

## What drives interest group collaboration at the EU level? Evidence from the European environmental interest groups

**Ruth Webster**

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### Keywords

environmental policy, institutions, institutionalism, interest representation, lobbying, NGOs, political science

### Abstract

The paper examines patterns of interest group collaboration at the EU level and investigates factors with the potential to influence collaborative behaviour. Ideas from the literature on collective action, interest group coalitions, American and European interest representation and new institutionalism create a framework for analysing the range of collaborative fora at the EU level and the factors driving collaboration among groups seeking to shape EU public policies. Empirical evidence drawn from a case study of collaboration by European environmental interest groups presents a number of conclusions about the nature of and reasons for collaboration. The European environmental interest groups favour informally organised, flexible coalitions in which the members decide their level of participation. The case study identifies collective and selective incentives, issues and allies (coalition partners) as factors driving collaborative behaviour. The case study also demonstrates the importance of considering the potential influence of opposition actors and the EU institutional framework on interest group collaboration.

### Kurzfassung

Dieser Artikel untersucht Muster der Zusammenarbeit von Interessensgruppen auf EU-Ebene und erforscht potentielle Einflußfaktoren für das kooperative Verhalten. Ideen aus der Literatur zu collective action, Interessensgruppenkoalitionen, amerikanischer und europäischer Interessensvertretung und neuem Institutionalismus bilden den Rahmen für die Analyse der verschiedenen Foren der Zusammenarbeit auf EU-Ebene sowie der Faktoren, die die Zusammenarbeit zwischen Gruppen befördern, die das Ziel haben, die öffentliche EU-Politik zu beeinflussen. Empirische Belege aus einer Fallstudie zur Zusammenarbeit von europäischen Umweltgruppen führen zu einer Reihe von Schlußfolgerungen über die Natur und die Gründe für Zusammenarbeit. Die europäischen Umweltgruppen bevorzugen informell organisierte, flexible Koalitionen, in denen die Mitglieder ihr Beteiligungsniveau selbst festlegen. Die Fallstudie identifiziert kollektive und selektive Anreize, Themen und Alliierte (Koalitionspartner) als kooperationsfördernde Faktoren. Die Fallstudie zeigt weiters die Wichtigkeit des potentiellen Einflusses von Akteuren der Gegenseite sowie des institutionellen EU-Rahmens auf die Zusammenarbeit von Interessensgruppen auf.

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## 1. Introduction <sup>↑</sup>

The literature on European Union (EU) level interest representation leaves relatively few stones unturned. Theoretical and empirical accounts explain *inter alia* the volume and range of groups operating at the trans-national level, how they are created and maintained, their importance for the optimal functioning of the EU political system (particularly regarding routine policy making decisions), and their contribution to the integration process. However, one area which has received little attention to date is the patterns of associability that develop between interest groups. Groups operating at the EU level do not work in isolation. They are aware of their contemporaries. More than this, groups communicate with each other. Interaction may lead to various outcomes, including the ubiquitous exchange of information. The collective pursuit of shared public policy goals is another possible outcome and serves as the focus of this paper.

The paper seeks to investigate patterns of interest group collaboration at the EU level and identify factors driving collaboration. It presents ideas from the literature on interest group coalitions, collective action, American and European interest representation and new institutionalism to create a framework for examining both the range of collaborative fora and the factors influencing the collaborative behaviour of groups seeking to shape EU public policies. Empirical evidence drawn from a case study of collaboration involving European level environmental interest groups presents a number of conclusions about the nature of and reasons for collaboration.

The paper defines European level environmental interest groups as those with a permanent presence in Brussels and Europe-wide organisations keen to influence the EU policy process. These groups are ideal candidates for an investigation of interest group collaboration because of their collaborative record. It is well known that the Brussels-based environmental groups collaborate (see for instance Biliouri, 1999; Long 1998, 1995; Mazey and Richardson 1993; Webster 1998). The main forum through which the groups have sought joint action for issues of common interest has varied according to the number of groups involved - the original Group of Four expanded to the Group of Seven and more recently the Group of Eight (G-8).<sup>(1)</sup> The enduring existence of this forum lends credence to an assumption which underpins the paper, namely that *prima facie* the potential for collaboration among the European environmental groups is considerable because they are not subject to the profit and market share tensions that underpin relations between many business and industry interest groups. Instead, the environmental groups share a common goal of protecting the environment. This provides a solid basis from which to act in concert. The literature and empirical evidence test these assumptions in the following sections.

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Although European environmental interest groups are the focus of the paper, patterns of collaboration (where the outcome is joint action to achieve shared public policy goals) is common among private and public interests at the EU level but to varying degrees and configurations. For example, the Packaging Chain Forum brought together industry associations in a coalition to address the European directive on packaging and packaging waste (European Communities, 1994; Porter and Butt Philip, 1993). The EU level consumer interest groups form ad hoc alliances as well as "highly developed and institutionalised" (Young, 1998, pp.166-167) patterns of collaboration on issues relating to agriculture, foodstuffs and technical standardisation (Young, 1998, p.166). Consequently, some of the factors driving collaboration between the European environmental interest groups have a more general application to collaborating interests at the EU level.

The paper begins with a definition of interest group collaboration and a discussion of basic criteria to identify the main patterns. The ideas drawn from the literature build a framework for investigating a range of factors with the potential to influence the collaborative behaviour of the European environmental interest groups. Case study evidence is used to explore these factors to reveal the collaborative activities of the European environmental interest groups and explain their behaviour.

## 2. Patterns of interest group collaboration <sup>↑</sup>

The definition adopted throughout the paper emphasises the purpose of collaboration, namely the furtherance of common interests. In essence, interest groups act in concert to achieve shared public policy goals. This definition draws upon Olson's (1971 edition) definition of collective action and Hula's (1995) definition of political coalitions. Both authors emphasise the purpose of collaboration. For Olson (1971 edition) the collective action problem arises because individuals with common interests will not act collectively to realise them. Consequently, the pursuit of common or group interests is the reason for collective action. Hula perceives political coalitions as "groups of organizations united by a common political goal" (1995, p.240). Again, the intention of the coalition is clear. Given its purpose, the paper regards collaboration as a strategy for influencing the EU policy process. Furthermore, the paper regards interest groups as rational actors in the sense that they choose the strategy they consider the most appropriate to achieve their public policy goals. The decision to treat interest groups as rational actors is deliberate and influenced by the collective action literature. The discussion of the literary framework in section three considers this decision in detail.

No single pattern of interest group collaboration exists. Different patterns emerge because groups participate in a range of fora. The paper adopts “coalition” as the generic term to describe the various fora in which groups combine forces. Existing studies of interest group coalitions in the American (Washington) policy process refer to their longevity, breadth of concern, structural characteristics and membership. These criteria have universal applicability and transfer readily to the EU.

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Loomis (1986) identifies the first two defining characteristics, namely the duration of the coalition and the number of issues it addresses. He describes four types of interest group coalition: the AD HOC CAUSE coalition forms around a particular issue and is a short-term venture; the AD HOC COMPLEX coalition organises around multiple issues for a similarly limited period; the CAUSE coalition champions one issue over a long period; and the COMPLEX coalition focuses on many issues and is a long-term alliance (1986, p.262). Schlozman and Tierney (1986) add the remaining structural and membership criteria. Coalitions differ according to their internal organisational structure, be it formal or informal. Schlozman and Tierney mention the extent to which meetings are planned and members are asked for contributions as indicators of formally organised coalitions (1986, p.48). The presence of a secretariat (staff) to manage and maintain the interest group coalition is a further indicator of a formal internal structure. The membership composition of coalitions is the fourth criterion. Whereas the members of some coalitions come from the same interest group category, a more heterogeneous mix comprises the membership of other coalitions (Schlozman and Tierney, 1986, p.48).

Research on coalitions within the American interest group system reveals the prevalence of short-term, single-issue coalitions (or AD HOC CAUSE coalitions in Loomis' (1986) terminology). These coalitions are attractive because they are flexible (Berry, 1989, p.166). They do not commit members for an indefinite period; neither do they extend their scope beyond a specific issue. Moreover, the limited duration of a temporary coalition enables interest groups to concentrate finite resources on other priority matters (Berry, 1989, p.167). Regarding membership Berry (1989, p.168) notes that most coalitions bring together groups who already consider themselves allies. Invariably this means groups operating within the same policy areas where shared interests are identified readily. Repeated collaboration fosters a communication and trust advantage for groups that maintain collaborative links (Berry, 1989, p.168).

Nevertheless, this advantage is not a prerequisite for collaboration. Coalitions comprising interest groups from many policy areas are commonplace in Washington and emerge in response to issues that affect simultaneously numerous interests. This can lead to some unlikely alliances of groups who may consider their routine interactions to be more adversarial than collaborative. Examining collaboration between the European environmental movement and other political actors Dalton (1992) contends that short-term, issue-specific collaboration between environmental groups and others is the norm. Hence, public policy issues create interim alliances between enduring enemies, including environmental groups and industry. Berry (1989) and Schlozman and Tierney (1986) regard the issue as the collaborative glue particularly for heterogeneous coalitions. Without a common issue, unlikely alliances often become unstuck. However, successful unlikely partnerships may endure (Berry, 1989, p.169) and enjoy the trust and friendship advantages of more homogeneous coalitions.

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Turning to structural characteristics, informally organised coalitions outnumber formally organised coalitions within the American system (Schlozman and Tierney, 1986, p. 48). It is easy to link this to the longevity and issue scope (or breadth of concern) criteria. Indeed, the prevalence of temporary, single-issue coalitions points towards informality because the limited time-scale and issue scope militates against the establishment of a secretariat or membership scheme. This type of organisational structure is neither universal for, nor exclusive to, fleeting, one-issue coalitions. The G-8 is a pertinent, EU example of an enduring, multi-issue interest group coalition organised on an informal basis. There is no secretariat, membership subscription or formal record of meetings and communications between the Brussels-based environmental groups. Moreover, it is the prerogative of each environmental interest group member to decide whether to act on a particular issue.<sup>(2)</sup>

Although interest group collaboration is an everyday phenomenon among interest groups seeking to influence the American policy process Berry (1989) strikes a cautionary note. Coalition formation is not a foregone conclusion. Groups work alone because there is a shortage of potential coalition partners, or groups prefer to pursue some public policy issues on an individual basis, namely those issues they deem to be most important (Berry, 1989, pp. 165-166). Whereas interest groups act alone on priority issues, they collaborate on issues of secondary importance. Coalitions provide groups with an opportunity to pursue issues that they would not address by themselves (Berry, 1989, p.166). The literature presented in the following section investigates these points.

As noted above, the purpose of interest group collaboration is essential to its definition. In turn, the purpose of collaboration provides a plausible answer to the question ‘what drives collaboration?’. Interest groups collaborate to achieve common public policy goals. Yet, some of the ideas presented in the literary framework question the simplicity of this answer. Indeed, some strands within the collective action literature doubt the commitment of coalition members to achieving public policy goals.

### **3. Incentives, allies, issues, opposition and institutions – factors with the potential to drive collaborative behaviour**

While the desire to achieve shared public policy goals is a plausible answer to the question ‘what drives collaboration?’ the literary framework includes ideas that look beyond common interests as an explanation for collaborative behaviour. The collective action literature is the starting point for an examination of the factors driving interest group collaboration and accentuates the role of incentives.

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With the publication of *The Logic of Collective Action* in 1965, Olson (1971 edition) advanced an economic explanation for collective action which emphasised how difficult it is to encourage individuals to act collectively to realise common (group) interests. His interpretation of the nature of common interests and rational choice perspective support this statement. Group interests usually take the form of collective goods. Collective goods are non-excludable, therefore their supply cannot be restricted to those who secure their provision. Everyone within a designated group will benefit from the collective good regardless of their individual contribution. Regarding the rational choice perspective, Olson (1971 edition) considers individuals as self-interested actors whose behaviour reflects their desire to maximise personal utility.<sup>(3)</sup> Combining these elements Olson (1971 edition) states that rational, self-interested individuals will not act collectively to achieve common interests (in the shape of collective goods) because the cost of contributing exceeds the collective, non-excludable benefit. Utility-maximising individuals will wait for others to contribute and free-ride based on their input. Put simply, why should an individual pay for a good he/she will receive

regardless of his/her actions? The free-rider problem exemplifies the dilemma facing groups that pursue collective goods: “unless the number of individuals in a group is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device” (Olson, 1971 edition, p.2) individuals will not engage in collective action to pursue their common interests.

Incentives, more particularly selective incentives, are the special device to resolve the collective action dilemma. Selective incentives are separate exclusive goods available only to group members. When presented as a positive inducement selective incentives transform the cost-benefit calculus of the rational actor. Groups elicit contributions from utility maximising individuals if the benefits from membership exceed the costs. Invariably membership benefits outweigh the costs when selective, excludable inducements are available. Olson (1971 edition) addresses the idea of different types of selective incentive, including psychological and moral selective incentives. However, he chooses to exclude them from the theory. One of the reasons given is the inability to test empirically these types of incentives (Olson, 1971 edition, p.61n17). Consequently, he focuses on material (economic) and social (non-economic) selective incentives. Social selective incentives (such as status and prestige) are more appropriate for small and intermediate groups. Material selective incentives are more appropriate for large groups. Olson (1971 edition) concentrates on large economic groups, therefore the emphasis is on material selective incentives. By providing this type of excludable inducement, large economic groups can mobilise. Selective incentives reduce the likelihood of free-riding and eliminate the collective action problem. Olson (1971 edition) reinforces the importance of selective incentives with the by-product theory.

*The Logic of Collective Action* (Olson, 1971 edition) remains a turning point in the study of group mobilisation. Olson’s (1971 edition) theory continues to stimulate debate about the influences upon individuals to realise their common interests. Yet, Olson’s (1971 edition) contribution is a less than perfect match for many groups whose individual members appear to mobilise ostensibly to pursue collective goods, and tangible (material) selective incentives are anything but ubiquitous. Public interest groups fall into this category. Hence, “There is then a mobilization paradox: Olson’s theory predicts the under mobilization of public interest groups but this seems contradicted by their empirical proliferation” (Jordan and Maloney, 1996, p.669). Olson (1971 edition) sets clear parameters for his theory. It seeks to explain the collective action problems facing large economic groups based on the rational, (largely) self-interested behaviour of individuals. Successive additions to the collective action literature extend the definition of rational behaviour and the range of incentives that induce collective action, not least in contributing to an understanding of why so many individuals join organisations which represent *inter alia* human rights and civil liberties, environmental protection and animal welfare (see for example, Jordan and Maloney, 1997, 1996).

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Individuals behave rationally when they act to realise their preferences (Moe, 1980; Salisbury, 1969). However, their preferences may amount to something other than maximising personal utility. Some contributions to the literature are critical of economic explanations for collective action and advance instead a broader set of preferences on which rational individuals act. Preferences and actions are subject to many influences, including the social ties and attachments individuals have to each other (Knoke, 1988; Udehn, 1993), the value system and moral sense of each individual (Moe, 1980; Udehn, 1993), the experiences each individual brings to new situations, and the information and skills available to each individual (Moe, 1980).

Regarding selective incentives, the literature identifies material, solidary and purposive (or expressive) types (Clark and Wilson, 1961; Salisbury, 1969). In addition to benefits that have a material value, individuals may receive social rewards from acting collectively. The

purposive/expressive benefit emanates from the goals of the group, namely by providing individuals with a sense of satisfaction from contributing to the cause or the opportunity to articulate their views and beliefs. Purposive incentives may also be collective because they relate to the common interests of the group. Jordan and Maloney (1996, pp.678-679) discovered that the members of Friends of the Earth rank the campaigning activities of the environmental organisation above any services available exclusively to those who join. Consequently, the public policy goals of the environmental interest group can persuade individuals to become members. These individuals are rational actors whose preferences are for something other than the maximisation of personal utility.

Criticism of Olson's (1971 edition) narrow economic definition of rational behaviour has drawn attention to myriad potential influences upon the preferences and actions of individuals. This in turn points the investigation of why the European environmental interest groups collaborate in a number of directions. Collaboration does not present the environmental interest groups with the same problem facing Olson's (1971 edition) individuals. After all the environmental groups pursue collective goods as a matter of routine. Moreover, collaboration is a strategic option to achieve public policy goals and as such the participants are making "second-tier choices" (Gray and Lowery, 1997, p.322; Jordan, 1998). The issue at stake for the European environmental interest groups is how they should pursue a public policy goal, not whether they should pursue it. Mindful of this, rational action based upon the desire to maximise personal utility is less appropriate for the European environmental groups than for the economically driven individuals in Olson's (1971 edition) theory. However, by changing the unit of analysis from the individual to the group as well as the types of incentive available to collaborating groups, Hula (1999, 1995) illustrates the importance of including incentives in a discussion of the factors influencing collaboration. Indeed, Hula's (1999, 1995) research reveals how incentives influence the way in which groups collaborate as well as why they collaborate.

Hula (1999, 1995) identifies strategic, policy-oriented incentives and selective incentives to attract potential coalition partners. Coalition participants seeking to influence public policies respond to the former policy-oriented category. They perceive collaborative strategies as "the most effective way to shape policy outcomes" (Hula, 1995, p.241). Coalitions also offer selective benefits, notably information. This exclusive incentive is particularly attractive to groups that have joined for reasons other than the achievement of public policy goals (that is, strategic, policy-oriented incentives) (Hula, 1995, p.246). Symbolic benefits are a further type of excludable incentive available only to coalition members. Hula suggests that the commitment of some groups to coalitions is largely symbolic – a measure to satisfy their members (be they individuals or organisations) that they are actively representing their interests in Washington, or provide support for other groups (1995, pp.248-249). In other words, joining a coalition demonstrates how busy the interest group is on behalf of its members, or shows allegiance to other organisations.(4)

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In changing the unit of analysis from the individual to the group, Hula (1999, 1995) identifies an important methodological point, namely that the usual participants in interest group coalitions are the members of staff employed by the groups. Members of staff differ from individual group members because collaborating to secure public policy goals brings a particular set of exclusive benefits to employees, notably a reduction in their workload from sharing tasks with other groups as well as improving the group's chances of success by choosing this strategy to influence the policy process (Hula, 1995, p.242). Collaboration is consistent with the rational behaviour of paid employees.

Hula's (1999, 1995) research raises two points about interest group coalitions and the incentives to which they respond. First, interest groups respond to public policy goals (collective goods) because

they are political advocates. Groups regard collaboration not only as an appropriate strategy for achieving political goals but also as a means for shaping the coalition's platform according to their specific interests and, in a broader context, influencing the terms of the policy debate (Hula, 1995, p.244). Second, individual group members and interest group employees respond to different types of selective incentives. For example, resource saving and sharing is a widely recognised benefit from collaboration (Baggott, 1995; Berry, 1989; Schlozman and Tierney, 1986).

Turning to the manner in which incentives influence how interest groups collaborate, Hula (1999, 1995) identifies different categories of membership – core members, specialist members and peripheral members (Hula, 1995, pp.249-255). Members within the first category display the highest level of commitment to the achievement of public policy goals (collective incentives). These groups bear the start-up costs to enable the coalition to pursue collective goods in the shape of favourable policy outputs (Hula, 1995, p.250). Surrounding the core members are the specialists or players (Hula, 1995, p.250). These groups are also keen to pursue policy goals and bring knowledge and expertise to the coalition. Their objectives are more limited than those of core members because they tend to concentrate on particular aspects of policy. If the coalition fails to incorporate or reflect their views, specialist members may leave (Hula, 1995, p.253). Specialists respond to collective incentives and more particularly the opportunity to mould the policy goals of the coalition. Peripheral groups are less interested in collective incentives than the other members and take a less active role in the coalition. They respond to selective incentives (Hula, 1995, p.254). Despite their relative inactivity, these members can have a significant impact upon the success of a coalition: even if an influential group only lends its passive support, its name may contribute to the overall success of the coalition (Hula, 1995, p.254). Drawing distinctions between coalition members highlights the potential influence of selective as well as collective incentives upon collaborative behaviour.

Moving beyond the discussion of incentives, the literary framework includes a range of ideas to investigate additional factors with the potential to influence collaborative behaviour, namely the relationships between potential coalition partners, public policy issues, the presence of opposition actors, and the institutional framework.

Interest groups tend to have “some reliable coalition partners” (Berry, 1989, p.168) with which they develop a bond through repeated collaboration. Although allies are often identified initially within the same policy sector more unusual partnerships can flourish in the long-term (see section two above). Focusing on the European environmental groups we might assume that co-operation between environmental organisations “of the kind that is necessary to be influential in Europe should be relatively easy to achieve, at least in principle” (Long, 1998, p.117), not least because organisations strive for a common fundamental goal to protect the environment. A shared fundamental goal and understanding of environmental concerns should enable these like-minded groups to collaborate.

Experience adds to the opportunities for interest group collaboration. Groups with a collaborative history are aware of the expertise and commitment others will offer to a coalition: “Repeated experience with other organizations introduces more stability into the relationship and provides for enhanced trust between members of the alliance” (Hojnacki, 1997, p.68). Examining the impact of collaborative experience on coalition formation, Hojnacki (1997) tests the proposition that experience can influence a group's decision to collaborate in the future. An experienced group is more likely to harbour realistic expectations vis-à-vis its role within a coalition and what the coalition can hope to achieve. As a practised coalition ally, the group knows what to expect from others and what others will expect of it. Hojnacki's findings confirm the proposition that groups which collaborate frequently (that is, groups for which collaboration is the strategy selected for at



least half of the issues they seek to pursue) are more likely to participate in coalitions than those which engage in collective action less frequently (1997, p.82). However, the results also reveal that collaborative experience is one of several factors influencing collaborative behaviour (Hojnacki, 1997, p.82).

Coalitions emerge around issues, as do potential coalition members. Berry suggests that groups tend to work individually on issues of great importance to their interests and collaborate on issues they would not normally address by themselves (1989, p.166). Nevertheless, some issues demand a collaborative response because of their complex nature (Loomis, 1986). Loomis (1986, p.268) cites nuclear power, tax laws and acid rain as examples. Complex issues often lead to coalitions of unlikely allies. They also provide interest coalitions with the opportunity to affect the level of public attention such issues receive (Loomis, 1986, p.267). For example, interest group coalitions can “broaden the scope of the conflict” (Loomis, 1986, p.268) by disseminating clear, concise information to improve knowledge and understanding, and attract attention (of both the public and the policy-makers). Loomis argues that environmental interest groups are successful when they try to increase public awareness (1986, p.268).

Hojnacki (1997) investigates how perceptions of an organised opposition can influence the decision to collaborate. Essentially, “When opponents are strong, organizations will see greater benefits in joining a coalition with other groups” (Hojnacki, 1997, pp.84-85). Groups will be more amenable to collaboration if they perceive a strong organised opposition because “Alliances provide a means of showing broader support for a cause or interest” (Hojnacki, 1997, p.67). In other words, there is safety and strength in numbers.

In addition to perceptions of opposition actors, relations between interest groups and the institutional framework of the EU may drive collaborative behaviour. Ideas from the literature on new institutionalism identify ways in which the EU institutions can influence interest group behaviour. This literature considers and debates the manner in which institutions “structure political interactions and in this way affect political outcomes” (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992, p.13). In essence, new institutionalism assumes that “institutions matter” (Bulmer, 1993, p.355). Views differ as to how institutions shape political interactions and outcomes. For historical institutionalists “institutions are not just another variable” (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992, p.9), they affect the preferences as well as the strategies of actors. By contrast, rational choice institutionalists credit institutions with the power to influence only the strategies selected by actors (thus restricting explanations to how actors behave not why they behave). It is unnecessary to choose a side (be it the historical, sociological or rational choice school) when applying the new institutionalist approach in the paper because examining the extent to which institutions influence the behaviour of interest groups is not critical to the analysis. The decision to collaborate is a decision about how to pursue preferences not how preferences form. For the purposes of this investigation the new institutionalist approach confirms the importance of looking at the institutional landscape and the way in which interest groups relate to it. This includes their patterns of interaction over the policy issues they pursue and the political goals they seek to achieve. Without knowing the extent to which “institutions matter” (Bulmer, 1993, p.355) it is possible to examine how the EU institutions influence the behaviour of the environmental interest groups.

There is considerable scope for analysis by adopting an inclusive (historical institutionalist) definition of institutions. Bulmer defines institutions “as meaning formal institutions; informal institutions and conventions; the norms and symbols embedded in them; and policy instruments and procedures” (1998, p.370). Bulmer (1998) identifies several ways in which the EU institutions can

structure political outcomes. Adopting a historical institutionalist approach he notes that the formal supranational institutions are not neutral actors mediating the preferences and demands of others (including member states and interest groups) (1998, p.374). The formal supranational institutions have their own agendas and shape the policy process accordingly. For example, the institutions act as gatekeepers allowing only some groups the opportunity to influence the policy process (Bulmer, 1998, p.374). Secondly, these formal supranational institutions can act as “key *players* in their own right” (Bulmer, 1998, p.374). The European Commission’s agenda-setting role exemplifies the way in which the supranational institutions can shape the policy process.

Walker’s (1991) examination of the role of institutional patronage in the formation and maintenance of interest groups within the American political system identifies the potential for the direct involvement of the institutions upon collaborative behaviour. The literature acknowledges the financial assistance provided by the European Commission to public interest groups in particular. However, it is not known whether institutional patrons support the collaborative fora in which interest groups, particularly the European environmental groups, participate or how such assistance might influence the behaviour of these participants and the patterns of collaboration that emerge.

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In sum, the literary framework guiding the empirical investigation presents the European environmental interest groups as rational actors - rational in the sense that they act to realise their preferences. Unlike the utility maximising preferences of the individuals in Olson’s (1971 edition) theory of collective action, preferences of the European environmental interest groups might be subject to a range of influences. Regarding the range of influences upon the preferences of the European environmental interest groups, the literary framework mentions some potential factors that are difficult to investigate without recourse to other academic disciplines, including moral sensibilities, value systems and societal norms and conventions. While accepting the importance of such factors the literary framework focuses on actions rather than preference formation and upon those factors that can be examined within the scope of the investigation. Hence, the empirical investigation concentrates on the potential of collective and selective incentives, coalition partners (or allies), public policy issues, and opposition interest and institutional actors as factors driving interest group collaboration.

Based on existing research, it is anticipated that the role of collective and selective incentives will prove to be an important influence upon the collaborative behaviour of the European environmental groups. Environmental groups seek to achieve public policy goals as a matter of routine. Hence, the strategic benefits from collaborating may persuade groups to create and participate in coalitions. As rational actors, the European environmental groups act to realise their policy ambitions and select strategies accordingly. The groups are not oblivious to their operational environment. Consequently, it is anticipated that a range of factors, including the actions of groups with opposing views on a particular public policy issue and the EU institutions might influence their behaviour.

#### **4. Patterns of collaboration involving the European environmental interest groups: case study evidence**

A case study of collaboration involving several European environmental interest groups investigates how these organisations collaborate and what drives their collaborative behaviour.<sup>(5)</sup> The case study investigates collaboration over the *European Parliament and Council Decision 1692/96/EC of 23 July 1996 on Community guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network* (European Communities, 1996). This legislative instrument comprises several elements, including

the objectives of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T), the outline plans for each modal network, the Community measures necessary to construct the TEN-T and the criteria for identifying infrastructure projects which contribute to the development of the TEN-T. In other words, *Decision 1692/96/EC* (European Communities, 1996) sets out the dimensions of and requirements for a European transport infrastructure system which links existing national networks and connects the peripheral regions to the EU's core, thereby transforming the patchwork of national networks into a common trans-European infrastructure. The Commission believes that, once in place, TEN-T will stimulate job creation, provide the necessary transport infrastructure to support the single market, reduce traffic congestion, increase choice for the consumer and contribute to a cleaner environment (Commission of the European Communities, 1995, pp.12-14). The latter benefit anticipated by the Commission interested the European environmental groups in particular.

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This case study is part of a larger project during which cases were selected following preliminary research on several issue areas (chemicals, biotechnology, waste management and transport) where patterns of interest group collaboration was anticipated. The preliminary research identified several transport related issues that met the selection criteria, namely that issues should have a clear environmental dimension and involve a range of private and public interest groups. The latter criterion sought to maximise the potential for collaboration and competition between groups. The TEN-T has major environmental implications vis-à-vis land use, wildlife and natural habitats, and noise and air pollution. Hence, its attraction to environmental interests is clear. Similarly, the economic implications of a Europe-wide transport infrastructure attract the attention of business and industry interests. In contrast to the other case in the project, the TEN-T is a relatively new, post-Maastricht issue and involves a strong Member State dimension.<sup>(6)</sup>

Six European environmental interest groups engaged in collaborative action to improve the environmental protection provisions within the legislative guidelines for the development of the TEN-T: Action for Solidarity, Equality, Environment and Development Europe (A SEED Europe), BirdLife International, Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE), Greenpeace (Austria and Switzerland), European Federation for Transport and Environment (T&E), and Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). They referred to their collaborative effort as *Trans European Networks and NGOs* or *TENGO*.

The members of the *TENGO* coalition questioned the economic rationale for the TEN-T and the supporting arguments linking infrastructure expansion to job creation, economic growth and regional development. Moreover, they asserted that the TEN-T contradicts European environmental policy and the EU's commitment to creating and maintaining a sustainable transport system. The *TENGO* campaign focused on improving the provision for environmental protection measures within *Decision 1692/96/EC* (European Communities, 1996), more accurately the legislative proposals preceding it.<sup>(7)</sup> The campaign targeted the EU institutions, particularly the European Parliament. Indeed, the formation of the coalition coincided largely with the Parliament's consideration (first reading) of the legislative proposal in May 1995. In general, the Parliament was disposed favourably to the calls from the environmental groups to augment and improve the environmental protection measures for the TEN-T guidelines. Of course, there were divisions within and between political party groups: not everyone shared the position of the socialists and environmentalists. Nevertheless, the parliamentarians were receptive to the *TENGO* campaign.

Following the first reading stage the Council rejected any green amendments from the European legislature. Against the ensuing inter-institutional disagreement, the *TENGO* campaign concentrated on the Parliament during the second reading stage and urged members to re-introduce the

amendments rejected by the Member States. The opposing positions of the Parliament and Council led to conciliation (since the guidelines legislation followed the co-decision procedure) where the *TENGO* coalition continued to lobby European parliamentarians.

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Article 8 of *Decision 1692/96/EC* (European Communities, 1996) reveals the (partial) extent to which the *TENGO* coalition achieved its policy goals. This is a separate article on environmental protection. It does not realise fully the coalition's desire for making a strategic environmental assessment of the entire network and analyses for particular sections (or corridors) of the TEN-T obligatory and resolves only to investigate these options further. Some members of the coalition felt that the efforts of the environmental interest groups had a considerable impact upon the contents of Article 8. The adoption of the legislative guidelines by the Parliament and Council in July 1996 marked the conclusion of the *TENGO* campaign and coalition.

#### 4.1. Characterising the *TENGO* coalition

As a temporary, single-issue forum, *TENGO* is an example of an AD HOC CAUSE coalition (Loomis, 1986, p.262). The environmental interest groups recognised the ephemeral nature of the coalition – a venture restricted to addressing the environmental protection requirements of the TEN-T. Moreover, the coalition members fit Scholzman and Tierney's description of "a relatively homogeneous group of participants who share more than their stake in a particular policy decision" (1986, p.48). The most striking characteristics of the *TENGO* coalition are its unofficial status and flexible organisational structure. In some respects the 'coalition' label is misleading because *TENGO* is an example of an ad hoc, informally organised effort. Moreover, the appearance of all the names and logos of the environmental groups on campaign literature was the only evidence of collaboration. In other words, the groups chose not to create a new, publicly recognisable collaborative organisation and '*TENGO*' remained an internal working name. *TENGO*'s organisational structure fits Scholzman and Tierney's more usual pattern of collaboration where members "contribute time, professional help, clerical services, and the like, according to their resources and their stake in the matter at issue" (1986, p.48). The members of *TENGO* did not subscribe to the coalition, nor was there a separate secretariat to co-ordinate the coalition's activities. One of the most noticeable features is the lack of face-to-face meetings between the member organisations. Instead, the members maintained regular contact over the telephone and by fax. The organic, piecemeal development of the *TENGO* coalition is further confirmation of its informal organisational character. There was a basic division of responsibilities determined by what each member was interested in, what they were able to contribute, their geographical proximity to Brussels and Strasbourg, and by their individual actions on the TEN-T. On the latter point, most members of the coalition continued to act on the TEN-T outside the coalition. The unofficial, informal nature of *TENGO* placed no restrictions of external activities. If members failed to agree on a position within the coalition, they could pursue their specific agendas and present individual positions outside *TENGO*.

The degree of participation within the *TENGO* coalition varied. No group assumed an overall leadership role but a core comprising three members contributed more resources. Two members restricted their contribution more or less to supporting the efforts of the others. As influential environmental interest groups, the core members welcomed their largely passive support because it strengthened the *TENGO* campaign and its ability to influence the legislative guidelines for the TEN-T (see Hula, 1999, 1995 above).

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The criteria identified in the literature for differentiating patterns of interest group collaboration are appropriate for the *TENGO* coalition. As an AD HOC CAUSE coalition whose members come from the same policy area, *TENGO* also reveals a flexible organisational structure. In this respect the TEN-T case study is representative of the patterns of collaboration in which the European environmental interest group engage.

#### 4.2. To what extent do incentives drive collaboration? ↑

The six members of the *TENGO* coalition are public interest groups and therefore do not fit neatly into Olson's (1971 edition) theory of collective action, which concentrates on the formation of (large) economic groups. As political advocates environmental interest groups pursue collective goods as part of their *raison d'être*. The free-rider problem is surmountable for the leaders of a coalition whose potential members seek collective goods routinely. Expanding Olson's (1971 edition) framework to include different types groups and different types of incentives recognises the importance of collective goods or collective incentives for potential members of interest group coalitions (Jordan and Maloney, 1996). For example, an interest group may join a coalition because it perceives collaboration as offering the best chance of securing political goals (Hula, 1999, 1995). Yet, there can be no assumption that political actors such as the members of the *TENGO* coalition will choose automatically to collaborate simply because free-riding is less of an obstacle. The literature also identifies several material, solidary and expressive selective incentives available to members of interest group coalitions (Berry, 1989; Hula, 1999, 1995). This allows for an investigation into the types of incentive interest groups recognise and to which they respond. In other words, what is the balance between collective and selective incentives in the membership calculations of interest groups? Hula (1999, 1995) adds a further dimension to the research on incentives by linking the levels of participation within interest group coalitions to the combination of incentives that induce membership. Any insights offered by his model are considered below. The case study reveals the range of incentives available to the environmental interest groups from membership of the *TENGO* coalition, and the extent to which the members were aware of these incentives and responded to them.

Hula suggests that groups select collaborative strategies "because they view them as the most effective way to shape policy outcomes" (1995, p.241). In other words, groups collaborate because they want to achieve shared public policy goals. Collaboration maximises the opportunities available to interest groups to influence policy outcomes. Hence, joining an interest group coalition is explained in part by strategic (collective) incentives (Hula, 1999, 1995). A majority of the members of the *TENGO* coalition link collaborative action to influencing opportunities. They indicated that collaboration strengthened their positions and resulted in an effective strategy for influencing the legislative guidelines for the TEN-T.

When interest groups join a coalition because they wish to pursue public policy goals, the collective incentive to join is clear – they hope that membership will improve their chances of securing a collective good. Joining a coalition to influence public policy outcomes also provides groups with an exclusive opportunity to influence the direction and contents of the coalition's campaign and the wider policy debate on the issue (Hula, 1995, pp.244-245). This opportunity is available only to members. None of the members commented directly on shaping the *TENGO* campaign. However, it is important not to dismiss this selective strategic incentive without due consideration because the environmental groups may take their ability to influence the coalition campaign for granted. It is clear

that the *TENGO* campaign incorporated many of their specific interests. Calls for a re-examination of the economic arguments supporting the TEN-T, adequate environmental protection provisions in the legislative guidelines and insistence upon strategic environmental assessment and corridor analysis reflect the particular interests of the coalition members and indicate their ability to shape the coalition's platform. One of the members wrote two position papers on behalf of the coalition. This suggests that this member had an opportunity to advance its interests within the *TENGO* coalition. Of course, it is also important to highlight a previous point, namely that four members of the coalition pursued the TEN-T initiative beyond the collaborative framework. Members could address any issues not agreed within the coalition on an individual basis. This suggests that the ability to shape the coalition campaign also depended upon the ability to persuade the other members to adopt particular ideas and positions. Another member of the *TENGO* coalition acknowledged another exclusive strategic benefit from coalition membership. The coalition provided the group with an additional outlet for its message. By joining, this group seized the opportunity to distribute its position on the TEN-T to a wider audience.

Information provides selective incentives to members of interest group coalitions. It is a multifaceted commodity, which derives material or solidary selective incentives depending upon its properties. For example, Aspinwall and Greenwood (1998, p.15) differentiate 'hard' material information and 'soft' social information. The information available to members of a coalition may pertain directly to the policy goals of the coalition or bear little relation to the activities of the coalition. Information and information exchange is an important feature of the *TENGO* coalition. The members met initially with the intention of establishing a co-ordination network to share information. The environmental groups sought to improve their knowledge of current legislative developments by pooling their intelligence. Indeed, one coalition member recalled its need for information on the progress of the legislative proposal. This group was one of the most active members of the *TENGO* coalition. Its information needs confirms the importance of this selective incentive. As the coalition developed the publications of BirdLife International, Greenpeace and T&E appeared in *TENGO* campaign literature indicating the continuing exchange of information (particularly scientific data) among the coalition members.

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The environmental groups did not refer directly to exchanging information on matters other than the TEN-T guidelines. This does not suggest the complete absence of such information; merely that it does not appear in the case study data. A possible explanation for the high level of issue or goal related information is the considerable importance placed by the members upon achieving the goals of the coalition. This provides further confirmation of the importance of collective incentives for encouraging collaborative behaviour.

“Coalitions flourish because, ultimately, they are a means of expanding and coordinating the resources needed for an advocacy effort” (Berry, 1989, p.170). An interest group participates in a coalition because the coalition affords that member the opportunity to combine its resources with the other partners. Resource sharing is a further selective incentive. The *TENGO* case study highlights the qualitative aspect of this incentive, namely increasing the availability of particular types of resources where members perceive a deficiency. The case study data also emphasises the range of resources shared within interest group coalitions. Members shared their subject knowledge and experience. In addition, several coalition partners have extensive networks of EU institutional and interest group contacts upon which the less connected could draw. These partners also have lobbying experience at the EU level. In addition, every group contributed its name and logo to the coalition in an attempt to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the EU institutions.

Just as some members were more active in the coalition than others, so their resource contributions differed in both quantitative and qualitative terms. For the less active members lending their names and logos (plus commenting on draft campaign letters and position papers) was often the extent of their contribution. By contrast, one of the most active members estimated that it devoted approximately half of its allotted time for the TEN-T to its collaborative work with the *TENGO* coalition.

Although Hula's (1999, 1995) core, specialist and peripheral model is difficult to apply strictly to such an informal coalition as *TENGO*, different levels of participation are evident within the *TENGO* coalition – some groups are more active than others. Nevertheless, does this affect the incentives to which the *TENGO* partners respond?

The more active members of the *TENGO* coalition considered collaboration as an appropriate means of improving the environmental dimension of the TEN-T guidelines. In other words, they responded to collective incentives. These members wanted to secure a formidable lobbying position by building a credible coalition of high profile groups. Indeed, this explains the inclusion of the less active members. Although one of the less active groups had a high regard for the public policy goals of the coalition, the least active member made no direct reference to the appropriateness of a collaborative strategy. If by lending its name and logo to the coalition (whose public policy goals it supported) the least active group was making a gesture to the other *TENGO* partners, this would fall within Hula's (1999, 1995) definition of a symbolic benefit from collaborating. While resource contributions differed, most members acknowledged the (selective) benefits of sharing (particularly information) – even one of the most active groups identified resources in which it was lacking.

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### 4.3. To what extent do coalition partners drive collaboration?

Berry (1989) suggests that groups usually identify coalition partners from within their particular policy area. The basis for this argument is the assumption that groups from the same policy area learn to trust each other through regular contact. In essence, like-minded groups are “regular allies” (Berry, 1989, p.168) with the ability to work together *ad infinitum*. The ephemeral nature of the *TENGO* coalition makes it rather difficult to reflect upon Berry's (1989) argument other than to note that in the case of the coalition the members come from the same policy area.

Beyond the case study, there is a wider point to make regarding the potential for like-minded groups to collaborate as a matter of routine. Long suggests that the environmental interest groups can “work together on the basis of *highest common factor* principles” (1998, p.117) because they strive for a common fundamental goal, namely the protection of the environment. While no guarantee of collaborative outcomes, shared goals create a favourable backdrop to collective action. For collaborative experience (Hojnacki, 1997), BirdLife International, FoEE, T&E and WWF engage in more enduring patterns of collaboration, including the G-8. Several groups describe it as the most important collaborative forum. In addition, some of the members of the *TENGO* coalition referred to other issue-based collaborative fora involving the European environmental groups. Yet, collaboration accounts for a relatively small proportion of the action undertaken by the European environmental groups. Moreover, when they engage in collaboration their preference is for issue-based, informally organised coalitions (exemplified by the G-8).(8)

There are several constraints upon collective action suggesting why collaboration is only one aspect of their work and explaining the popularity of this particular pattern. For example, the European environmental groups compete over funding from the EU institutions, notably the Commission

(Rucht, 1993). Furthermore, the groups may compete in their quest for policy and campaign success at the EU level despite their “unwritten and even an unspoken agreement among the Brussels-based environmental groups to specialize in different areas of activity” (Long, 1995, p.674). In this respect they resemble their industry counterparts and vie for market share (Mazey and Richardson, 1993). The European environmental groups come from different political traditions (Biliouri, 1999) and favour different policy or lobbying styles (Mazey and Richardson, 1993; Rucht, 1993). While some groups prefer to work within the limits of the EU policy process, others favour the direct action approach. Consequently, the groups have different strategic preferences or means for pursuing public policy goals. Although the environmental interest groups share the same common goal of environmental protection, they often pursue it in different ways. Strategic preferences have an enduring quality because routine choices often become embedded. More than this, other actors (institutional and interest group) tend to associate groups with their usual tactics. The contrasting styles of the EEB and Greenpeace illustrate the differences - the former displays the attributes of an 'insider' group (working within the limits of the EU policy process) and the latter those of an 'outsider' group (pursuing goals by direct action). Both have much to defend regarding their lobbying styles. However, contrasting preferences may constrain collaboration, particularly formally organised, publicly recognised coalitions. While a broader perspective on relations between the European environmental groups highlights the considerable potential for collaboration between like-minded organisations, it also identifies differences between the groups. Differences do not prohibit collaboration per se; after all, they can be advantageous in a collaborative context (Greenwood, 1997). Nevertheless, they may explain why collaboration is not a routine phenomenon and the European environmental groups' penchant for informal coalitions such as *TENGO*.

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#### 4.4. To what extent does the issue drive collaboration? ↑

The literature identifies a number of points concerning issues and interest group collaboration. Berry suggests that groups tend to work alone on priority issues and collaborate on issues of lesser importance or issues they would not wish to address individually (1989, p.166). Section 4.2 confirms the importance of the issue to a majority of the *TENGO* members. What is striking about the members of the *TENGO* coalition, regardless of their level of participation, is their recognition of the (collective) strategic benefits which derive from collaboration and, by implication, their regard for improving the environmental protection measures in the TEN-T guidelines. Although this appears at first to contradict Berry's (1989) argument that groups act alone on priority issues, four of the six members continued to act individually and in concert outside the *TENGO* coalition. This indicates their commitment to pursuing an issue of considerable importance. Some coalition partners addressed aspects of the TEN-T that were not included within the parameters of the *TENGO* campaign, for example, actions against specific transport links, which form part of the TEN-T. They combined collaborative and individual action to address the issue comprehensively.

Loomis suggests “Sometimes the mere complexity of an issue may dictate cooperation” (1986, p.267). Interests who feel unable to address such issues alone will seek to pursue them collectively. To what extent is the TEN-T a complex, multi-faceted issue? The environmental groups focused upon the environmental dimension of the TEN-T. An understanding of the economic dimension of the TEN-T is required to address the environmental dimension comprehensively. The environmental dimension involves technical, scientific and detailed arguments about the correlation between economic development transport infrastructure and sustainable mobility. It includes discussion of environmental protection mechanisms such as strategic environmental assessment and corridor analysis.



Several *TENGO* members investigated the potential environmental impact of the TEN-T before the formation of the coalition and continued after joining. Each approached the issue according to its particular interests. The following publications indicate the level of economic, technical and scientific understanding of the issue within the *TENGO* coalition. BirdLife International's study on *The impact of trans-European networks on nature conservation: a pilot project* (Bina, Briggs and Bunting, 1995) ascertains and quantifies the impact of the TEN-T upon important bird areas. The study indicates the environmental benefits of a planning process that includes strategic environmental assessment (Bina, Briggs and Bunting, 1995, p.5). A joint study by BirdLife International, T&E and Greenpeace on *Strategic environmental assessment and corridor analysis of trans-European transport networks: a position paper* (BirdLife International, European Federation for Transport and Environment (T&E) and Greenpeace, 1996) enabled the members to advance further the need for both types of analysis for the TEN-T. The members used these and other studies on transport and regional development as lobbying tools to bring the environmental protection issues to the attention of the EU institutions (see for example, Greenpeace, 1995). From the expertise gathered before the formation of the *TENGO* coalition the evidence suggests that the environmental groups did not collaborate because of the complex nature of the issue.

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Loomis contends that coalitions help to extend or diminish the amount of “public attention an issue will receive” (1986, p.267). Indeed, “the extent of public attention an issue receives frequently depends on the ability of interest groups to make the issue accessible, and important, to the appropriate constituencies” (Loomis, 1986, p.268). Collaborative action to alter the level of public attention an issue receives has a strong strategic component. The members do not refer directly to extending public attention on the TEN-T. However, a number of points support Loomis' (1986) argument. The environmental dimension of the TEN-T was not addressed fully at the EU level until the European Parliament's first reading of the legislative proposal in May 1995. The coalition focused its campaign on the EU institutions, particularly the European Parliament, to draw attention to the environmental protection requirements for the TEN-T. Press conferences and demonstrations such as those staged for the European Parliament's first reading during the plenary session in May 1995 brought wider attention to the TEN-T. One of the members commented upon the *TENGO* campaign's favourable reception from the media. Furthermore, the coalition members also encouraged a Europe-wide campaign on the TEN-T involving organisations at the national level. Examining Loomis' (1986) issue scope argument reveals additional insights into the actions of the *TENGO* coalition and the nature of the *TENGO* campaign

#### **4.5. To what extent do opposition interests drive collaboration? ↑**

Hojnacki (1997) suggests that groups are more receptive to collaboration when they perceive an organised opposition. A number of business and industry groups, including the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT), were involved in the development of the TEN-T master plans. These groups supported the economic arguments for an integrated Europe-wide transport network. As noted above, Commission documents explain how a trans-European infrastructure system is essential for the effective operation of the Single European Market and how it will promote economic growth and employment throughout the EU. The business and industry organisations acted before the formation of the *TENGO* coalition and either reduced their involvement or ceased to be involved altogether after the Commission adopted the initial legislative proposal for the TEN-T guidelines. This contrasts with the active phase of the *TENGO* coalition when the Council and European Parliament were considering the proposal. The *TENGO* partners do not refer directly to the role of business and industry groups in their decision to collaborate. However, the involvement of business and industry representatives at the agenda setting and policy formulation stage may have galvanised the

environmental groups into action. This interpretation rests more upon a general reading of the positions of the *TENGO* members than evidence or confirmation from these groups. Nevertheless, it is plausible to argue that opposing interests need not act simultaneously to influence collaborative behaviour. If this is the case, it is possible to interpret the actions of the European environmental groups as the response of relative 'outsider' interests to the 'insider' actions of the ERT and its contemporaries.

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Evidence suggesting the manner in which the organised opposition influenced the actions of the *TENGO* coalition is more compelling. The groups decided to speak with one voice. In other words, the coalition did not have an official name (or status) but the members made joint statements bearing the six names and logos. According to one *TENGO* partner, the issue and the lack of active opposition influenced the decision to use a collective voice. The environmental groups were not obliged to counter lobby separately to match the volume of dissenting voice because the organised opposition was less active during the legislative process. Instead, the *TENGO* members were free to speak collectively if they wished.

#### 4.6. To what extent do institutions drive collaboration? ↑

Walker (1991) identifies the role of patrons in the origins and maintenance of interest groups. Patrons include *inter alia* government agencies and, in essence, patrons offer financial and organisational support to groups. There is no evidence in the case study data that the formal EU institutions contributed directly to the development of the *TENGO* coalition or encouraged consciously the environmental interest groups to collaborate over the TEN-T legislative guidelines.

The evidence is similarly scarce regarding the influence of the institutions in the new institutionalist sense (see Bulmer's (1998) definition above) on the *TENGO* partners. One member of the coalition suggested that the lack of transparency surrounding the progress of the legislative proposal stimulated the initial discussion between the six environmental groups from which the *TENGO* coalition emerged. Another member commented on the conflict between the Council of Ministers and European Parliament over the environmental protection requirements within the legislative guidelines. Successive amendments to the original legislative proposal for the TEN-T guidelines made issue tracking difficult. Based on this (limited) evidence, it appears that the uncertainty created by the institutional intransparency surrounding the development and progress of the legislative guidelines may have encouraged the environmental groups to exchange information. This in turn led to collaboration. Such an explanation concurs with the new institutionalist approach where formal and informal institutions structure political interaction. Indeed, this example highlights the potential influence of the policy and legislative process (particularly the co-decision procedure) on interest group behaviour. It is clear that any institutional influence on collaborative behaviour of the *TENGO* partners was of an indirect nature; the empirical evidence suggests that the EU institutions did not create opportunities or actively promote collaboration between the environmental interest groups. However, a new institutionalist interpretation would emphasise the importance of the circumstances created by the EU institutions as a potential influence upon collaborative behaviour. Collaboration may then appear as a response to developments within the institutional landscape. The lack of transparency created by the EU institutions over the TEN-T guidelines lends credence to a new institutionalist interpretation, although as indicated in section three there is no sense in which the case study can be regarded as a contribution to the debate about the types of historical, rational choice or sociological institutional influences at work.

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The case study data reveal some evidence of institutional influence upon the activities of the *TENGO* coalition. For example, the European Parliament provided the institutional focus for the *TENGO* campaign not least because the formation of the coalition coincided with the Parliament's consideration of the legislative proposal. The rapporteur for the proposal on the legislative guidelines responded favourably to the *TENGO* coalition. Likewise, the parliamentarians praised the campaign's clear position on a complex issue. This suggests that the favourable response of the Parliament and the timing of the coalition influenced its campaigning activities.

## 5. Conclusions <sup>↑</sup>

The case study reveals a particular pattern of collaboration, namely an informally organised, unofficial coalition in which the names of the European environmental groups were publicised and the members decided how much or how little they would contribute to the coalition.

The literary framework identifies a number of factors with the potential to drive interest group collaboration - incentives, coalition partners, issues, opposition interests and institutions. Evidence from case study of the *TENGO* coalition points to the importance of incentives and issues upon the behaviour of the European environmental interest groups. There is a clear link between collective incentives and issue importance since a majority of *TENGO* members recognised collaboration as an appropriate strategy for improving the environmental dimension of the TEN-T guidelines. Four groups pursued dual strategies of influence (combining individual and collaborative action). Their external activities confirm the priority status of the issue. The range of selective incentives recognised by the *TENGO* members similarly confirms the importance of collaborating to achieve public policy goals. For example, the information exchanged within the coalition related to the goals of the coalition and the resources contributed to the coalition indicate the members' desire to improve the TEN-T guidelines.

The collective action literature identifies the importance of incentives for encouraging collaboration by asking the researcher to look beyond the more obvious explanation for collaborative behaviour, namely that shared goals equal coalition strategies. It is hardly surprising that collective strategic incentives appeal to the environmental groups given their political advocacy role. Besides routinely pursuing public policy goals, several members of the *TENGO* coalition have considerable collaborative experience (through the G-8 and other fora). Consequently, they are aware of potential coalition partners and are capable of pursuing collaboration with like-minded groups. These factors create a favourable backdrop to collaboration. Nevertheless, collaboration is not an everyday phenomenon for the European environmental groups and when they act collectively they favour informally organised coalitions. A number of potential constraints upon collaboration highlight the differences between the environmental interest groups. Competition over funding, contrasting strategic preferences and the desire to achieve public policy goals on an individual basis may explain the popularity of coalitions that do not constrain external activities.

Beyond incentives, allies and issues, the case study presents less evidence of opposition and institutional influences upon collaborative behaviour. There is little evidence to suggest that perceptions of an organised opposition influenced the *TENGO* partners' decision to collaborate. However, it is possible to interpret the creation of the coalition as the partners' reaction to the agenda setting role of the ERT and other business and industry groups. If this view is accepted, the

potential influence of opposition actors upon the decision to collaborate does not depend upon simultaneous action. Regarding the timing of opposition action, the case study evidence suggests that the lack of a simultaneous organised opposition influenced *TENGO*'s campaign strategy.

The only evidence of institutional influence upon the decision to collaborate is the lack of transparency surrounding the development of legislative proposal for the TEN-T guidelines and amendments to the proposal. One member expressed its inability to find out about the progress of the proposal due in part to the inter-institutional debate surrounding aspects of the TEN-T guidelines. The case study confirms the appropriateness of using basic ideas from the new institutionalism literature to investigate patterns of collaboration. It emphasises the importance of an encompassing institutional definition since there was no evidence to suggest that the formal EU institutions had any direct influence upon the collaborative behaviour of the environmental interest groups.

The paper examines a phenomenon that had not been the subject of extensive empirical research. The case study identifies a specific pattern of informal collaboration. It also demonstrates the applicability of a range of ideas to an investigation of how and why European environmental interest groups collaborate. Each factor is worthy of further empirical investigation, particularly the presence of opposition interests and the impact of the EU institutional framework. The factors considered in this paper divide into two categories, internal (or group related) factors and external (or environmental) factors. Incentives (collective and selective) are an internal factor and contribute to an explanation of what drives collaboration at the EU level. Indeed, the literature and empirical case study findings confirm their importance. How groups relate to possible coalition partners, behave when faced with opposition, and manage their institutional environment are potentially no less important. Nevertheless, these external factors require further research to establish their explanatory value, including the introduction of a more sophisticated methodology to investigate fully the institutional influences upon collaborative behaviour. Future research should concentrate on developing and combining these internal and external factors to explain collaborative behaviour by interest groups at the EU level.

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## Endnotes

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(1) The Group of Eight (G-8) is the collective name for the main environmental interest groups with a permanent presence in Brussels. The members are the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE), Greenpeace International, Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), Climate Network Europe (CNE), BirdLife International, the European Federation for Transport and Environment (T&E) and The World Conservation Union (Biliouri, 1999).

(2) The G-8 coalition confirms the universal applicability of the criteria. It is an enduring coalition of same sector members. It addresses many environmental issues and maintains its informal organisational arrangements.

(3) Olson (1971 edition) tends to rely upon the self-interested aspect of rational behaviour. However, he suggests that rational action does not equate necessarily with self-interested action. The behaviour of individuals may also be rational “in the sense that their objectives, whether selfish or unselfish, should be pursued by means that are efficient and effective for achieving these objectives” (Olson, 1971 edition, p.65).

(4) Symbolic participation is tied to the issue of interest group maintenance (Hula, 1995, pp.248-249).

(5) This case study is part of a larger project investigating patterns of interest group collaboration involving the European environmental interest groups. Interviews conducted in 1996 with interest group and institutional actors generated valuable data regarding how and why groups collaborate.

(6) EU policy and legislation to combat motor vehicle emissions (specifically the preparations for setting emission standards and related measures for the year 2000) is the other case study in the project. The case study issues were selected because they met the criteria and exhibited a number of contrasting features. Whereas the TEN-T is a new issue, vehicle emission standards have been determined at the European level since 1970. Initially the patterns of collaboration in the two cases appeared to be rather different regarding their membership composition and public status. However, further investigation revealed considerable similarities in terms of the informal organisational character of the coalitions.

(7) Although the *TENGO* campaign concentrated on the development of the TEN-T at the European level, it is important to note that several coalition members were also active at the national level where *Decision 1692/96/EC* (European Communities, 1996) will be implemented.

(8) Data collected during preliminary interviews with environmental interest groups in Brussels in June 1995.