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Interest-group capacities and infant industry development: State-sponsored growth in organic farming

Darren Halpin, Carsten Daugbjerg and Yonatan Schwartzman

Abstract

Both interest-group and public-policy scholars accept that groups are important to policy formulation and implementation because they hold valuable capacities. However, the literature has not dealt with whether, and how, groups *develop* capacities. In this article, we examine the question of group capacity development by focusing on the adaption of specific groups to evolving policy contexts. Taking the example of organic farm policy we look at the impact that divergent policy strategies aimed at growing this infant industry sector have had on the way related industry groups have evolved in four countries. This comparative study supports our argument that policy strategy is one key force in shaping the capacities that groups develop over time.

Keywords

interest groups, infant industry, organic farming, public policy, state

Introduction: Group ‘capacity’ and public policy

Interest-group input to public policy is sought on the grounds that the group has something valuable to offer. Groups are valuable because they are ‘capable’. The literature conceptualizes capacity in a multidimensional manner: a checklist of possibilities emerges.¹ Groups are capable because they have information: they provide policy ideas and possess relevant facts and figures. Where the ‘representativeness’ of groups is high, they can also enhance acceptance of the policy outcome among important constituencies. Maloney et al. (1994: 36) list the ‘resources’ that groups might exchange with policymakers for access as ‘knowledge, technical advice or expertise, membership compliance or consent, credibility, information, implementation guarantees’. More recently, Bouwen (2002) provides a similar list of ‘resources’, but refers to them as ‘access goods’ that groups use to engage in the policy processes.

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But what about the *development* of group capacities? While interest-group scholars would no doubt agree that variations in capacities exist, the specialist literature does not offer much in the way of tools to conceptualize and explain such differences, whether within group populations or over the life course of an individual group. The interest-group literature has tended to focus upon the 'event' of birth or formation (see Olson, 1965; Salisbury, 1969). After this 'event' groups simply exist – 'maintained' by the efforts of group 'entrepreneurs' who ensure incentives to sustain member support while pursuing policy influence (Moe, 1980; Wilson, 1995). While this approach correctly asserts 'business-like' considerations (such as financial security) as perhaps *the* basic preoccupation for group leaders, it also seems to underplay significantly the dynamism of groups *during* their life course. Once groups are created, it is implied that they simply exist. The population-ecology approach has recently dominated discussion of group survival, implying that poorly adapted groups are 'selected out' and new, better-adapted models emerge (Gray and Lowery, 2000; Nownes, 2004). This is an important insight, but curtails and discourages questions about whether organizations seek to adapt to conditions. In response, recent group analysis has suggested a focus on group adaptation (Halpin and Jordan, 2009). Even so, this tentative step does not analyse whether adaptive group change is directly sensitive to the policy context.

There is, however, some consideration of capacity development in the literature on associative governance. This provides a promising starting point and something with which group scholars might engage. In the context of industry policy, Bell (2006) deploys the benchmark measure of 'capable' associations. The general public-policy literature views 'associative' capacities as critical to generating 'governing' or 'transformative' capacity (see Atkinson and Coleman, 1989; Painter and Pierre, 2005: 11; Peters, 2005: 80; Weiss, 1998). But it also defines capacities rather generally. Painter and Pierre (2005: 11) suggest that groups help the state 'acquire essential knowledge, while cooperative relations with them also ensure compliance'.

It is relatively easy, as evident above, to list the group capacities that may be considered, in a general sense, to be policy relevant. But if such formulations are to make sense in identifying the 'particular' contribution of groups to governing capacities in a given policy area, we surely need a more nuanced understanding of group capacity. The immediate problems with the existing approach are threefold. First, groups are surely not all *equally capable*. Resource levels, 'encompassingness', and staff professionalism (indeed, all the 'capacities' listed above) vary within group populations. Second, group capacity is to some extent likely to be a by-product of broader organizational survival prospects. That is, developing capacity is likely to be partly contingent on fulfilling more basic group 'needs', such as sustaining broad legitimacy with key audiences (policymakers and members) and sustaining the income base. Lastly, the policy context surely shapes what counts as a 'capacity': particular policy contexts would seem to demand different capacities. Put simply, the extent to which group capacities are 'valuable' is a context-specific matter and doubtless varies across countries and through time. Here we focus our analytical attention on the former element by comparing the adaptation of group capacities in a single industry sector, but across countries with differing policy contexts. While we accept this is not the only factor affecting interest groups' capacities, its neglect in the study of interest groups is of particular significance in limiting our understanding of group adaptation. This article devotes attention to the capacities that interest groups develop and adapt as policy contexts evolve. It analyses the relevance of this issue for both policy formulation and policy implementation. As is evident in our cases below, the development of capacities relevant for policy can empower interest groups to play important roles in policy formulation as well as in implementation.

In this article, we analyse the link between the design of organic-sector policies and capacity development among organic-sector groups. Saliiently, while the dedicated group literature is relatively quiet on this link, the existing public-policy literature *does* say something about the relationship between policy context and group capacities. Focusing on the broad shift to neo-liberal policy programmes and internationalizing policy spaces, most scholars ponder the ongoing relevance and capacity of 'traditional' business or industry groups. But, it is largely (and in our view unnecessarily) pessimistic in relation to the issue of capacity development. The implicit approach is to conceptualize group capacity as generated within, and thus rooted to, certain historical policy contexts or conditions. New policy contexts, particularly of the neo-liberal variety, demand new and better-adapted groups. Groups may try to stretch (adaptive efforts are implied), but they find 'capacity renewal' difficult. However, this approach is very broad and says little about the specific design of policy programmes or its impact on capacity development.

In this article, we probe the issue of capacity development by comparing the organizational evolution of the key organic interest groups in Australia, the UK, Sweden, and Denmark. The key differences, we argue, are strongly (if not decisively) shaped by variation in the organic-sector policies of the four countries. This comparison is particularly useful in investigating the nuts and bolts of interest-group capacity development and adjustment. It may provide new knowledge relevant in exploring the growth of other infant industries in which interest groups' capacity may be decisive for successful policy implementation. The organic interest groups of the four countries emerged from a similar milieu, yet they developed capacities relevant to policy implementation very differently. Two of the cases have maximum variation in relation to the independent variable of policy context (Australia and Denmark) and the two others constitute intermediate cases (Sweden and the UK). Thus, we maximize experimental variance, which from a comparative-research methodological perspective provides the best condition for producing robust conclusions in small-*N* studies. Of course, to reach firmer conclusions, additional cases are required.

Organic-sector policies and associative capacity development

While, in principle, group capacity development is anticipated in the literature, the question of how it emerges in particular policy contexts is understudied. How do *individual* groups in *particular policy contexts* actually *develop* capacities over time? *Capacity development* is a process influenced by external as well as internal factors. For many groups, public policy forms an important part of the context within which they act and policymakers are a key audience with whom groups need to maintain legitimacy. To varying degrees they are able to influence this context; however, they are rarely in a position solely to control policy development. Government and political parties, as they respond to various calls for change and adjustment of policy, may decide to overrule the opinion of groups to pursue broader societal, partisan, and bureaucratic goals or they may pursue the interests of competing interest groups. In other words, interest groups are *policy-takers* as well as *policymakers*.

If policy context is likely to shape the kinds of group capacities required, then how can we distinguish between significantly different contexts? In the case of innovative infant industry development, governments can choose among different policy strategies. The basic choice governments face is whether to intervene in a sector. In the *non-interventionist strategy*, the state leaves infant industry development to market forces, civil society, and households. At the most, the state may intervene to ensure that market forces operate effectively. Market forces will ensure that supply and demand will reach equilibrium. Civil society may seek to influence supply and demand

Table 1. Policy Instrument Typology for Infant Industry Development

| Supply-side policy instruments (push) | | Demand-side policy instruments (pull) | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Direct | Indirect | Direct | Indirect |
| Examples: • Producer subsidies | Examples: • Funding of research and development activities | Examples: • Compulsory purchase • Consumer subsidies | Examples: • Market facilitation • Support for marketing |

Table 2. Interventionist Policy Strategies

| | | Emphasis on supply-side instruments | |
|-------------------------------------|------|--|---|
| | | Low | High |
| Emphasis on demand-side instruments | Low | Passive market-development policy strategy | Supply-driven policy strategy |
| | High | Demand-creation policy strategy | Active market-development policy strategy |

Note: A draft version of this typology was developed in Daugbjerg and Sønderkov (2009).

directly; for instance, industry groups may promote their industry by influencing household purchasing decisions.

When governments choose an interventionist strategy to promote an industry, they have a number of instruments at their disposal (Vedung, 1998: 23–4). Most often public policies are composed of a mix of several policy instruments; only rarely do policies rely on a single one to sustain a preferred situation or bring about change. It is the combination of policy instruments which defines policy and therefore it is important to establish how ‘various policy instruments ... [are] packaged into overall programmes or comprehensive policies’ (Vedung, 1998: 39).

When intervening in infant industries, governments can apply policy instruments aimed at increasing the supply of or the demand for a new, innovative product, or both (see Table 1).

These instrument types can be combined in four different (intervention) policy strategies (see Table 2).

As displayed in Table 2, state intervention can be of varying kinds. The two dimensions in Table 2 are continuous scales. Therefore, the four types of policy strategies outlined must be considered as ideal types. Actual policies may not necessarily be clear-cut examples of one of the four types.

The *passive market-development policy strategy* is an interventionist policy strategy, but government engagement is at a modest level. The main purpose of intervention is to provide the institutional setting for the market to function. The government is likely to become involved either directly or, most likely, indirectly in market facilitation (such as setting production standards). Given that start-up costs for a new industry sector and the costs of converting from old to new production technology may be considerable, modest producer subsidies may be provided by the government. However, these producer subsidies are not designed to grow the sector beyond what demand can justify, but simply to meet existing demand. In the *supply-driven strategy*, governments tend to view the product of infant industries as a public good and thus see increased supply as having a public value in its own right. Government intervention is heavily skewed towards supply-side instruments and relatively little concern is given to influencing demand. Producer

subsidies are the major policy instrument applied. The *demand-creating strategy* finds increased demand the most effective way of bringing about infant industry growth. It is assumed that when demand exists, entrepreneurs and capital will enter the industry and increase supply. The policy instruments applied under this strategy are strongly focused on creating incentives for increased consumption and may even bring about mandatory consumption (for instance, Danish electricity utilities are required to purchase wind power). In the *active market-development strategy*, government commits itself to promote an infant industry through a balanced use of supply-side and demand-side policy instruments to stimulate rapid market development.

The impact of policy strategies on shaping interest-group capacities

These policy strategies impact on interest-group capacities by creating incentives for groups to develop the capacity to assist in the formulation or implementation of these broad strategies. By 'capacities', we refer to the activities and actions that groups are able to engage in to support the policy strategy. We limit the concept of capacity to the abilities and skills groups develop in order to contribute to (and affect) the process of policy formulation or its implementation. In so doing, we do acknowledge that a group may have substantial political power (for instance, it may organize a section with considerable electoral influence), yet hold weak capacities with respect to our concern in this article. We study here four of the five possible organic-sector policy strategies. To our knowledge, the *demand-creating strategy* is not applied in the organic sector, though it can be found in other infant sectors (for example, the Danish wind-power sector). What do we expect to find?

A *non-interventionist policy strategy* has no direct impact on interest-group capacity development; in fact, it would logically prevent interest groups from developing policy capacities. In the absence of any state activity, organic interest groups would focus upon capacity development in relation to 'internal' sector issues (such as certification and education). Where organic groups engage in influencing the state under such a strategy, it would be limited to things such as achieving legal protection for 'organic' labelling systems.

Passive market-development policy strategies have a limited impact on the development of organic-group capacities. In the agricultural sector, states have mainly developed capacities to govern the supply of various agricultural commodities and these capacities are utilized to respond to increased demand by creating economic incentives to increase supply. However, states may possess some capacities related to market facilitation, such as the ability to set up and operate public certification bodies or accredit and inspect private certification bodies. Performing these roles is not significantly different from food-safety and quality-control functions in which states have been involved for some time. As a result, interest-group capacity development would be aimed at policy formulation, concentrating on demonstrating the need for state intervention, providing the information needed for such intervention, and also developing the capacity to increase demand through information campaigns fostering public awareness about organic food. But these capacities would be shaped and developed independently of government involvement.

Supply-driven policy strategies would encourage organic interest groups to develop capacities to assist the state in providing organic subsidies to farmers. However, as states already possess capacities in implementing supply-side policy instruments, capacity development within organic interest groups is likely to be directed towards lobbying and assisting government in structuring policy programmes and towards traditional farm-group activities (such as assistance in applying for producer subsidies and organic extension services). Activities related to the demand side of the organic food market would be very limited.

Active market-development strategies are likely to have a much more profound impact on interest-group capacity development. Given that traditional agricultural policies are supply-side orientated, states have limited expertise and administrative resources directed at creating demand. Thus, states are not well equipped to create markets for organic produce. Such efforts require organization, skill and experience in marketing campaigns, and capacities in coordinating marketing activities with producers, processors, and retailers. When states pursue a demand-creating policy strategy, without having 'in-house' capacities to implement such policies, organic industry associations have a strong incentive to develop such capacities. Having done so, they may be in a position to link state objectives with the market behaviour of producers, processors, distributors, and retailers to aid implementation.

It is important to reiterate that we have chosen cases to vary on the independent variable, that is, policy context and strategy. Thus, we examine cases that cover all relevant policy contexts for organic farming. An alternative, but no doubt fruitful, research design would be to select cases with maximum variation on the dependent variable, that is, group policy capacity. Therefore, one limitation is that we cannot say that all relevant variations of capacity development have been covered. This is a viable research strategy for future work.

Organic-sector policy strategies in Australia, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Denmark

The contemporary approach to agricultural support of all four countries analysed is of a commercial, as opposed to a state-supported, nature. It is true that the UK, Sweden, and Denmark, by contrast with Australia, are subject to significant market intervention associated with the Common Agricultural Policy. However, all four countries are regarded in the comparative agricultural-policy literature as states with commercially orientated stances (Grant, 1996: 62, 160, 181). Nevertheless, they have developed significantly different organic-sector policy strategies. This section compares the policy strategies of the four countries.

Australia

Export access has been the driver for what little governmental engagement has occurred in the organic sector. Governmental recognition of the industry first came in a 1989 discussion paper from within the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) calling for a national approach to certification. The aim was for Australia to gain access to export markets which existing private certification alone would not easily permit. The federal government became more fully involved in 1990 when it helped establish the Organic Produce Advisory Committee (OPAC), a body formed to develop a national export standard. Currently, the federal government regulates organic exports via a government-to-government certificate: Export Control (Organic Produce Certification) Orders. A 'National Standard for Organic and Bio-dynamic Produce' compiled by the Organic Industry Export Consultative Committee (OIECC), an industry committee under the auspices of AQIS, provides guidance for private certifiers who enforce private standards that must exceed the national standard in order that they are recognized as certifiers by AQIS. In essence, the state regulates certifiers, who in turn certify producers. However, the state has recently sought to transfer this task to an industry-based body regulated by Standards Australia (see Halpin and Daughbjerg, 2008).

The Australian organic industry does not receive any direct, targeted assistance from the state. However, it does receive some funding via the taxpayer-funded Organic Subprogram of the Rural

Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) and from general agricultural or rural industries assistance programmes, such as the Farm Innovation Program and New Industries Development Program (NIDP). Research and development (R&D) funding for the organic sector has been very modest (Wynen, 2003). Though state intervention is not totally absent, it is minimal. Therefore, the Australian organic-sector policy comes *close to being non-interventionist*.

United Kingdom

According to Tomlinson (2007: 39), until the 1980s, the state had been ‘conspicuous by its absence’ from the development of the UK organic sector. A change of mood was evident in the 1980s, catalysed in part by the ‘crises’ in the UK’s conventional agriculture (Clunies-Ross, 1990). But even such promising conditions for organic development, that is, a period in which major stakeholders were willing (or had no choice but) to admit problems with the ‘conventional’ farming model, did not result in broad state engagement with the sector. However, it did give impetus to the evolution of the Soil Association (see below).

Perhaps the most significant early engagement of the state with the sector was the establishment of the UK Registry of Organic Food Standards (UKROFS) in 1987 (Tomlinson, 2007: 142). As the certifier of certifiers, it became the first dedicated forum for interaction between the state and the sector. It incorporated the members of the British Organic Standards Committee (BOSC)² in addition to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food (MAFF), supermarkets, and consumers. *Incrementally*, more generous state support (mostly for conversion) has been forthcoming through the Organic Aid Scheme (1994), the Organic Farming Scheme (1999), and through measures associated with the 2002 Organic Action Plan (for details, see Daugbjerg et al., 2008). Lately, the state has funded scientific research into organic farming systems and an information and advisory service (the Organic Conversion Information Service or OCIS). At face value this appears to be consistent with an emerging supply-creating strategy. But one must look at the way this state engagement was framed. Public financial support for the organic farming sector was linked to environmental-care, rural-development, and health agendas. However, most saliently, the state provided support because it rested on firm market demand – the organic sector became a vehicle for achieving public goods *via the market*.

Perhaps the key feature of the state’s engagement with the organic sector is its continued insistence that the sector should rest firmly on consumer demand. Tomlinson (2007: 144–5) cites continued ministerial and departmental statements reasserting that their main interest is in meeting consumer demand (where it exists) and not in creating demand. They became marginally more concerned with supply-side issues in the context of import replacement: making sure UK producers meet UK demand. Farmers are encouraged to meet demand, and the state suggests it will assist that, but it is not in the business of *creating* demand (Tomlinson, 2007: 145). Thus, we argue that the British organic-sector policy is characterized by a *passive market-development policy strategy*.

Sweden

From the outset, Swedish organic policy was framed as an environmental policy measure (Rydén, 2003: 11–12; Swedish Government, 1997: 72–3, 2006: 1). The Swedish Board of Agriculture states that ‘Organic production is one of the means for achieving some of the national environmental goals and to promote a sustainable farming sector’ (Jordbruksverket, 2001: 5, authors’ translation). As a result, Swedish organic policy has emphasized increasing the area farmed organically:

supply-side policy instruments have been dominant and no significant support has been granted to demand-oriented market development (Källander, 2000: 280).

Specific targets for the conversion of farm land to organic production were established: 10 percent of agricultural land was to be converted by 2000 and 20 percent by the end of 2010 (Swedish Government, 2006: 11). A conversion subsidy for organic farming was introduced in 1989 (for a three-year period) as part of a broader agricultural policy programme aimed at reducing surplus cereal production and limiting farm-based pollution. In 1994, a small, permanent subsidy was introduced. However, as a consequence of Sweden's entry into the EU, relatively generous permanent subsidies for organic farming were introduced in 1995. Payments were differentiated according to region, crops grown, and the livestock system. This model was further differentiated in 1999 and payments were increased and reached comparatively high levels, in particular for oil-crop, potato, sugar-beet, fruit, and vegetable production (Rydén, 2003: 10–12, 22, 39). In 2008, subsidies were further differentiated between certified and non-certified organic farmers, with the payment levels for the latter scaled down to 50 percent in 2009 (Jordbruksverket, 2009). The state has provided increased funding for research in organic production. In addition, the Board of Agriculture (a state agency) launched information campaigns designed to encourage farmers to convert. It has also created an extension service for organic farmers as part of the state's agricultural advisory service.

The government has delegated certification and labelling to the private association KRAV (Control Body for Alternative Agriculture). Formed in 1985, KRAV was granted state authorization in 1993 and is now highly professionalized. Between 1994 and 1997 its staff size rose from 2 to 50 persons, and by 2006 it had risen further to 70 employees (Boström, 2006: 348–9). Organic farmers are not required to be certified to receive government subsidies for organic farming as long as they comply with EU rules on organic farming and are subject to inspection by the Board of Agriculture. However, certification (in practice, KRAV certification) is needed to market produce as organic through commercial sales channels. The Swedish government has admitted that its skewed focus on supply-driven policy has led both to a significant growth in organic production and to minimal growth in organic consumption. In fact, only a third to a half of total organic output is actually marketed as organic (Jordbruksverket, 2001: 43; Swedish Government, 2006: 7). But this state of affairs has not led to a shift in Swedish policy strategy. Somewhat surprisingly, rather than supporting marketing activities, the government decided to decrease subsidies to non-certified farmers (Jordbruksverket, 2009).³

Denmark

The Danish state's engagement with the organic sector began with the Act on Organic Farming (1987). It had two main components. First, subsidies were provided both to ease farm conversion and to fund initiatives related to the processing, marketing, and distribution of organic food. Prior to 2004 organic farm subsidies were differentiated between arable and various types of livestock production in order to motivate particular groups of farmers to convert. On the demand-creation side, state funding for product innovation and marketing increased by more than 350 percent between 1994 and 1996. Second, state engagement in the Danish organic sector in the late 1980s entailed a shift from certification by non-state bodies to a fully state-operated certification and labelling system (the Ø-label). Until 1989 the National Association of Organic Farming (NAOF) was the main organic certifier, setting its own standards and carrying out its own farm inspections. The strong emphasis on state-sponsored marketing of organic produce means the Danish government

has pursued an *active market-development policy strategy*. The resignation in late 2001 of the government led by the Social Democrats and the election of a Liberal-Conservative government led to a lowering of organic subsidies, but the policy strategy was left untouched. In the early 2000s, after several years of considerable overproduction of organic milk and cereals, it was decided to abolish support schemes directed at selective commodity groups. The market, rather than selective support schemes, was perceived as a better mechanism to determine the level and type of organic production.⁴ However, conversion and permanent subsidies would still be provided. In 2004, a flat-rate conversion and permanent organic payments system replaced the complicated commodity-differentiated subsidy system. Spending on demand-side policy measures was scaled down fivefold between 2002 and 2005 as a result of the change of government, but this did not halt efforts devoted to increasing demand for organic produce. After 2002 demand-creation initiatives were still implemented, but funding increasingly came from the Land Tax Foundation (*promilleafgiftfonden*) and the Foundation for Organic Agriculture (Schvartzman, 2008: 53–5).⁵ Increased demand for organic food domestically and internationally in 2006 and 2007 persuaded the government to again increase funding to levels just short of the highs of 2005.

The impact of organic-sector policy on group capacities

Organic-sector groups present a particularly good context for investigating the shaping role of policy strategy on group capacity development. The organic groups in each country emerged from a similar milieu, initially sharing a number of basic features. They were established by people outside the established farming community and, in contrast to traditional farm groups, they have a consumer membership component. They were also founded against the backdrop of a movement-style network of farmers exchanging best-practice farming techniques and engaged in on-farm research. Likewise, they were instrumental in initial standards development and early certification schemes. Yet they *developed their capacities differently*.

On the basis of the policy classification developed above, we would expect that the non-interventionist organic-sector policy in Australia would have little impact on organic-interest-group capacity development. As a consequence of the passive market-development policy strategy in the UK, we would expect that organic interest groups would attempt to develop capacities enabling organic-sector market development, such as supplying information which might enable the state to intervene to increase supply and engage in market-facilitation activities. In Sweden, we would expect its supply-driven policy strategy to motivate the organic interest group to develop traditional farm-union capacities consistent with advising the government on organic policies and providing farmer-focused dissemination activities. The active market-development strategy in Denmark should provide incentives for organic interest associations to develop the capacity to undertake government-sponsored marketing activities.

Australia

Organic agriculture has been practised for more than 40 years in Australia (see Clay, 1999). Historically, certification companies have functioned as de facto industry groups. The only body that can claim to be a national organic body without links to a certification organization is the Organic Federation of Australia (OFA). The creation of the OFA in 1997 was an attempt to integrate producers, processors, wholesalers, retailers, and consumers into a single structure. While the Organic Federation of Australia promises (and claims) a national umbrella role, this is contested

by, among others, the Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) (formerly a certifier and cooperative, but in 2002 separated from this business and now the only other industry body with ambitions for national coverage). Indeed, the BFA claims to be the largest national representative organic body in Australia.

The Organic Federation of Australia lacks policy-relevant capacities. It has no full-time staff and runs entirely on unpaid volunteers (a mix of farmers, consultants, and academics). By contrast, some of the certifiers, and the BFA in particular, are well resourced. The OFA lacks the capacity to represent the sector authoritatively. The state, for instance, is not able to grant resources to the OFA to do industry-development work (such as the 2004 Organic Industry Profile), as it attracts criticism from *within* the industry that the OFA is unrepresentative. Another consequence of the OFA's capacity deficit is that it is no more than an observer as consultants, food companies, certifiers, and exporters develop food-industry strategies for important organic supply chains. This is a stark contrast to the role of the conventional farm associations and related groups within broader Australian farming policy and programme development.

But there are signs that the federal (and some state) governments are interested in developing industry associative structures. However, as discussed above, this is associated with the desire by the state to hand over what little direct role it has in regulating the industry (removing the certification role of AQIS). A recent media release from the parliamentary secretary responsible for organic farming stated that in addressing its many challenges, the industry 'must work together under the leadership of the Organic Federation of Australia to ensure continued success'. The state recognizes it needs an authoritative body, but until now it has been frustrated in associative capacity building. The legacy of the state's non-interventionist strategy in the organic sector has been to dampen efforts at capable industry associations. In lieu of such a body, certification organizations remain strong, not least because they can deliver what is needed: a system to certify food to meet small levels of domestic demand and to sustain a niche export sector.

United Kingdom

The Soil Association (SA) was established in 1946. Its founders were not all dedicated farmers, but a diverse mix of individuals, mostly of high social status. The dual purposes of the SA at formation were research and education. In the early period, however, research dominated. If anything, it resembled an amateur scientific society, describing itself in the first edition of its magazine *Mother Earth* as an 'agricultural research organisation'. A key plank of the early organic movement's strategy was the scientific testing of organic methods at the privately owned Haughley Research Farms. The SA was also involved in the development of the first set of UK organic-farming standards in the late 1960s. In 1973, the Soil Association Marketing Company Ltd (now the Soil Association Certification Ltd) was formed to both certify and promote organic produce.

Scholarly accounts of the Soil Association suggest a significant shift between the pre-1980s and post-1980s (Reed, 2004; Tomlinson, 2007).⁶ This marks a switch to *external* engagement, as the Soil Association took on a stance more consistent with a policy-orientated interest group. A new leadership cadre took over in the early 1980s, developing a more conscious engagement in market-based issues and adopting a campaigning stance (Reed, 2004: 151). The inherent difficulty in securing funding for the SA to maintain quality organic research (*SA Quarterly Review*, 1982: 1) reinforced a view that scientific work was not feasible. In its place, more effort went into market development and consumer engagement. In 1985, the SA moved its head office from Haughley Farm to offices in Bristol.

To confirm the change of tack, the SA pursued a consumer campaign in 1983–84 (the ‘Eat Organic’ message). It took the view that demand creation was crucial given the power of consumers: if demand was there (and if it could be demonstrated), then government would have to listen and support the sector. The philosophy was ‘first, build its production base ... and its ability to educate the consumer. The public, then, must emphatically demand of the government more food produced under biological systems – this pressure must then be channelled through the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries to increase the research into organic agriculture which, together with increased product demand, will bring the much higher supplies to meet increased demand which our campaign stimulated’ (*SA Quarterly Review*, 1982–83: 8–9). MAFF said as much, making clear it would respond to consumer pressure where demand existed. In fact, the state got involved in standards, as it recognized that if consumers were paying a premium, they had to be sure that they were getting what they were paying for. Mobilizing consumer awareness was defined as a key task for the SA and converged with the state’s emphasis on market-demand-led sector development.

This is not to say that the SA was not engaged in *direct* lobbying activities. The bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE or mad-cow disease) and other food scares in the 1990s prompted renewed attention to organic farming, and the SA was well placed to respond.⁷ It knew that the way to be influential within a passive market-development policy strategy was to stoke demand and gesture to that demand. The SA engaged with the state over drawing up the Organic Aid Scheme in 1993 and the subsequent programmes which supported conversion (see above). But, unlike the Danish case, there was no underlying commitment by the state to ‘plan’ for sector growth. By contrast, this governmental intervention was recognition that the SA’s campaigning and market strategy had worked – the state accepted that demand *already* existed. The SA’s role in policy development reflected its expertise owing to its status as a certifier and standard setter for UK organic farmers, by virtue of which it knew where the organic farmers were located, their production volumes, and their prospects for extending production to meet demand. The SA was involved in running a ‘conversion information service’ in 1996 to increase uptake. It was funded by MAFF and was subsequently taken over by MAFF/Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), but has recently been disbanded (Tomlinson, 2007: 166). At that time the SA was still a relatively small enterprise: growing to just 30 staff by 1997.

For the past 10 years the Soil Association has been expanding rapidly, as well as increasing its capacities. Today’s Soil Association is a large enterprise: more than 200 full-time, professional staff engage in activities as diverse as standards development, market development, education, public affairs, and policy. The supporter base is around 28,000, which is relatively small for a high-profile, mass-membership group (and particularly small as a base to sustain such a large staff). Much of this expansion has been funded by increases in grants (for example, from the Big Lottery fund), increased membership, and donations and legacies, resulting from more vigorous membership marketing and related activities (as the SA’s annual reports confirm). The growth in staff engaged in areas such as public relations and media, new regional centres and networks, and school education provides an indicator of where it has generated policy capacities. It maintains a growing network of organic farms that are visited by the general public, publishes a magazine, and has developed regional centres to engage more directly with local partners (and also EU, state, and lottery funding) in organic food projects (for example, the ‘Food for Life’ partnership, that is, organic meals in schools).

As one would expect, the SA has a capacity in market development. It has maintained its indirect market ‘shaping role’ through mass communication. The philosophy that such *indirect*

pressure will develop the organic market runs deep at the SA. In an interview with a staff member, the suggestion that the SA 'negotiate' with the state or supermarkets to develop the sector solicited the response 'I could get Tesco to agree to stock organic chocolate, but if it didn't sell after a week they would pull it off the shelves.'⁸ The view is that if consumers want something (and if the SA can demonstrate that), then the market actors and the state will become enrolled in meeting demand. The Soil Association does not offer consultancy to individual enterprises: farmer, processor, or supermarket. However, it does directly engage in market-development activities. The recent growth in the staff resources of the SA has engendered a more hands-on approach than the very indirect 'environment setting' approach described above. It may, for instance, assist product innovation in the sense of linking processors and supermarkets with producers (in addition to establishing relevant standards as is necessary). It runs a Multiple Retailers Working Group which is an information exchange between the SA and retailers. In terms of supply and demand, the SA is active in encouraging conversion (providing general advice and targeting sectors in which supply is low) and fostering demand with consumers, but it also tries to 'iron out' oversupply issues by dissuading conversion where supply is likely to exceed demand (a staff member cited the organic milk sector). It is involved in programmes that put organic food in hospital and school canteens, but these projects serve as exemplars to demonstrate what can be done. One staff member described its market role as 'sustaining the organic market in the overall public interest', and this seems a relatively accurate description of the logic that informs the SA's functions in this arena.

In its own words, the SA is an 'educational charity'. It is an organization with open affiliation to the general public. The certification service (a separate business from the charity) provides important income. However, its accounts suggest that the net profit of certification activities is modest compared with the income from project grants, donations, members, and legacies.⁹ The consistently agnostic approach of the British state to organic food has heavily shaped the evolving capacities of the SA. It will intervene where consumer demand can be shown to exist, which has put a heavy reliance on the SA to continue to establish that this is indeed the case. That the SA has fashioned (and grown) a broad membership base beyond organic farmers reflects this imperative. It does not present itself as an orthodox farm union; it has few agricultural economists on its staff. Rather, the group possesses capacities in relation to fostering a broad public profile for organic food, a position from which it can demonstrate the public desire for organic food and promote its use in all aspects of the food sector.

Sweden

The Swedish Ecological Farmers' Association (SEFA) was established in 1985 with the aims of promoting organic agriculture and working for the interests of organic farmers.¹⁰ Most of SEFA's members are active farmers, but others supporting organic agriculture can also join (Rydén, 2003: 7).

SEFA's office in Uppsala, north of Stockholm, employs nine people. This relatively small staff means that the association has to rely heavily on unpaid volunteers, mostly farmers.¹¹ The emphasis in Swedish organic farming on increasing supply means that the government possesses sufficient administrative capacities to implement the policy. As such, SEFA receives no state financial support for its activities (Källander, 2000: 280).

SEFA has developed into a farmers' union with the aim of representing organic farmers' interests to the state bureaucracy and politicians. Unlike its sister associations in Australia, the UK, and Denmark, SEFA does not claim to represent the whole organic food chain including consumers. On its website, it presents itself as the organic farmers' professional and interest association and both

its Swedish and its English name explicitly states that it is a farming association (see <http://www.ekolantbruk.se/omoss>). As a farming interest group, the main effort of SEFA has always been directed towards influencing policy formulation and it has been quite successful in that endeavour. By 1988, a few years after formation, it had gained insider status in deliberations on organic farming policy as a member of the Council of Organic Farming. The discussions in the council had little impact on policy because its agenda was limited to relatively minor issues, therefore SEFA also undertook traditional lobbying activities directed towards political decision-makers. For instance, it persuaded the farm minister that the conversion subsidy introduced in 1989 should not only be paid to new converters, but also to farmers who had already converted their farms to organic production. Since then, SEFA has pursued a dual-influence strategy of participation on government boards and committees and of influencing political decision-makers directly (Rydén, 2003).¹² It is not only in relation to the political system that SEFA has attempted to nurture a good relationship. Since 1997, SEFA has been collaborating with the main association of conventional farmers, the Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF), in order to generate legitimacy for organic production among conventional farmers, thereby avoiding opposition from within the farm community (Rydén, 2003: 30–3). To pursue its interest in policy formulation, SEFA does provide limited market and sector analysis. However, given that the political context has been favourable to the demands of organic farmers, SEFA has been able to rely on moral persuasion rather than technical argument. Thus, it has no reason to develop substantial analytical capacity.

As a professional association for organic farmers, SEFA also devotes resources to internal affairs such as providing information to farmers on organic production rules, the market for organic produce, research findings, production support, and the like. The association also provides an arena for debating various issues in organic farming (such as genetically modified organisms (GMOs), marketing, and certification rules) and it publishes a monthly magazine for organic farmers.

The motivation to develop implementation-orientated capacities has been limited as a result of the supply-side focus of the organic farming policy, but nevertheless the association has engaged in some demand-side activities. Since the late 1990s, SEFA has put some efforts into marketing-related activities, such as bringing together various stakeholders in the food chain, undertaking market analysis, organizing educational programmes for retailers, and (as noted) publishing a monthly magazine. However, as a consequence of limited financial resources, these activities are relatively minor compared with those of its sister associations in Denmark and the UK. SEFA has only two full-time employees working on market development and one on communication.¹³

Given that the Swedish government has demonstrated a willingness to provide substantial subsidies to organic farmers as an agri-environmental measure in its own right, SEFA has been able to focus on communicating to government what it believes is necessary to motivate more farmers to convert to organic farming. It has not had to demonstrate consumer demand as a motivation for government provision of organic subsidies. Thus, SEFA has mainly developed traditional farming group capacities, such as lobbying and internal information dissemination.

Denmark

The establishment of organic farming in Denmark was associated with the rise of the environmental movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1980, a group of organic farmers took the initiative to organize the organic sector, and the National Association of Organic Farming was formed in March 1981. In 2002, the association was reorganized and changed its name to Organic Denmark (Økologisk Landsforening).

The 1987 Act on Organic Farming established the Organic Farming Council (Lov No. 363, 1987, Article 2), of which the NAOF became an important member. During the first period of its existence (up to *circa* 1994) the council played a limited role. Subsequently, it played a key role in preparing the two action plans for organic farming (1995 and 1999) which set the direction for Danish organic-sector policy until 2004 (Lynggaard, 2001: 98). The NAOF did not limit itself to this corporatist-style policymaking institution; it very successfully engaged in lobbying directed towards politicians and civil servants and actively used the media to attract state funding to promote the organic sector (Larsen, 2000). To a considerable extent, the successful lobbying activities of the NAOF/Organic Denmark were the result of a very favourable political context. For instance, pro-organic food ministers were in power from the mid-1990s until 2001 (Daugbjerg and Halpin, 2010) and there was a generally positive political attitude to promoting organic farming as an environmental measure (Jacobsen, 2005: 152–70). The employment of a managing director skilled in lobbying further professionalized the NAOF as a pressure group. The favourable political context may explain why only four staff have been allocated to policy activities compared with the many more devoted to policy-implementing activities and marketing and information activities (Økologisk Landsforening, 2008).

In parallel with these policy-formulation activities, the NAOF/Organic Denmark has also been deeply involved in policy-implementation activities. As mentioned above, the Organic Act of 1987 introduced a state certification and labelling system. This was a serious blow to the NAOF, which had established its own certification body in the early 1980s (Ingemann, 2006: 13). The loss of certification endangered the NAOF's identity with farmers and external stakeholders (for example, the state). Therefore, the NAOF had to renew itself as an interest group and define its relationship with the state. The Danish organic-sector policy, with its emphasis on the creation of both supply and demand, proved helpful in that respect as it left room for engagement in market development. However, since the state considered the NAOF a pressure group, rather than a corporatist-style industry association, the renewal of capacities could not take place *within* the NAOF itself. Therefore, in 1989, the Organic Trade Coordination Committee (OTCC) was formed by members of the NAOF, the established farm unions, and the organic commodity-sector associations (in the beginning, only the dairy, vegetable, and beef sectors) to coordinate and assist in organic marketing activities. It was entirely funded by state subsidies until 1992 (*Økologisk Jordbrug*, 1992: 7).¹⁴ However, its capacity was limited as its staff consisted of only one employee (BKU, n.d.).

In 1992, the Trade Coordination Committee was dismantled and the Organic Service Centre (OSC) was established. It was a separate organization from the NAOF, but was seen as a means to provide indirect funding to the NAOF (for instance, by buying space for relevant articles in the NAOF magazine). The basic idea of the centre was to perform as 'the farmer's extended arm to the consumer and the retailer' (Økologisk Landscenter, n.d. b). In 1995, the OSC was engaged in activities such as in-store demonstrations, answering questions from consumers, conducting analyses of retailers' needs and attitudes to organic products, generating product-information material, organizing open farm days, participating in food fairs and exhibitions, and taking care of press contacts. A highly valued activity was nourishing contacts with retailers (Økologisk Landscenter, 1995). The OSC's activities were funded by payments for services and state support for information activities (Økologisk Landscenter, 1992). A project department, fully funded by state subsidies, was established within the OSC.

The OSC became an organizational success. It rapidly expanded its information activities, for which it attracted considerable state funding. It hired additional staff and even outsourced some public-information campaigns to consultants. In 1998, the OSC began to diversify and engaged in

export-promotion activities (Økologisk Landscenter, n.d. a). The activities were funded by the Land Tax Foundation (consisting of land-tax and pesticide-tax revenues) and by the Ministry of Food (through the schemes for product innovation and marketing under the organic policy framework) (Økologisk Landscenter, n.d. b). In 1999, the OSC was strongly criticized by the Organic Food Council for not doing enough in relation to marketing, in particular with regard to the marketing of organic dairy products. In response, the OSC launched a state-funded marketing campaign targeted at organic dairy products and a 'grand' campaign for organic produce (Økologisk Landscenter, 1999).

The Liberal-Conservative government elected in 2001 cut down on funding for various organic activities – sometimes at very short notice. The NAOF's reliance on state funding to maintain its market-development capacities left it vulnerable when political cycles changed. This change of policy forced the newly reorganized Organic Denmark, which was a merger of the NAOF and OSC, to find other sources of income to maintain its activities. One strategy it implemented was to offer on-farm advice in addition to the R&D activities already taking place within the Agricultural Development Department. This worked out well and additional staff were hired (Økologisk Landsforening, 2003: 21, 2004: 16). Another strategy was to reinforce the effort in relation to retailers and to commercialize the Marketing Department. Since the late 1990s, this department had developed considerable expertise in the marketing of organic food. Moreover, it had gained important experience in coordinating the activities of processors and distributors and in engaging directly with retailers on sales campaigns focused on specific organic products (Økologisk Landsforening, 2003: 12). In August 2002, it decided to utilize this capacity commercially by offering advice and in-store assistance to food processors and retailers in the field of organic sales (Økologisk Landsforening, 2002: 2). But rather than funding these activities by commercial income, Organic Denmark compensated for the decrease in state funding by attracting semi-state funding from the Land Tax Foundation and the Foundation for Organic Agriculture (Schvartzman, 2008: 53–5). Close cooperation with selected supermarkets in the promotion of organic sales proved very successful (Økologisk Landsforening, 2005: 26–7). By 2008, Organic Denmark had a staff of 36. The Marketing Department and the Agricultural Development Department each employed seven consultants. The Communications Department also has a staff of seven (Økologisk Landsforening, 2008). The organizational history of the NAOF/Organic Denmark demonstrates that the Danish organic-sector policy had the effect of empowering the NAOF/Organic Denmark as an important actor in policy implementation, that is, in executing state-funded, marketing-related activities in which the state has limited capacity.

Conclusions

The relationship between policy context and group capacities is not well researched in the interest-group literature. For reasons of parsimony, the interest-group and public-policy literatures treat groups as homogenous in relation to capacity. We claim that this obscures much variation and heterogeneity, and we have analysed the development of group capacities in relation to policy context. We find that groups engage in many adaptive efforts to stay relevant as policy strategies evolve. This article has explored the issue by analysing the link between the unfolding design of organic-sector policy strategies and capacity development among organic-sector groups, focusing upon the way in which interest-group capacity co-evolves with the public-policy context. Our analysis revealed a link between policy design and interest-group capacity development. We have distinguished between five types of organic-sector policy strategies (the non-interventionist strategy and

Table 3. Summary of Main Findings

| | Type of policy strategy | Expected capacity development | Findings on organic-interest-group capacity development |
|-----------|----------------------------|---|---|
| Australia | Non-intervention | Limited impact on organic-interest-group capacity development. | The OFA has little incentive to organize policy-relevant associative capacity. Instead, certifiers dominate. |
| UK | Passive market development | Develop capacities that enable organic market development, such as market-facilitation activities and supplying information needed for state intervention aimed at increasing supply. | The SA has developed an indirect 'market-shaping role' through mass communication aimed at creating consumer awareness and demonstrating demand for organic food (communicating this demand to government and members of the organic food chain). |
| Sweden | Supply driven | Develop traditional farm-union capacities, such as assisting government in preparing policy programmes and inward-directed dissemination activities. | SEFA has limited capacity. Capacity development directed towards presenting the interests of organic farmers to government and providing information to organic farmers. |
| Denmark | Active market development | Develop organization and implementation capacities related to the marketing of organic produce. | In addition to developing capacities in lobbying and mass communication, Organic Denmark has developed significant implementation capacities in marketing targeted at retailers and aimed at changing in-store consumer behaviour. |

four varieties of interventionist strategy) and explored how four of these have impacted on the capacity development of the Organic Federation of Australia, the British Soil Association, the Danish National Association of Organic Farming (and later Organic Denmark), and the Swedish Ecological Farmers' Association. Our analysis demonstrates that the four organic-sector policy strategies impacted differently on the development of policy capacity among the four organic interest groups we examined, and in the direction generally expected. Table 3 provides an overview of the main findings.

Our comparison has demonstrated that interest-group capacity is not static, but develops over time as a response to policy evolution. This implies that interest groups may have a larger potential to engage in policy implementation than is usually assumed. In particular, the Danish case illustrates that interest groups may respond to changes in policy by developing capacities so as to remain policy relevant, which is also important (although not necessarily sufficient) for survival. The frequent adjustments to policy settings within an active market strategy provide the ideal circumstances to uncover the small (but significant) adaptations that groups can make to retain relevance. In other cases, changes were broader, slower, and channelled in one direction. This finding largely contradicts the existing literature which sees little possibility for capacity development. The implicit approach is to conceptualize group capacity as generated by, and thus rooted to, particular historical policy contexts or conditions. The implicit assumption is that if conditions change, then group capacities may be of reduced value (see Coleman and Chiasson, 2002; Wanna and Withers, 2000). Our study

indicates that interest groups may be capable of adjusting their capacities, but more research is needed to determine under what conditions this is possible. Particular attention to the way in which group 'origins' shape adaptive activity would be a logical extension of this work. Certainly, policy context is one of a number of key factors which affect group capacities; others might include age, financial resources, constituency power, and leadership style. Nevertheless, the impact of policy is central for students of politics interested in how groups engage in public policy over time.

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Notes

1. In the corporatist-inspired literature, the capacity of groups to translate bargained agreements into action by the rank-and-file membership is of particular importance in delivering workable policy (see Schmitter and Streeck, 1981). Groups are valuable to the extent that they can work on their constituency to achieve 'compliance' and to 'discipline' members: that they have autonomy in their own right. The ongoing viability of such corporatist policy arrangements is closely linked to the ability of business and labour groups to reproduce these core capacities.
2. There were several organic groups in the UK movement at the time that worked together on standards, forming the BOSK in 1981.
3. For a short period in 2004 and 2005 the state experimented with active market policy strategies, by increasing support to marketing activities, but only a very limited share went to organic-sector organizations. After the change of government in 2006, support for marketing activities was significantly reduced (interview with a Swedish Ecological Farmers' Association (SEFA) marketing employee in August 2008; interview with a SEFA board member in August 2008). The government also supports consumption of organic food in public institutions.
4. Interview at the Directorate for Food, Fisheries and Agribusiness, December 2007.
5. The two foundations were established to fund various activities in the agricultural sector (for example, research, advisory services, education, and sales promotion). Their revenue sources are land and pesticide taxes. The Minister of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries appoints their governing boards, on which representatives of the agricultural sector form the majority. The foundations are administered by the Agricultural Council, which is an umbrella association for farmers' unions and business associations.
6. Recent interviews conducted by the authors with SA staff also confirm this broad analysis.
7. Food scares have propelled organic farming into the spotlight for awhile, but there is no evidence that they have had a lasting impact on consumption in three of the countries under scrutiny here (Denmark, Sweden, and the UK) (Daugbjerg and Sønderkov, 2009).
8. An interview with a member of the SA's senior staff, Bristol, February 2008.
9. It receives around 30 percent of its income from certification, but spends almost as much on running the certification body. Therefore, the net profit is low.
10. The National Association for Alternative Farmers changed its name to the Swedish Ecological Farmers' Association in 1994.
11. An interview with a SEFA official in September 2008.
12. An interview with a SEFA board member in September 2008.
13. An interview with a SEFA marketing employee.
14. Interviews with a former Organic Service Centre representative and a former Organic Trade Coordination Committee employee in March 2008.

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