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## **Functioning or Failing? Influence, Representation and the Fulfilment of the Transmission Belt: A study of CSOs active in EU member states**

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## *Functioning or Failing?*

*Influence, Representation and the Fulfilment of the*

*Transmission Belt:*

*A study of CSOs active in EU member states*

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Public Administration, International and European Governance

Masters Thesis

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## Abstract

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Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are a salient characteristic observed across democratic systems. Perceived to strengthen citizen representation and improve policy outcomes, as such member involvement and organisational capacity are key attributes. In order to achieve this role, CSOs must possess the capability to influence decision-making processes. This thesis investigates the realisation of these attributes at the national level of European Union member states through quantitative analysis. The outcomes highlight noteworthy variations across EU member states. In Eastern countries, member involvement emerges as a catalyst for achieving heightened access to decision-making. Conversely, for CSOs in Western and Scandinavian nations, neither member involvement nor organisational capacity significantly corresponds to access within the decision-making realm.

## Chapter I: Introduction

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Democratic systems at large are intricate structures characterised by diverse attributes, a salient characteristic observed in many democracies is the active engagement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). The term ‘civil society organisations’ is used to encompass the array of different groups, including lobbyist and activist groups, which actively participate in governance structures. As an archetypal feature of democratic systems, CSOs operate globally, aiming to reinforce citizen representation by serving as intermediaries between citizens' interests and the policy-making process (De Schutter, 2002). This role is epitomised by the concept of a ‘transmission belt’ wherein CSOs bridge the gap between the interests of their members and political institutions, effectively conveying members' preferences to the decision-making process (De Schutter, 2002; Warleigh-Lack, 2007). Wherein the transmission belt plays a crucial role in enhancing the legitimacy of the receiving structure by involving external entities with specialised expertise and distinct knowledge bases. This involvement can lead to the attainment of more favourable policy outcomes (Rodekamp, 2013, p. 20). A key perceived attribute of integrating CSOs is, therefore, the augmentation of citizen representation, ensuring that decision-making derives from the ‘authentic preferences of citizens’ whether directly or indirectly (Scharpf, 1997: 19). This conception of CSOs presupposes that the organisational structure of the recipient institution facilitates effective transmission of members' interests and ensures a causal influence on decision-making (Albareda, 2018). By advocating for citizen interests and exerting influence on policy-making, CSOs imbue representative governance structures with enhanced legitimacy, bolstering representation and fostering effective governance systems (Kohler-Koch, 2010).

The Academic discourse, however, has shed light on the limited and insufficient capacity of CSOs to fulfil their representative function (Binderkrantz, 2009; Halpin, 2006; Kohler-Koch, 2010). The prevailing critique revolves around the growing professionalisation of CSOs, increasingly characterised as organisations controlled by expert staff, featuring well-structured and efficient external mechanisms, and enjoying privileged access to policy-making officials (Jordan and Maloney, 2007). While these internal characteristics may augment their influence on policy-making, they may also shift control from the membership to professional staff

(Rodekamp, 2013), engendering an expertise-representation gap whereby greater expertise weakens representation (Saurugger, 2006). CSOs have faced censure for prioritising efficiency and engagement in policy-making over member involvement, resulting in limited and weak channels for members to contribute to policy positions (Albareda, 2020). Such tepid engagement with members raises pertinent questions regarding the democratic role of CSOs: If they fail to genuinely represent their members' interests, how can they facilitate democratic legitimacy, and moreover, whose interests do they truly represent? Conversely, CSOs that prioritise member engagement over professionalisation in their organisational structure may encounter challenges in accessing policymakers, impeding their ability to effectively represent citizen interests at the decision-making level. Therefore, alongside ensuring representativeness, CSOs must establish the capacity to influence policy-making by gaining access to decision-makers and exerting an impact on the decision-making process. The absence of either capacity would render CSOs ineffective in their function in fulfilling the transmission belt. The balance between these two capacities can be succinctly summarised as the logic of membership and the logic of influence (Berkhout, 2013; Schmitter and Streeck, 1999).

CSOs are habitual features of democratic systems, and their perceived value primarily stems from normative perspectives rather than empirical research, leaving their actual utility largely unexplored (Albareda, 2020). Nonetheless, alternative governance tools, such as referendums, citizen assemblies, and decentralisation, can also contribute to increased citizen representation and governmental efficiency (Landemore, 2020). Therefore, if the transmission belt fails to function as intended, political institutions must consider alternative means of endowing governance structures with legitimacy, representation, and effective decision-making. Consequently, as CSOs continue to play a role in policy-making, it becomes imperative to examine whether they genuinely fulfil their intended mandate and effectively ensure democratic legitimacy while representing the interests of citizens. This significance is particularly relevant in the national context, where representative democratic systems face mounting criticism due to perceived deficiencies in representation, a sentiment observed across various Western nation-states (Chrysochoou et al., 1998; Dahlberg, 2015; Martinelli, 2016; Papadopoulos, 2019;). This apparent crisis in representation particularly in regards to traditional party politics, bring increasing urgency for nation states to both examine existing channels instead for

representation, such as the involvements of CSOs, and potentially if these are found lacking to introduce new channels in their place. Thus if CSOs are not able to fulfil the transmission belt, then it is imperative that alternate governance tools should be explored and implemented.

Existing research has predominantly focused on CSOs operating at the EU level. However, limited research exists regarding CSOs active at the national level. Consequently, in order to address this gap in the literature this study will specifically concentrate on CSOs operating within EU member states. To evaluate how effectively CSOs fulfil the transmission belt theory at the national level, this research draws upon the work of Adrià Albareda (2020), who explored how the democratic and professionalised nature of interest groups influences their access to EU officials. Building upon Albareda's theoretical framework and research design, this study aims to investigate the national level and address the existing research gap.

By focusing on CSOs active in EU member states, this research contributes to the academic discourse by addressing an area that is currently underexplored and broadening the scope to encompass the functioning of CSOs across nation-states. Consequently, this research aims to fill a void in the literature and assess whether this archetypal feature of many democratic systems effectively contributes to governance or if it has become obsolete in fulfilling its perceived role. The primary contributions of this thesis are threefold. Firstly, it provides insights into the internal organisation of CSOs and highlights significant variations in this regard by emphasising two critical attributes: organisational capacity and membership involvement. Secondly, the study examines the effects of these attributes on the degree of access to public officials. Finally, it provides empirical evidence on whether CSOs that successfully embody the transmission belt ideal achieve access to public officials.

To achieve the research objectives, this thesis employs an explanatory research question to quantitatively assess how the attributes of member involvement and organisational capacity shape CSOs' access to decision-making at the national level. The research question is as follows:

*"How do the attributes of member involvement and organisational capacity shape Civil Society Organisations' access to decision-making at the national level?"*



To accomplish these objectives, this thesis is structured as follows: Chapter Two presents the theoretical framework, comprising a comprehensive literature review, conceptual framework, and explication of the research hypotheses. This is followed by Chapter Three, which outlines the research design and methodology employed in the study. Chapter Four details the research findings and provides an analysis of the results. Finally, Chapter Five summarises the findings, draws conclusions, and includes a discussion that examines the limitations of the research and provides implications for future studies.

## Chapter II: Theoretical Framework

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This chapter will establish the theoretical framework to guide the application of this research. It will be divided into two sections: a literature review and a conceptual framework. The first section will delve into the relevant literature addressing the research question: "How do the attributes of A) member involvement and B) organisational capacity shape Civil Society Organisations' access to decision-making at the national level?" Given the multifaceted nature of this question, this section will be further divided into several subsections. Firstly, it will explore the role of civil society organisations. Secondly, it will examine the transmission belt theorem. Lastly, it will discuss the logic of membership and the logic of influence as two separate subsections.

The second section will employ the insights gained from the reviewed literature to construct a conceptual framework. This framework will define the theoretical concepts that will underpin this research and outline the hypotheses, which will be derived from both the literature and conceptual framework.

### **Literature Review**

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#### 2.1 Civil Society Organisations

The focus of this research is Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), their role, and their functioning. The moniker CSO has been chosen, as opposed to other labels such as interest groups or lobbyists, to encompass the diversity of non-state actors involved in these organisations. A macro definition, proposed by Albareda (2018), encompasses various types of organisations, including those representing specific societal causes (such as environmental advocacy groups), those representing member-oriented objectives (such as community-based or denominational organisations), and those representing social and economic interests (such as trade unions, consumer organisations, and non-governmental organisations). This comprehensive definition acknowledges the diversity of CSOs, as the population of such organisations is complex, comprising entities with disparate aims and interests (Albareda, 2018). This study will,

therefore, adopt this macro definition to account for the multitude of CSOs active within and across nations.

The role and precise functioning of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) has been subject to academic debate. Apart from their capacity to transmit preferences, CSOs have also been identified by scholars as having other institutional effects (Johansson & Lee, 2014; Kohler-Koch, 2010; Rodekamp, 2013). As previously discussed, the representative capacity of CSOs can contribute to legitimising governance structures by enhancing the representation of citizens' interests through the transmission belt ideal (Rodekamp, 2013). This legitimising function extends beyond representation. CSOs and the professionals within them can provide valuable expertise and knowledge to governance structures, filling potential gaps in bureaucracies, improving the quality of decision-making, and legitimising outcomes (Rodekamp, 2013). CSOs and their involvement in decision making bodies is thus conceived as both a democratic and organisational asset to the receiving structures. As previously noted, many normative perspectives consider CSOs as a vital functionary of the more extensive democratic system (De Schutter, 2002; Warleigh-Lack 2007). As previously noted, many normative perspectives regard CSOs as vital components of the broader democratic system (De Schutter, 2002; Warleigh-Lack, 2007). However, existing research highlights that CSOs may actually possess limited capacity to fulfil their representative function (Binderkrantz, 2009; Halpin, 2006; Kohler-Koch, 2010). Saurugger (2006) further explores this notion, questioning why CSOs are perceived as effective tools for enhancing democracy and citizen representation. She contends that CSOs are not inherently democratic and argues that their potential as weak sources of representation lies in the internal structures of individual organisations, particularly if adequate channels for membership involvement are absent (Saurugger, 2006).

Another consideration of the functioning of CSOs is the organisational structure of the receiving body. Due to the prevalence of CSOs in representative democracies, they operate in a vast array of contexts at both the supranational and national level. Thus, the organisational structure of not only CSOs themselves but also the governance structures they seek to influence can affect the extent to which they fulfil the transmission belt function. The pluralist–corporatist continuum outlines how different institutional structure shapes government relations with CSOs. This spectrum captures dynamics ranging from a pluralist dynamic, characterised by open competition between CSOs for access to public officials and influence, to a neo-corporatist

dynamic, where group relations are more closed, and only certain CSOs dominate sector-specific government relations, enjoying insider status and greater influence within the receiving structure (Beyers et al., 2020; Jordan, 1984). Research has also drawn attention to the differential access of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) between national and supranational contexts, with CSOs operating at the national level often enjoying greater access to public officials than their counterparts in the supranational context, such as the EU (Grömping and Halpin, 2019; Heylan et al., 2020). This variation is often attributed to differences in organisational structure (Albereda, 2020). Consequently, the effectiveness of CSOs in engaging with their membership and influencing policy making is expected to vary depending on the context in which they operate. For example, in the national context, challenges may include political interference and limited resources, whereas CSOs in the EU context may face complexities in decision-making processes, language barriers, and cultural diversity. The way supranational bodies, like the UN or EU, and national bodies, such as national and regional governments, engage with and utilise CSOs can differ based on the structure of the receiving body (Albareda and Braun, 2019; Renshaw, 2012; Steffek & Nanz, 2008). Consequently, it is crucial for research on the functioning of CSOs to encompass both supranational and national contexts. By addressing both levels, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of how CSOs function in governance structures.

## 2.2 The Transmission Belt Theorem

The role of CSOs, as defined by the transmission belt theorem, is to serve as intermediaries or representative organisations that aggregate and represent societal interests at the governance level (Rodekamp, 2013). As aforementioned, this conception of Civil Society Organisations perceives CSOs as a mechanism through which citizens' interests and demands are conveyed to policymakers, with the objective of influencing policy outcomes (Albareda, 2018). To fulfil the role of a transmission belt, CSOs must therefore fulfil the two components identified earlier: representing the interests of the membership and possessing sufficient organisational capacity to effectively influence policy-making. Balancing these two components can pose challenges for CSOs, however, to fulfil the transmission belt ideal both components must be achieved in some capacity (Albareda, 2018). Managing this dual objective for CSOs is an extremely demanding task, and may often create dilemmas that require reconciling the organisation's ability to democratically engage the membership with its effectiveness in lobbying policymakers (Berkhout et al., 2017).

To function as transmission belts, CSOs must ensure active interaction with their two key audiences: members and policymakers. This can be achieved via an organisational structure which facilitates the involvement of both parties (Albareda, 2018). Moreover, they must continuously cater to each audience to ensure a positive reception by both their membership and policymakers (Jordan and Maloney 2007). Albareda (2018) emphasises that CSOs require organisational structures that enable the representation of membership preferences and, simultaneously, provide efficient mechanisms for generating, processing, and transmitting valuable resources to policymakers (Albareda, 2018, p.?). Thus, by investing in both of these components, CSOs are able to fulfil their role as transmission belts (Albareda, 2018).

### 2.3 The Logic of Membership

In order to fulfil the transmission belt, ideal Civil Society Organisations must represent the interests of citizens. The membership of CSOs functions as their core constituency whose preferences they aim to represent (Albareda, 2018). The membership of CSOs serves as their core constituency, whose preferences they aim to represent (Albareda, 2018). The involvement of the membership is a crucial legitimising characteristic of CSOs, enabling them to claim a representative function that can be acknowledged by policymakers (Johansson & Lee, 2014). However, research, including the work of Johansson and Lee (2014) and Rodekamp (2013), highlights a significant disparity in how CSOs engage with their membership. This disparity stems from different formal organisational structures and representation strategies, which shape the influence of members in internal decision-making processes. Nonetheless, membership representation must be facilitated through adequate internal organisation (Johansson & Lee, 2014; Rodekamp, 2013). Anheier and Themudo (2005) identify that many international CSOs exhibit weak internal democracy due to limited avenues for membership participation, which limits their representative function. Another factor influencing membership engagement is the extent to which CSOs rely on funding from membership fees. This reliance may necessitate greater involvement of core constituents to ensure the representation of member preferences (Rodekamp, 2013).

In contrast to the transmission belt ideal, some CSOs operate as professionalised oligarchies with limited membership involvement in the internal functioning of the organisation (Albareda, 2018). These organisations are characterised by the dominance of professional staff who can operate autonomously without requiring membership consultation (Jordan and Maloney, 2007). Anheier and Themudo (2005) observe that international CSOs often have weak internal

democracy due to limited avenues for membership participation, prioritising the interests of professional staff. These internal dynamics do not only inform how representative a CSO can be considered but may also directly affect their external actions. Heaney (2004) highlights that the degree of membership involvement is a critical factor in shaping an organisation's identity, thereby informing its functioning. Furthermore, the extent of membership involvement affects the policy agenda of CSOs, determining which policy areas they prioritise (Halpin et al., 2018). This illustrates that the logic of membership extends beyond a symbolic ideal, as the representation of membership preferences plays a crucial role in the external functioning of CSOs.

It is evident that membership involvement is essential for how well CSOs fulfil the transmission belt ideal of citizen representation. However, increased membership participation may also present challenges for the functioning of CSOs. Heightened membership engagement may negatively affect the flexibility of CSOs due to lengthy consultation processes, resulting in delayed decision-making that limits their ability to adapt swiftly to changing policy demands (Hollman, 2018). This could hinder an organisation's capacity to effectively engage with policymakers and influence policymaking (Albareda, 2020). Conversely, organisations characterised by lower membership participation and greater autonomy of professional staff, achieved via centralised decision making, may possess greater adaptability to changing circumstances due to streamlined decision-making processes. Moreover, such organisations may be more appealing candidates for policy consultation, as they present a more coherent narrative with less disparity of opinions that need to be reconciled (Rajwani et al., 2015). CSOs are thus tasked with achieving balance in their organisational structure to facilitate both membership involvement and the creation of effective channels for coherent policy development.

#### 2.4 The Logic of Influence

In addition to ensuring the representation of members, Civil Society Organisations must also possess the capacity to influence policy and gain access to policymakers to fulfil the role denoted by the transmission belt theory. This capacity can be understood via an organisation's ability to 'efficiently generate, process, and transfer information from members to policymakers' (Albareda, 2018). As previously discussed, greater professionalisation can enhance CSOs' ability to access policymakers, provide expertise, adapt to changing policy circumstances, and thereby influence policy outcomes. The term Professionalisation denotes a trend in organisations

wherein decision making becomes increasingly centralised, dominated by a hierarchy of professional staff who can exercise a high degree of autonomy without consulting the membership (Halpin, 2006, 2010; Jordan and Maloney, 1998). This results in professional staff deviating from the ideal 'doing-with' philosophy, in which staff and members collaborate, to the less desirable 'doing-for' philosophy, where staff work 'for' but without the aid of the membership. This trend has been criticised for undermining the representative nature of CSOs (Skocpol, 2003), and it is observed across CSOs, including at the national and EU-level (Klüver and Saurugger, 2013).

Increased professionalisation can simultaneously facilitate and hinder the transmission belt ideal. As aforementioned professionalisation can enhance CSOs' capacity to effectively influence policymaking and contribute to fulfilling their role in affecting policy, as indicated by the transmission belt theorem. However, increased professionalisation is also associated with a decrease in membership involvement in decision-making, which undermines CSOs' ability to act as representatives of citizens and, consequently, weakens the transmission belt ideal. Research has identified that staff bodies predominantly consist of white, highly educated professionals from western countries, thus lacking representativeness of citizen populations (Scholte, 2002). This aspect has led to some scholars identifying professionalisation as detrimental to the transmission belt ideal (Klüver and Saurugger 2013). This aspect has led some scholars to view professionalisation as detrimental to the transmission belt ideal (Klüver and Saurugger, 2013). Furthermore, research has found that the central staff of EU CSOs do not directly communicate with their membership and prioritise their capacity to influence policy over representing the preferences of members (Warleigh, 2001). Albareda's (2018) research into EU-level CSOs found that only one in three organisations had the organisational capacity to function as effective transmission belts by effectively connecting the membership to internal decision-makers. This suggests that CSOs may be significantly limited in their ability to represent citizens' interests and effectively influence policy on their behalf. However, Albareda (2018) posits that professionalisation and increased organisational capacity are not necessarily incompatible with active membership participation; CSOs can strike a balance between these two components. Albareda acknowledges that achieving such a balance requires a robust organisational structure, but emphasises that it is achievable.

Thus, this research aims to explore how CSOs can effectively organise themselves to fulfil both components of the transmission belt; representing membership interests and influencing

policy-making. Specifically focusing on the national level, the study seeks to address potential shortcomings in CSOs' intended roles. The research will analyse how the organisational structure of CSOs at the national level influences their ability to represent members' interests and influence policy-making. The findings may indicate the need to revise governance structures at both the supranational and national levels to enhance CSOs' effectiveness. This investigation will contribute valuable insights to policymakers, practitioners, and researchers interested in fostering the role of CSOs in democratic processes and policy development.

## **Conceptual Framework**

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### 2.5 Degree of access

This thesis focuses on Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) with access to decision-making processes, emphasising the significance of access in their intermediary role between citizens and policymakers. The concept of access is crucial as it allows CSOs to directly engage with public officials, influencing policy formulation and in turn democratic governance. Understanding the dynamics of access is thus essential for assessing the impact of CSOs in democratic systems. This research builds upon the conceptualisation presented by Albereda (2020), who views access as an exchange mechanism where CSOs provide resources to public officials in return for meetings, encompassing various forms of engagement such as presentations, advisory roles, and direct contact. The broad definition of access is more appropriate considering the diverse contexts and forms of access encountered by CSOs across different nation states. Thus this broad definition is more applicable given the wider scope of this thesis.

This research examines the organisational elements that explain the degree of access within the set of groups that frequently engage with public officials. The focus on insider organisations is selected to examine the variation of groups involved in a national context who are actively interacting with public officials and thus hold the potential to influence decision making (Albereda, 2020; Grossmann, 2012; Fraussen et al., 2015).

The existing academic discourse has identified several factors influencing the degree of access for CSOs, including group type, the organisational structure of the receiving body, and



membership density. Studies by Grömping and Halpin (2019) in Australia and Heylen, Willems, and Beyers (2020) in Belgium, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Sweden have demonstrated that CSOs with greater member involvement are more likely to gain access and achieve political insider status. However, Albereda (2020) found that at the EU level, greater member involvement did not necessarily correlate with increased access. Drawing upon the work of Albereda (2020), this research aims to investigate how CSOs' attributes of member involvement and organisational capacity influence their access to public officials, specifically within the national context of European Union member states.

## 2.6 The Transmission Belt Theorem

The central theoretical concept that informs this thesis is the transmission belt theorem, and it is crucial to define how this theory will be conceptualised for use in this research. For the purposes of this study, the transmission belt theorem is applicable to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) with a membership. This specification is selected based on the assumption that such organisations, by virtue of having members, are expected to have a representative function. They are tasked with providing a legitimising role by aggregating and relaying the interests of their core constituents (the membership) when formulating policy positions (Albareda, 2020; Kröger, 2016). As such, said organisations are expected to operate based on authorisation between members and representatives (Albereda, 2020). This representative function may not be present in CSOs without a membership or will be more complex in its nature (Schlozman et al., 2015). Thus this thesis conceptualises the transmission belt as it relates to membership-based organisations.

The previous section details that in order to fulfil the transmission belt ideal, CSOs must strike a balance and achieve both member involvement and organisational capacity. This can be accomplished by CSOs possessing organisational attributes that foster both membership engagement and efficient influence through professional staff and policy expertise (Albareda, 2020). Greater professionalisation is expected to be associated with increased access to decision makers, while organisations with strong membership involvement will be better able to generate relevant policy positions (Albareda, 2020), thereby promoting input and output legitimacy.

Accordingly, this research argues that organisations with internal structures that align with the ideal transmission belt will enjoy a greater degree of access to decision-making processes.

However, fulfilling the requirements of the transmission belt is accompanied by internal tensions due to the challenge of balancing democratic membership involvement with the generation of efficient policy expertise (Albareda, 2020; Berkhout et al., 2018; Klüver and Saurugger, 2013; Skocpol, 2003). Despite the challenges posed by these dual capacities, this thesis assumes that they can be reconciled. Albareda (2018) suggests that although demanding, some CSOs are able to overcome organisational tensions and possess sufficient structures to fulfil the transmission belt. Consequently, this study argues that member involvement is compatible with organisational capacity, challenging the notion that member involvement is negatively affected when CSOs professionalise and possess the capacity to influence decision-making (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013).

This understanding of the transmission belt theorem in turn denotes how CSOs will be conceptualised in this research. As aforementioned, this thesis employs a macro definition of CSOs as posited by Albareda (2018), this thesis adopts a macro definition of CSOs proposed by Albareda (2018) to encompass and account for the diversity of organisations active in national governance structures. This includes organisations representing specific societal causes, member-oriented objectives, or social and economic interests. Based on the above understanding of the transmission belt, CSOs will be conceptualised as membership-based organisations, and the focus of this research will be on CSOs that have a membership. These two theoretical components will shape the conceptualisation of CSOs for the purpose of this study.

## 2.7 Member Involvement

As previously discussed, representation plays a pivotal role in the transmission belt ideal. In this research, member involvement is conceptualised through organisational features that facilitate meaningful engagement with the membership and the formulation of policies based on member preferences (Albareda, 2020; Berkhout et al., 2017). The study will employ the three organisational elements proposed by Albareda (2020) to operationalise member involvement: member interaction, decision-making procedures, and local chapters. Member interaction refers

to the existence of platforms where CSO members and leaders can interact, fostering social integration between professionals and members and facilitating democratic decision-making processes (Albareda, 2020; Jordan & Maloney, 2007). Member interaction is conceptualised as decision-making structures that empower the membership to contribute to strategy and policy positions, thereby assessing the depth of member participation (Albareda, 2020; Beyers, 2008). Local chapters are conceptualised as the establishment of local offices or regional bodies, aiming to ensure societal embeddedness and facilitate discourse with members across different geographical locations (Albareda, 2020; Fraussen et al., 2015). These three organisational attributes promote active group participation and reinforce the democratic character of CSOs.

CSOs that invest in member participation channels are anticipated to enjoy enhanced access to public officials, thereby bolstering their input legitimacy by virtue of their perceived strength in representing their members' interests (Grömping and Halpin, 2019; Heylen et al., 2020). Furthermore, CSOs that actively engage their members are likely to cultivate greater output legitimacy through an exchange approach, wherein public officials value the CSOs' ability to grasp the needs and preferences of their membership (Kohler-Koch, 2010). Consequently, this research conceptualises member involvement as conducive to a greater degree of access to public officials.

## 2.8 Organisational Capacity

The capacity to influence decision-making processes represents the second component of the transmission belt ideal. In this research, organisational capacity is understood as the array of organisational elements that enable groups to interact with public officials in a proficient and professional manner, while also producing knowledge based on expertise (Albareda, 2020). The focus is primarily on the professionalised nature of CSOs, which equips them with the necessary tools to effectively engage with public officials. This study will adopt the three organisational elements proposed by Albareda (2020) to conceptualise organisational capacity: autonomy, centralised structures, and functional differentiation. Autonomy refers to the discretionary delegation of authority, enabling flexible and efficient groups that can operate independently and set long-term goals (Albareda, 2020). Centralised structures entail concentrating the most authoritative power within a small number of individuals to ensure efficiency in decision-making and management (Albareda, 2020; Skocpol, 2003). Functional differentiation pertains to the

presence of specialised policy-generating groups that provide expertise, identify policy development opportunities, and convey their findings to decision-makers (Albareda, 2020; Klüver, 2012). CSOs that invest in organisational capacity are predicted to be highly attractive to public officials due to their ability to generate expertise efficiently and in a timely manner (Albareda, 2020; Heylen et al., 2010). Such organisations are also better positioned to enhance their output legitimacy by furnishing public officials with expert knowledge (Albareda, 2020). Therefore, this research regards organisational capacity as a factor conducive to achieving a greater degree of access to public officials.

## 2.9 Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses have been formulated;

**Hypothesis 1:** Civil Society Organisations which invest in member involvement are more likely to achieve a high degree of access to public officials.

**Hypothesis 2:** Civil Society Organisations which invest in organisational capacity are more likely to achieve a high degree of access to public officials.

**Hypothesis 3:** Civil Society Organisations which function as transmission belts are more likely to achieve a high degree of access to public officials.

**Hypothesis 4:** Civil Society Organisations which function as transmission belts are more likely to achieve a higher degree of access to public officials compared to Civil Society Organisations that prioritise investing in either member involvement or organisational capacity.

## Chapter III: Research Design

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This research evaluates how effective CSOs are as transmission belts in the national context, adopting Albereda's (2020) design used in a similar EU-level study. Replicating this design offers advantages in terms of comprehensiveness, meaningful comparisons with EU-level findings, and enhanced academic credibility. Albereda's study examines how democratic and professionalised interest groups' nature influences their access to EU officials, considering factors like member involvement and organisational capacity. The research aims to adapt this design to fit the specific scope, including data description, research methods, and operationalizing concepts.

### 3.1 Data Collection and Sampling

The use of survey data in this study allows for the application of outlined hypotheses to a substantial dataset encompassing five countries. Consequently, valuable insights into the functioning of CSOs across five European nations are provided, addressing a gap in the academic discourse. As previously discussed, the research design aims to replicate that of Albereda's 2020, which relied on data from the INTEREURO Interest Group Survey (Albereda, 2020).

The INTEREURO project is a large-scale survey seeking to understand the policy activity and internal structure of CSOs operating at the EU level. However, given the specific focus of this thesis, an alternative data source is employed. The Comparative Interest Group Survey (CIG survey), derived from the INTEREURO project, conducted a similar survey at the national level across eight EU member states to enhance the comparative dimension of the original project (Beyers et al., 2020). Using the CIG survey aligns precisely with the objective of this research, namely the national context. In addition to replication purposes, the CIG survey provides the advantage of a substantial number of survey respondents, resulting in a large dataset suitable for analysis. This is particularly valuable, given the challenges associated with accessing data on the internal characteristics of CSOs (Albereda, 2020; Baggetta & Madsen, 2020).

The countries included in the population of the CIG survey are Belgium, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and Sweden (Beyers et al., 2020). Due to data availability constraints, a representative sample was selected for analysis. Heylen, Willems, and Beyers (2020) conducted a study using the CIG survey data to explore the relationship between professionalisation and member influence at the national level. They selected five countries representing three geographical groupings of EU member states: Belgium and the Netherlands as Western countries, Slovenia and Lithuania as Eastern countries, and Sweden as a Scandinavian country. These groupings (Western, Eastern, and Scandinavian) are commonly employed in the study of European political systems due to the prevalence of common regional characteristics (Clark et al., 1993; Strandberg, 2006; Swianiewicz, 2014). Heylen, Willems, and Beyers (2020) devised a representative sampling method categorising the study population into three groups along the pluralist-corporatist continuum. These groupings, along with their respective countries, constitute the population for this research.

To be included in the sample survey respondents must have some access with public officials those who do not were removed from the sample, additionally survey respondents who did not answer any of the survey questions used to formulate the explanatory and control variables were also removed from the sample. The table below illustrates the final study sample population.

**Table 1: Sampling Method and Study Population**

<b>National Context</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of Survey Respondents</b>	<b>Number of Survey Respondents included in the Sample Population</b>
<b>Eastern</b>	Slovenia	473	490
	Lithuania	365	
<b>Western</b>	Belgium	958	946
	The Netherlands	866	
<b>Scandinavian</b>	Sweden	646	567
<b>Combined</b>			<b>Total: 2003</b>

### 3.2 Research Methodology

This research will employ a multivariate research design to examine the impact of multiple causal factors on the dependent variable. The dependent variable is access to decision-making, while the explanatory variables include member involvement, organisational capacity, and fulfilment of the transmission belt. Additionally, control variables considered are organisational type, financial resources, and national context.

To empirically assess this question, survey data will be utilised. Each variable will be conceptualised through survey questions that correspond to the different theoretical components of each variable. The survey data will be coded (as detailed in the following section), and then the data will be analysed using the statistical software SPSS to calculate the relationship between the variables. The empirical method is as follows: a statistical overview between the dependent variable national context, the bivariate relationship between each explanatory variable and the dependent variable will be calculated, followed by the multivariate relationship between the explanatory variables and the dependent variable using regression analysis. The bivariate relationship will be calculated using Chi-Square Test, this method has been selected given the categorical nature of many of the variables. The multivariate model utilised is binomial logistic regression, this is an appropriate method as the dependent variable is a dichotomous variable. The results of this empirical research will then be assessed in relation to the research question and hypotheses.

### 3.3 Operationalisation

To empirically assess the attributes of CSOs several capacities were operationalised for research purposes. These conceptualisations are duplications, or closely align, with those proposed by Albareda (2020). The dependent variable of this research is access to decision making. As previously mentioned, in order to fulfil the transmission belt ideal, CSOs must possess the capacity to influence decision-making. Therefore, access to decision makers serves as a key indicator of this capacity. In this research, the dependent variable is access to decision-making, which will be examined in relation to the organisational characteristics of CSOs. The explanatory factors of the research are member involvement, organisational capacity and transmission belts.

For these factors, exact replication was possible using the same survey questions from the original research in this study. For these factors, multiple survey questions and their responses were used to form an additive index.

### **The Dependant Variable: Access to Decision Making**

In the original research design access to decision making was operationalised as CSOs having at least one face-to-face meeting with an EU Commission official. One or more meetings were coded as 1 and no meetings were coded as 0. To warrant being included in the sample, CSOs must have had some access and or influence in decision making as this research focuses on so called ‘insider’ organisations, those with access. To assess access to decision making at the national level two survey questions were selected as they indicated that survey respondents had some access to decision makers; Q35\_04 ‘Presenting research or technical information to policymakers’ and Q40\_02 ‘Policymakers contact your organization’. Survey respondents must have either presented research to or been contacted by policymakers at least once, no presentation/contact was coded as 0. Survey respondents who had no access with public officials were removed from the population, thereby reducing the size of the sample.

These survey questions also work to assess the degree of access as survey respondents can indicate whether they have had access ‘At least once’, ‘At least once every three months’, ‘At least once a month’ or ‘At least once a week’. To measure the degree of access for this thesis the two categories were determined those with ‘low degree of access’ and those with a ‘high degree of access’. CSOs who had access in either form ‘at least once’ or ‘at least once every three months’ were coded as 0 and CSOs who had access either ‘at least once a month’ or ‘at least once a week’ were coded as 1. This was designed to differentiate between those with irregular access and those with regular access who can be considered insider organisations.

**Table 2:** *Access to Decision Making*

<b>Access to Decision Making</b>	<b>Question ID</b>
Degree of Access to Decision Making	Q35_04: ‘Presenting research or technical information to policymakers’ Q40_02: ‘Policymakers contact your organization’



### **Explanatory Variable I: Member Involvement**

Member involvement is determined vis a vis three attributes; interaction among members, decision-making procedure and the presence of local branches. Interaction among members is conceived as ‘the presence or absence of a forum that facilitates the interaction among members or supporters’ as such survey question q10\_07 ‘Does your organisation have: A general assembly or an annual general meeting’ was utilised, as in the original survey, 0 was coded as no and 1 was coded as yes. Albareda (2020) acknowledges that this does not account for the frequency or quality of such meetings however considered having the attribute of a general assembly or meeting; a ‘prerequisite to enable the interaction among members and between members and the organisation; (2020). Organisational capacity is operationalised to consider the depth of member involvement in internal decision making, specifically in relation to either group consensus or voting procedures. As such two survey questions are utilised which ask survey respondents to what extent members are involved when q11\_07 ‘Establishing your organization’s position on policy issues’ and q11\_08 ‘Adopting strategies to influence policy making process’. Responses 3-7 indicated members are not involved and were coded as 0, responses 1-2 indicated members are involved and were coded as 1. The presence of local branches is utilised to indicate the organisation's ability to reach elementary members fostering a connection with its membership constituency. The research question q10\_08 ‘Does your organization have local or regional chapters?’, speaks to this. As in the original survey 0 was coded as no and 1 was coded as yes.

**Table 3:** *Member Involvement*

<b>Member Involvement</b>	<b>Question ID</b>
Interaction amongst Members	Q10_07: ‘Does your organisation have: A general assembly or an annual general meeting’
Decision-making Procedure	Q11_07: ‘Establishing your organization’s position on policy issues’ Q11_08: ‘Adopting strategies to influence policy making process’
Local Branches	Q10_08: ‘Does your organization have local or regional chapters?’

## **Explanatory Variable II: Organisational Capacity**

Organisational capacity has been operationalised by way of three organisational attributes; autonomy, centralization and functional differentiation. Organisational autonomy is assessed via organisations' ability to make human resource decisions without the involvement of the membership. Autonomy in relation to the specific domain of staffing was chosen as Bach (2014) identified human resource management specifically to be a strong indicator of membership influence in the daily operations of CSOs. Survey questions were selected which assessed how staffing decisions were made in relation to q11\_01 'Budget' and q11\_02 'Hiring staff', survey responses 3-7 indicated members were not involved and was coded as 0 while survey responses 1-2 indicated members were involved and was coded as 1. The second feature centralisation seeks to assess where power resides within the organisation. Albareda specifically selected survey questions which relate to how influential the Apex of the group (such as the executive director, the chair of the board, and the board of directors) are in relation to establishing positions and deciding on advocacy tactics. Focus upon the influence of the group apex, rather than features of centralisation, was chosen as it proves a better representation of where power resides as organisational features designed to de-centralise power do not guarantee such an outcome. As such the survey questions which speak to how much influence the following actors have when establishing policy positions q12 and political strategies q13 operationalise how much power Resides with the central group apex; q12\_03/q13\_03 'Executive director', q12\_04/q13\_04 'Chair of the board' and q12\_05/q13\_05 'The board of directors/executive committee'. Survey responses of 3-4 indicate the apex is not influential and were coded as 0, while survey responses of 1-2 indicate the apex is influential and were coded as 1. Functional differentiation, refers to units which are specialised to a policy domain. Such units can be seen to aid CSOs in their ability to provide expert based policy information (Albareda, 2020). To operationalise the presence of these units survey question q10\_05 does your organisation have 'Committees for specific tasks' was selected. As in the original survey 0 was coded as no and 1 was coded as yes.

**Table 4: Organisational Capacity**

<b>Organisational Capacity</b>	<b>Question ID</b>
Autonomy	Q11_01: 'Budget' Q11_02: Hiring staff'
Centralisation	Q12_03/Q13_03: 'Executive director' Q12_04/Q13_04: 'Chair of the board' Q12_05/Q13_05 'The board of directors/executive committee'
Functional Differentiation	Q10_05: 'Committees for specific tasks'

**Explanatory Variable III: Fulfilment of the Transmission Belt**

The third and final explanatory factor is how well does the CSO fulfil the transmission belt ideal. Albareda (2020) operationalised this factor to be binary, organisations who score 2 or 3 in both member involvement and organisational capacity were coded as 1 indicating they fulfilled the transmission belt, and organisations who scored 0-1 in both or either capacity were coded as 0 indicating they do not fulfil the transmission belt ideal. This is designed as such as in order to fulfil the transmission belt ideal CSOs must be proficient in both capacities, as previously discussed.

**Control Variables: Organisational Type, Financial Resources and Region**

In Albareda's original design control variables were utilised relating to group type (ie. business or nonbusiness), arena of access (national or supranational), and financial resources (assessed via number of full time staff). The CIG survey focuses on groups active at the *national level* and thus the control of area access was not included as a control. Group type is included as a control as business organisations have been shown to be better represented in some administrative contexts and face more challenges when establishing policy positions (Albereda, 2020; Fraussen et al., 2015). The survey included a question entailed type, business organisations are coded as '1' and non business organisations are coded as '0'. The final control of financial resources can be accounted for in this design. Operationalized via Q21\_02 which speaks to how many 'Paid staff (full time /equivalent)' work for each CSO. It is expected that financial resources may have an

effect on CSOs ability to involve their membership and influence decision making (Albereda, 2020).

An additional variable of country was included for the Eastern and Western populations, to account for differences with the sample populations. To account for any national differences outside the exceptions outlined by Heylen, Willems, and Beyers in their research. As such, in the Eastern context CSOs active in Slovenia were coded as 0, and CSOs active in Lithuania were coded as 1. In the Western context CSOs active in Belgium were coded as 0, and CSOs active in the Netherlands were coded as 1. This control is omitted from the Scandinavian context as this sample comprises only one country; Sweden.

**Table 5:** *Control Variables*

<b>Controls</b>	<b>Question ID</b>
Organisational Type	Type
Financial Resources	Q21_02: 'Paid staff (full time /equivalent)'

## Chapter IV: Findings

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This section will detail the research findings, in relation to the research question and the stated hypotheses.

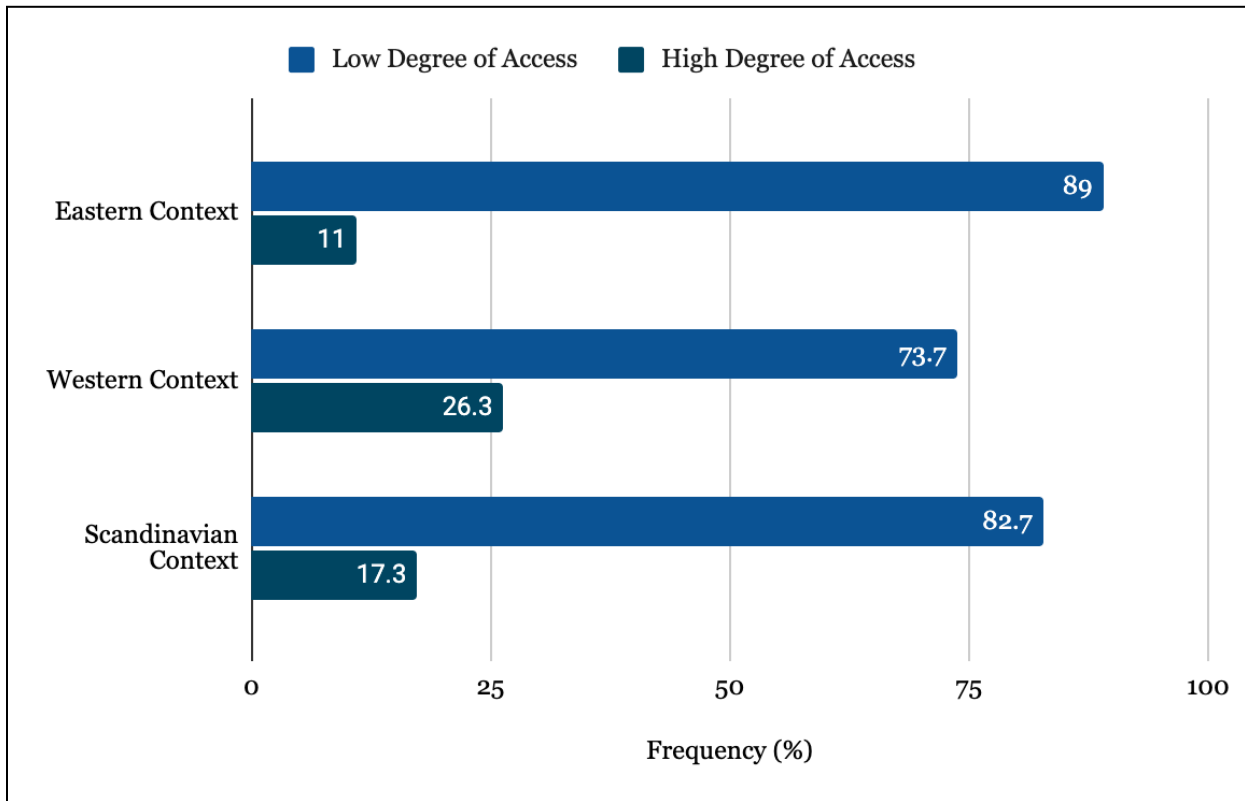
### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

**Table 6:** *Descriptive Frequencies of Degree of Access in Different National Contexts*

<b>National Context</b>	<b>Degree of Access</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
Eastern	Low	436	89.00
	High	54	11
Western	Low	697	73.7
	High	249	26.3
Scandinavian	Low	469	82.7
	High	98	17.3

The descriptive statistics pertaining to the dependent variable "degree of access" and the study populations reveal notable variation in access levels across national contexts, yet a discernible pattern emerges. Among CSOs with access, the majority exhibit low levels of access, with a smaller percentage demonstrating a high degree of access. This observation aligns with the existing academic literature, which consistently identifies that even among those with access, a smaller subset, referred to as "insider" organisations, wield regular access and greater influence over decision-making processes (Albareda, 2020). Such insider organisations represent a distinct and more influential group within the broader landscape of CSOs with access to decision-making.

**Figure 1:** *Descriptive Frequencies of Degree of Access in Different National Contexts*



In terms of the national context, the Western context stands out with the highest proportion of CSOs, 26.3%, having a high degree of access. In contrast, in the Eastern context this is notably reduced, with only 11% of CSOs having a high degree of access. The Scandinavian sample falls between these two categories, with 17.3% of CSOs with access achieving a high degree of access. This variation aligns with existing research, which highlights the influence of the receiving structure on the degree of access achieved by CSOs. Accordingly, we anticipate variations across different national contexts in accordance with the pluralist-corporatist continuum (Beyers et al., 2020; Jordan, 1984).

Moreover, the Descriptive statistics underscore differences in the number of valid respondents utilised in the study. The Western sample population encompasses a larger number of valid respondents compared to both the Eastern and Scandinavian populations, respectively.

## 4.2 Bivariate Analysis

**Table 7:** *Chi-square Test for Association Between the Dependent and Explanatory Variables*

Population	Member Involvement	Organisational Capacity	Transmission Belt	Organisational Type	Financial Resources	Country
Eastern	<.001	.499	.070	.044	<.001	<.001
Western	.013	.064	.104	.177	<.001	.874
Scandinavian	.763	.749	.595	.007	.007	N/A

A chi-square test for association was performed to examine the relationship between the dependent variable, degree of access, and the explanatory and control variables. The phi-coefficients findings, outlined in Table 7, reveal substantial variations across different national contexts, which aligns with the earlier expectation considering the diverse structure of the receiving bodies along the pluralist-corporatist continuum (Beyers et al., 2020; Jordan, 1984). These results underscore the significant influence of the national context on the internal characteristics of CSOs.

### **Eastern Population:**

In the Eastern population, there was a negligible statistical association between the degree of access and the variables; Organisational capacity and Fulfilment of the Transmission belt. There was a weak association identified between degree of access and organisational type  $\chi^2(1) = 4.073$ ,  $p = .044$ . A statistically significant association was observed between the degree of access and the variables; member involvement  $\chi^2(3) = 16.484$ ,  $p = <.001$ , financial resources  $\chi^2(29) = 70.585$ ,  $p = <.001$  and country  $\chi^2(1) = .025$ ,  $p = <.001$ .

This result underscores that within the Eastern context, the attributes organisational capacity and fulfilment of the transmission belt appear to have a weak association with degree of access thereby these results do not lend support to hypotheses 2, 3 and 4.

**Western Population:**

In the Western population, a negligible statistical association was found between the degree of access and the variables; organisational capacity, fulfilment of the transmission belt, organisational type, and country. A statistically significant association was observed between degree of access and the variables; member involvement  $\chi^2(3) = 10.748$ ,  $p = .013$ , and financial resources  $\chi^2(151) = 292.803$ ,  $p = <.001$ .

The results of these associations in the Western context do not lend support to hypotheses 2, 3 and 4, due to weak association with degree of access and the attributes; member involvement, organisational capacity and fulfilment of the transmission belt.

**Scandinavian Population:**

In the Scandinavian population, a negligible statistical association was found between the degree of access and the variables; member involvement, organisational capacity, and fulfilment of the transmission belt. A statistically significant association was observed between degree of access and the control variables; organisational type  $\chi^2(1) = 7.168$ ,  $p = .007$  and financial resources  $\chi^2(73) = 106.160$ ,  $p = <.007$ .

The results of these associations in the Western context do not lend support to any of the 4 hypotheses put forth. Due to the weak association with degree of access and the attributes; member involvement, organisational capacity and fulfilment of the transmission belt.



### 4.3 Multivariate analysis

A binomial logistic regression was performed for the three national contexts in order to determine the effects of member involvement’, organisational capacity, fulfilment of the transmission Belt, organisational type, financial resources and region on likelihood that CSOs achieve a high degree of access achieved by CSOs.

#### Eastern National Context

**Table 8:** *Logistic Regression Predicting Degree of Access in the Eastern National Context*

	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I or EXP(B)	
					Lower	Upper
Member Involvement	.254	13.127	<0.001	2.514	1.527	4.139
Organisational Capacity	.286	.022	.882	1.043	.596	1.826
Transmission Belt	.689	.376	.540	.655	.170	2.529
Organisational Type	.337	6.678	.010	2.388	1.234	4.621
Financial Resources	.010	.195	.658	.955	.976	1.016
Country	.296	.021	.885	1.044	.585	1.862
Constant	.760	20.862	<0.001	.031		

In the Eastern Sample the binary logistic regression was statistically significant Chi-Square=11.967, and  $p < 0.05$ . The model explained 85.0% (Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>) of the variance in degree of access and correctly classified 89.0% of cases. The results indicate that member involvement and organisational type are significant predictors of CSOs degree of access to decision making. The other four variables, organisational capacity, fulfilment of the transmission belt, financial resources and country are not significant. CSOs which invest in member involvement are able to achieve a higher degree of access to decision making. Regarding organisational type, business CSOs had 1.234 times higher odds to achieve a higher degree of access to decision making than non business CSOs.

As such these results lend support to hypothesis 1: Civil Society Organisations which invest in member involvement are more likely to achieve a high degree of access to public officials. In addition to indicating that the control variable organisational type is significant in relation to degree of access. However these results do not lend support to hypothesis 2, 3, and 4 in the Eastern National Context, as neither organisational capacity or fulfilment of the transmission belt were statistically significant predictors of degree of access.

Western National Context

**Table 9: Logistic Regression Predicting Degree of Access in the Western National Context**

	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I or EXP(B)	
					Lower	Upper
Member Involvement	.182	.058	.810	.957	.670	1.367
Organisational Capacity	.130	.847	.358	1.127	.874	1.452
Transmission Belt	.292	1.485	.223	1.428	.805	2.531
Organisational Type	.170	2.145	.143	1.283	.919	1.790
Financial Resources	.000	1.849	.174	1.000	1.000	1.001
Country	.174	7.955	.005	1.637	1.163	2.304
Constant	.357	22.509	<0.001	.184		

In the Western Sample the binary logistic regression was statically significant Chi-Square=16.039, and  $p < 0.05$ . The model explained 32.0% (Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>) of the variance in degree of access and correctly classified 73.4% of cases. The results indicate that the variable country is statistically significant, as CSOs active in The Netherlands had 1.163 times higher odds to achieve a higher degree of access in comparison to those located in Belgium. The other five variables, member involvement, organisational capacity, fulfilment of the transmission belt, organisational type and financial resources were not statistically significant.

Consequently, these results do not lend support to any of the four posited hypotheses as neither member involvement, organisational capacity or fulfilment of the transmission belt were statistically significant predictors of degree of access in the Western Context. The results do

however, highlight that the receiving structure can greatly influence the characteristics and function of CSOs as the variable ‘country’ was statistically significant in relation to degree of access.

Scandinavian National Context

**Table 10:** *Logistic Regression Predicting Degree of Access in the Scandinavian National Context*

	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I or EXP(B)	
					Lower	Upper
Member Involvement	.161	1.627	.202	1.229	.895	1.686
Organisational Capacity	.165	.402	.526	.901	.651	1.245
Transmission Belt	.242	2.456	.117	.685	.426	1.100
Organisational Type	.271	8.198	.004	2.173	1.277	3.696
Financial Resources	.001	5.263	.002	1.002	1.000	1.004
Constant	.340	20.157	<.001	.217		

In the Scandinavian Sample the binary logistic regression was statically significant Chi-Square=14.170, and  $p < 0.05$ . The model explained 41.0% (Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>) of the variance in degree of access and correctly classified 82.7% of cases. The results indicate that the variables organisational type and financial resources are statistically significant predictors of CSOs degree of access to decision making. CSOs with a greater number of full time staff (financial resources) are able to achieve a higher degree of access to decision making. Regarding organisational type, business CSOs had 1.277 times higher odds to achieve a higher degree of access to decision making than non business CSOs. The other three variables, member involvement, organisational capacity, and fulfilment of the transmission belt are not significant.

Consequently, these results do not lend support to any of the four posited hypotheses as neither member involvement, organisational capacity or fulfilment of the transmission belt were statistically significant predictors of degree of access in the Scandinavian Context. Conversely, the results indicate that the control variables of organisational type and financial resources are significant in relation to the degrees of access achieved by CSOs active in Scandinavian context.

## Chapter V: Conclusion

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The research focus centred on Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) operating within the national sphere. This emphasis was selected for two key reasons. Firstly, CSOs stand as integral components of democratic systems, yet their practical effectiveness often remains overlooked. Secondly, prevailing research on the realisation of the transmission belt ideal has predominantly concentrated on the supranational level, with less attention paid to the national level. Consequently, the research question of this thesis was articulated as follows:

*"How do the attributes of member involvement and organisational capacity shape the access of Civil Society Organisations to decision-making at the national level?"*

The findings of this study contribute significantly to the discourse within the national context of European Union (EU) member states, through the examination of three distinct populations representing Western, Eastern, and Scandinavian democracies. These findings provide insightful contributions into how the critical attributes of the transmission belt ideal, specifically the capacity to represent and influence decision-making, influence the degree of access that CSOs achieve within the decision-making processes of these specific national contexts.

### **5.1 Key Findings**

In line with expectations the descriptive statistics highlighted that of those who achieve access to the decision making process only a small subset actually achieve a high degree of access. Furthering, the trend observed that of CSOs active in governance only a small group of organisations with privileged ‘insider’ status hold consistent influence over decision making procedures.

As discussed, CSOs exhibit remarkable diversity, encompassing an array of objectives, structures, and preferences. However, they are not singular entities; they are also subject to external structures, particularly the structure of the receiving democratic body, which wields

significant influence. The quantitative findings of this research affirm this expectation, as anticipated, to hold true in relation to EU member states. The findings underscored that the degree of access achieved by CSOs is moulded by different factors depending on the national context. The internal characteristics of CSOs are thus divergent depending upon the context within which they operate. Consequently, the four hypotheses posited, along with the overall findings, will be summarised in relation to each of the three national contexts examined in this study: Western, Eastern, and Scandinavian.

The findings within the Eastern context corroborated hypothesis 1: Civil Society Organisations which invest in member involvement are more likely to achieve a high degree of access to public officials. Additionally, the results indicated that organisational type exerts an influence on the level of access achieved by CSOs, with business organisations attaining a more substantial degree of influence. This latter observation contrasts with the outcomes of Alberada's study (2020) at the EU level and with the findings of this research in the Western Context, where group type was not found to impact the degree of access. These results suggest that emphasis on representation holds significance in this context, while organisational capacity holds lesser importance. This discord with ongoing discussions about CSO professionalisation underscores the necessity of examining CSOs across various contexts to comprehend their operational dynamics (Binderkrantz, 2009; Halpin, 2006; Jordan and Maloney, 2007; Kohler-Koch, 2010; Rodekamp, 2013). The significance of just one aspect of the transmission belt ideal might also suggest that achieving a balance between these two capacities, influence and representation, is a demanding and resource-intensive undertaking for CSOs, as posited in the academic discourse (Alberada, 2020; Berkhout, 2013; Hollman, 2018; Schmitter and Streeck, 1999). Thus, as the outcomes do not substantiate the notion that investing in organisational capacity and fulfilling the transmission belt substantially contribute to CSOs' access to decision-making, this consequently refutes hypotheses 2, 3, and 4.

The findings within the Western context illuminated the influence of the receiving structure, specifically the national operating context of Belgium or the Netherlands, which significantly impacted the degree of access attained. CSOs operating in the Netherlands achieved a greater degree of access to decision-making processes. However, the findings in this national context did

not provide backing for any of the four stated hypotheses. Hence, it is plausible to deduce that neither the attributes of member involvement nor organisational capacity carry significance within the Western Population. Furthermore, the chosen control variables also exhibited no noteworthy association with CSOs achieving an elevated degree of access to decision-making. This potentially implies the presence of an unaccounted-for variable.

The outcomes derived from the Scandinavian Context exhibited a partial resemblance to those of the Western Context, given their lack of empirical validation for any of the four hypotheses. The results indicated that in the Scandinavian national context CSOs which invest in member involvement and/or organisational capacity do not achieve a greater degree of access to decision making procedure. Thereby, it can be inferred that the transmission belt ideal is also not fulfilled in this context. However, in contrast to the Western findings in this population, the control variables were significant. Organisational type was, as found in the Eastern Context, to be significant with business organisations achieving a higher degree of access. Financial resources, in relation to the number of full-time staff, was also found to be significant. Indicating that increased resources may enable CSOs to pursue their goals in relation to influence over decision making. Thus, as member involvement, organisational capacity, and fulfilment of the transmission belt ideal were not found significant in this case, the results do not support any of the stated hypotheses.

Overall, the findings derived from this research indicate that CSOs in EU national contexts are not fulfilling the transmission belt ideal. The attributes of member involvement and organisational capacity, when examined in the context of the study's population, are discovered to be only partially or not at all realised among CSOs that manage to attain a high degree of access. These findings diverge from those of Albareda (2020), whose research at the EU level revealed a correlation between organisational capacity and an increased access to decision-making. It thus signals the need for national democracies to critically reassess the engagement of CSOs in governance, particularly if their involvement is intended to enhance legitimacy as well as fulfil representative and expertise-based roles. Instead, it becomes imperative for democratic systems to explore alternative avenues to achieve these objectives, such as employing referendums, citizen assemblies, and decentralisation strategies (Landemore,

2020). Given the current socio-political landscape, where issues of representation, or their perceived absence, take precedence, this reassessment should be undertaken expeditiously. Its objective would be to instil citizens' confidence in the representative avenues inherent to their democratic frameworks, thereby preventing a crisis in confidence in the fundamental ideal of representative democracy.

## **5.2 Limitations**

Beyond these conclusions, the findings also shed light on certain potential limitations inherent in this research endeavour. The principal methodology employed to derive these conclusions centred around binary logistic regressions. While this approach aligns appropriately with the chosen variables, it is imperative to acknowledge that regression analysis, while illuminating the likelihood of a phenomenon occurring, does not facilitate the establishment of causal relationships. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the operationalization of variables was somewhat restricted by the available survey questions. Notably, the question corresponding to the control variable 'financial resources' (Q21\_02: 'Paid staff (full time / equivalent)') exhibits a degree of overlap with the variable denoting 'organisational capacity'. The latter was operationalized using fiscal autonomy, encompassing 'Budget' (Q11\_01) and 'Hiring staff' (Q11\_02). This is particularly relevant given that 'Q21\_02' may also relate to the prominent question of professionalisation. However, although a limitation given the available survey questions it still remains a suitable control, more so given it was found to be significant in the western population. Additionally, the utilisation of three distinct populations introduces a notable limitation, circumscribing the depth of insights attainable into specific national contexts. While this issue falls beyond the purview of the current research, it underscores a limitation that merits consideration.

## **5.3 Implications for Future Research**

The findings of this study offer opportunities for further research exploration. They underscore that the perceived role of CSOs in fulfilling the transmission belt ideal remains unattained within the examined national contexts of EU member states. Additionally, these findings unveil significant variations in the organisational structures of CSOs and their levels of access to decision-making. Thus, future research endeavours should focus on delving into this subject

within specific national contexts to comprehensively comprehend the precise organisational facets of the receiving structure that exert influence on the inherent characteristics of CSOs. Such an endeavour would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between these elements.

Furthermore, this research not only underscores the potential absence of the organisational characteristics associated with the transmission belt ideal within CSOs but also reveals that other organisational elements might hold greater significance. Consequently, future research endeavours should undertake a comprehensive exploration of additional attributes that could potentially exert influence on CSOs' access to decision-making at the national level.

Moreover, this research was constrained given the scope and limitations of this study. This study relied on existing survey data and was confined to quantitative analysis, future research initiatives could consider the acquisition of fresh data as required. Additionally, it would be prudent to ensure triangulation by complementing quantitative data with qualitative insights. This methodological expansion would bolster the research's robustness and yield deeper insights into the multifaceted nature of CSOs and their intricate relationship with the decision-making landscape.

#### **5.4 In Conclusion**

The findings presented in this thesis make a substantial contribution to the ongoing discourse surrounding Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and their organisational attributes. Notably, the study underscores a parallel with observations at the supranational level, revealing that CSOs operating within nation states encounter challenges in fulfilling their intended role, specifically the transmission belt ideal. Moreover, the research illuminates significant variations among CSOs, even within the focused population of European Union member states. In doing so, this thesis revitalises the ongoing debate regarding the representative role of contemporary democratic systems, accentuating the urgency of reevaluating at least one critical attribute—the involvement of civil society organisations.



## Chapter VI: References

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