. During the 60's, an equation has been found: the existence of interest groups was the proof of the

power of the European institutions¹³. In the national states, it was often the proof of the weakness of political actors. In Brussels, it was the beginning of a new conception. W. Hallstein was speaking of 250 interest groups during his presidency because it was an argument in the battle against the skepticism¹⁴. "Find more interest groups and you'll be powerful" became a kind of credo. During this era, the European Commission found more groups than ever after. This institution became the best recorder of interest groups. But, for other reasons, the Economic and social committee during the 70's (and the European Commission before 1992) does exactly the same, trying to find more interest groups than ever. But the CESE has failed in this inquiry. And this logic of demonstration has always an effect on the high number created and registered by the Commission. For example, when the data base Conecs was published on the Web, the Commission wanted to show how many interest groups were participating to the consultation. Globally, concerning interest groups, the inflation of the number is a by-product of political issue.

This lobby boom has a second meaning. When we are focusing on the growth we hardly see the flows: at the end of the 60's some interest groups stopped their activities in Brussels and went back in their national state (it's what we call a renationalization process). In the 60's, around 75% of the interest groups were working in Brussels and Paris. And the two cities lost their members until the mid 1990's (Brussels lost 2% of offices between 1973 and 1992, see table n°3). During this decade, Brussels becomes for the first time the main place where you must sit or work. This is a specifically phenomenon of the lobby boom in the 90's.

Table n°3 : where are the offices of interest groups?

Colonne1	Has an Office in Brussels	In an other European town
1960	39,2	60,8
1973	47,2	51,7
1990	46,1	43,9
1992	45,5	54,5
1996	59	41

Third meaning of the lobby boom concerns the people working in European staffs. Since 2008, the new official conception of interest groups is not dedicated to civil society but to individuals (the Commission speaks of "interest representatives"). How can we continue to count organizations while the European institutions speak about interest representatives?

This double frame, one individual, one organizational, is not a new problem. Since the beginning of the 90's, the European Parliament has been recording people to enter the parliament building. But there is a strange gap between these two populations, those visiting the EP in Brussels and those registered by the Commission. Another part of the lobby boom in the 90's is in fact our new ability: we can focus on people and we can forget progressively the organization frame. As there are more individuals than organizations, we think that the increase is a huge one. As European institutions show every day how many people meet their administration, it's difficult to see exactly what's going on. Since 2000 (see table n°4), the accounts find new scales. Around 2000-15000 people were supposed to lobby but suddenly 4000-30000 are cited. Rumors and shady evaluation are now as persuasive as easy to produce.

During the same time, the lobbying is becoming more and more a collective activity (see table n°5). It doesn't mean that the organization disappeared but that the staff of interest representation changes. More and more people work alone, less and less works in twos. The consequence is that people working alone are making more advertising and communication about their activity than big

13. See Courty G., *Les groupes d'intérêt*, Paris, La Découverte, 2006.

14. Hallstein W., *L'Europe inachevée*, Paris, R. Laffont, 1970, p.96.

staff publishing one annual report. This evolution increases the illusion of the inflation of people. In fact, it's difficult to think about interest groups because we are in front of an individualization process.

Table n°4. Three estimations of lobbyists

	1960's	1970's	1980's	1990'	2000	Mid 2000's	2010
Institutional data : The staff and the Bureau	258	263		2013 (1990) 2203 (1992) 1194 (1996)			2598
The European Parliament				2079	4000	4834	4556
Rumors and media data			15000		30000		

Table n°5. – How many people work in the Bureau of interest groups ?

People working in the bureau	% of interest groups in 1992	% of interest groups in 1996	% of interest groups in 2004
1	11	16,3	37,6
2	84	79,3	45,7
3-7	5	4,4	16,7
Total	100 (n=647)	100 (n=618)	100 (n=641)

So, we were searching a lobby boom and we discovered along the way a dense, diverse and continuous metamorphosis of the interest groups system. It's impossible to pretend that there's one increase or one cause. Figures must always be interpreted: the date, the name, the people, the structure, the status.

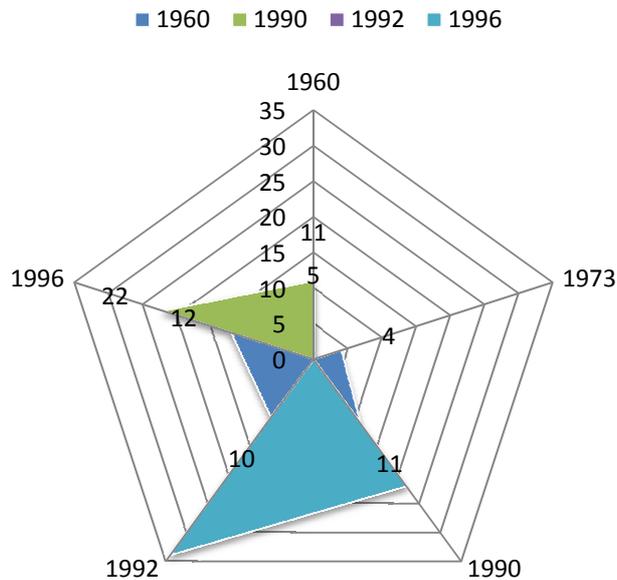
Last discussion: is it possible to know how many they are?

It might be possible to know what the global population of interest groups is if we take care of two dimensions. The first concerns the quality and the accuracy of the question we are trying to answer. If we want to know how many organizations are spending time, money... to live and participate to institutional and political life : we don't know before our enquiry how many they are (and I am not sure that the score will be the most interesting side of our research). In fact, the scoring habit is not an introduction to the understanding of political activities. And if we want to know what the representatives' practices in Brussels are, we need to explore and to observe what they are doing and we must be suspicious of what they are telling about them.

The second dimension we must explore is a new formulation of a traditional question: what population are we exploring? Professionals of lobbying activities or everyone trying to give informations to the European institutions? Only full time consultants? People in charge of the advocacy job of everyone working in a staff?

Graph n°5. An Evaluation of what we know about the origins of interest groups

The origins of interest groups



When you take a look at the last graph, you can see what political science begins to know about interest groups. You can also see what we can explain (in blue and green). The white side of this picture is our challenge: who are they and how can we think about them? We have a lot of facts concerning the 90's certainly because they try to communicate more during this period than ever before. We know a little about the pioneers, those who started to act in the 60's. But we know quite nothing concerning the 70's. The reasons are that we are in front of a transformation that troubles the statistics: the translation of the acronyms and the composition of a space of European professional of public affairs. In fact I hope that we'll be able to describe the core of interest groups system with the older organizations living and acting permanently in Brussels. Around this core, I hope we'll be able to find the flow of way in and way out. All over, I think that we can describe the last enlargement of the system with the recognition of local and national interest groups ; the highlight of the consultancies and the interplay of new categories of brokers.

With these official data, they are more continuities than « stop » or changes in the interest representation space. It doesn't mean that it is a stable space. Transformations are symbolic (interest groups have new status, they are younger – representatives need to choose the right date of creation - ; for the same reason they look older). They are economical (the staffs, the budgets) and political too (who runs and who is defeated). But, if we accept to follow a long term approach, it will allow us to show the variation of a permanent issue : the « Consultation » of the civil society and its different meanings.