European Opportunities: Institutional Factors and Creative Usages

Introduction

The Europeanization of civil society organizations (CSOs) is a multi-faceted process in which both institutional factors and CSOs’ choices are relevant. Variations in Europeanization can be explained by institutional factors, namely, European and domestic opportunities. This chapter’s original contribution is in also looking at the agency of individuals, that is, uncovering the usages both by and of Europe. If the notion of usages by Europe prevails, one would expect that European opportunities are mainly created, promoted and shaped by European officials to serve their own interests. On the other hand, Europeanization from below or usages of Europe means that CSOs create and develop European opportunities to serve the purposes of self-organized citizenry.

The first section of this chapter examines CSO strategies toward European and domestic opportunities across countries and policy areas, relying on existing studies in the field. To fully grasp the interactive nature of the Europeanization process, attention is then turned to the effects of the agency of individuals. European Union (EU) opportunities have been strategically used by EU officials (usages by Europe) and by CSOs (usages of Europe). Empirical evidence for this chapter is drawn from policy documents and semi-structured interviews with key EU officials and CSO representatives.

1 CSOs’ use of EU opportunities: Transforming the European civil society landscape?

The use of EU opportunities is affected by multiple factors at several levels. Previous research on this topic has highlighted the following:
national opportunities, the degree of fit between modes of interest intermediation at the national and European levels and resources (Beyers 2002; Eising 2007; Klüver 2010). Since all these factors are combined in different ways and vary widely across member states, the emergence of a uniform Europeanized civil society is very unlikely.

One would expect that CSOs are more affected by national factors since they are embedded in specific political cultures and face exclusively national legal constraints. If the degree of embeddedness of national CSOs were the most important factor, the advocacy strategies of CSOs would mainly be dictated by the degree of contraction or expansion of domestic opportunities. The relevance of domestic opportunities can be analyzed in light of four distinct hypotheses (Beyers 2002). First, the positive persistence hypothesis assumes that CSOs that benefit from favorable domestic opportunities will more frequently use European opportunities, since their capacity will carry over to the European level. Second, the negative persistence hypothesis predicts just the contrary, that favorable domestic opportunities will prevent domestic actors from turning to the European level. Third, another hypothesis (reverse positive persistence hypothesis) states that when domestic opportunities are not very well developed, CSOs may lack the capacity to effectively use European opportunities. In sharp contrast, the compensation hypothesis predicts that domestic actors have the capacity to bypass domestic opportunities. According to this last hypothesis, domestically weak CSOs may seek to compensate through funding opportunities at the EU level (Marks and McAdam 1996).

Previous research has concluded that higher levels of domestic access lead to a more Europeanized multilevel strategy (Beyers 2002). However, this positive relationship between domestic access and the development of a Europeanized multilevel strategy was not found to be so strong for groups representing diffuse interests, which are those closer to this book’s definition of CSO. More recent research on the Europeanization strategies of territorial interests has shown that different hypotheses may be applied to different member states (Callanan 2011). In Denmark favorable access opportunities at the domestic level have carried over to the European level. While in Ireland poorly developed domestic access opportunities had resulted in poorly developed advocacy strategies at the EU level. In the United Kingdom the inverse was found: local governments engaged in an EU strategy in spite of poorly developed domestic opportunities (the bypassing strategy). Callanan’s study suggests that it is unlikely that a general pattern will be found.