Governing growth in organic farming

The evolving capacities of organic groups in the United Kingdom and Denmark[1]

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Paper for the 58th PSA annual conference, Swansea University, 1-3 April 2008.
Panel: Agriculture and the Environment: Managing the Policy Interface

[1] This paper forms part of work funded by the Danish Research Centre for Organic Food and Farming (DARCOF III) and the Leverhulme Trust (award Halpin 2007-8). We would like to specially thank Dr Isobel Tomlinson, Dr Matthew Reed, Dr Nina K. Brandt Jacobsen for making available their excellent PhD theses on the UK Soil Association and the Danish organic movement respectively, Yonatan Schvartsman for his excellent assistance with data collection and the Danish National Organic Association and the Soil Association for allowing us access to archives and for interviews with key staff.

Abstract

The question of the 'policy capacity' of interest groups is increasingly gaining prominence as a key variable in governing and transformative capacities. This raises the issue of whether group policy capacities can be developed. While group scholars have long talked of group capacity, this has largely amounted to compiling a 'shopping list' of possible capacities general to all groups. There has not been much attention to variations in capacity among groups, or with the development of capacity by a single group over time. This paper takes a tentative step towards filling this gap.

In pursuing this general line of inquiry we argue that (i) initial 'selection' of group type shapes scope of capacity development, (ii) groups seek to adapt capacity to changing policy contexts, and (iii) adaptive efforts are shaped by the 'legacy' of the originating type – change is bounded unless the group engages in 'radical' organisational changes (e.g. redefinition of entire purpose). This general argument is fleshed out by comparing and contrasting the evolution of the key organic interest groups in both the UK and Denmark.

Introduction: Group 'Capacity' and Public Policy

By whatever mode group input to public policy is obtained, whether by participation, consultation, bargaining or deliberation, it is sought on the grounds that the group has something valuable to offer. Groups are valuable because they are 'capable'. The literature conceptualises capacity in a multi-dimensional manner: a checklist of possibilities emerges[2]. Groups are capable because they have information, and they provide policy ideas and relevant facts and figures. Where the 'representativeness' of

[2] 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.

groups is high, they can also enhance acceptance of the policy outcome amongst important constituencies. For example, Maloney et al (1994, 36) list the 'resources' that groups might exchange with policy makers for access as 'knowledge, technical advice or expertise, membership compliance or consent, credibility, information, implementation guarantees'.

This broad approach is evident in the general public policy literature that sees 'associative' capacities as critical to generating 'governing' or 'transformative' capacity (see Atkinson and Coleman 1989; Peters 2005, 80; Painter and Pierre 2005, 11; Weiss 1998). For instance, Peters (2005, 80) talks of the 'capacities of society' as being crucial to a 'capacity to govern'. He says ' If we continue to use the logic of mutual cooption to understand the relationship between private sector actors in governance, then actors who bring little or nothing to the table are of little value as partners'. But what is it that would (ideally) be brought to the table? What capacities are required? Here Peters (2005, 80) identifies '…the capacity to deliver the commitment of its members and/or other actors in the policy sector' – that groups having been involved in decision making will go along with the decision. He also identifies 'information about the wants, needs and demands of their constituents'. 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 off 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 problem with the existing approach is threefold. Firstly, groups are surely not all *equally capable*. Resource levels, encompassingness, staff professionalism, indeed all the 'capacities' listed above, vary within group populations. In that respect the starting point of a group, or its broad 'type', is likely to shape capacities. Secondly, policy context surely shapes what constitutes 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. This suggests that as specific policy contexts change over time established groups may need to *renew* capacities to maintain policy relevance. Lastly, group policy capacity is to some extent likely to be a by-product of broader organisational survival prospects. Developing policy capacity is likely to be partly contingent on fulfilling more basic group 'needs' like income and member support.

These problems suggest a focus on the link between *individual* group evolution and questions of capacity development. The existing public policy literature is largely pessimistic in relation to the issue of capacity development. The implicit approach is to conceptualise group capacity as generated within, and thus rooted to, certain historical policy contexts or conditions. And, that if conditions change then group capacities may be of reduced value. This is the general thrust of Coleman and Chiassons evaluation of French agriculture (2002): they claim that without new more capable groups, 'the likelihood of realizing this new vision for agriculture would be rather low' (p.183). This pessimism about groups renewing their capacities seems to be confirmed by the observed propensity for established industry groups to 'stick' even under rather adverse conditions and where their 'value' has waned (Coleman 1997; Wanna and Withers 2000).

We ponder whether existing groups can adapt their capacities. Can established groups rework their capacities to remain policy relevant? And what of initial design? We argue that different types of groups – we deploy the usual sectional versus promotional distinction – embody *potential* for developing differential capacities. The organisational type into which groups crystallise after a formative period, thus, shapes the range of capacities a group could be expected to develop. After taking decisions on organisational form and structural set-up groups are not always easy to change – even where circumstances seem to demand it. Yet, we argue that groups can adapt capacities, albeit *within* the confines of the group type into which they have crystallised.

In this paper we probe the issue of developing capacity by exploring the organisational evolution of the key organic interest group in the UK and Denmark. A comparison of the British and the Danish organic interest groups, the Soil Association (SA) and the National

Association of Organic Farming (NAOF) (later the National Organic Association), is particularly useful in investigating the nuts and bolts of interest group capacity development and adjustment. They emerged from a similar milieu, initially sharing a number of organisational features, but, during the formative phase, drifted in different directions and crystallised into different group types. The roots of both groups date back to the 1970s, they were established by people outside the established farming community and, in contrast to traditional farm groups, they both have a consumer membership. They were also founded against the backdrop of a movement style network of farmers exchanging best practice farming techniques and on-farm research. Likewise, both were instrumental in initial standards development and early certification schemes; yet they developed very differently. The Soil Association crystallised into a promotional / campaigning group aimed at mobilising broad societal support, establishing that consumer demand exists for organic food and acting as a resource for market building activities, while its Danish sister organisation chose a different direction and developed into a more conventional sectional / industry association, which besides promoting the political interests of the organic farming industry, is concerned with providing extension services to farmers and, not least, activities aimed at providing market outlets for organic produce. These formative 'choices' over organisational form have had a significant upon the way in which the two associations have developed their capacities to respond to contextual change.

Theoretical Approach: Developing 'Group Capacities'

Asking questions about the development of group capacities *should* be the domain of group specialists. However, it is not well addressed in the dedicated group literature. While group scholars would no doubt agree that variation in capacities is evident, the specialist literature does not offer much in the way of tools to conceptualise and explain such differences: either within group populations or over the life-course of an individual group. So where to start?

One starting point is to probe the link between broad group 'type' and capacities. That is, to focus on broad variation within the group population. For our present purpose, we find it useful to contrast the sectional model with a promotional or campaign group model. Jordan and Richardson (1987, 19) argue that the literature repeatedly 'rediscovers' essentially these same two binary categories. While the multiple dimensions upon which these types can be applied to empirical cases serve to blunt their 'analytical' promise, they nonetheless constitute a starting point to explore population-level variations in capacity. And the literature *does* – albeit tentatively - link this rather rudimentary 'typing' to questions of policy capacity. In the UK, Whiteley and Winyard (1987, 5) explain that a core difference between these two types is in terms of their power to sanction government. They explain that non-producer groups '… supply specialist information to government, and are frequently consulted by government in the development of policy. However, they do lack the sanctions open to producer groups…They may be able to embarrass governments but they are not really in a position to prevent or obstruct implementation and this makes them very much weaker than some of the producer groups' (*ibid*). These two ideal type groups imply different types of organisations, and this has impacts on policy capacities. Groups on different ends of this continuum can be expected to hold different policy capacities.

But what of capacity *development*? While 'typing' specifies a general complement of 'innate' capacities to sets of groups, we would expect groups to work on and develop these 'innate' capacities in ways consistent with prevailing policy requirements: capacity should be viewed as developmental. But the dedicated group literature is weak in this regard. 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 (Wilson, 1979; Moe 1980). While this approach correctly asserts 'business-like' considerations – like financial security - as perhaps *the* basic preoccupation for group leaders (see Salisbury 1969; Wilson 1979), it also seems to significantly underplay the dynamism of groups *during* their life course. Maintenance is surely an activity common to all groups: but underpinning organisational

conditions is part of creating a platform to engage in 'something more'. But, maintenance, and incentive management, suggests bland stasis in relation to group organisations. Once created, groups simply exist. The population ecology approach has recently dominated discussion of group survival, proposing that poorly adapted groups are 'selected out' and new better adapted models emerge (Nownes 2004; Gray and Lowery 2000). This approach curtails and discourages questions about whether organisations seek to adapt to conditions.

Recent group analysis has suggested a focus on group evolution (Halpin and Jordan, *forthcoming*). It has been argued that a new account could conceive of group leaders, confronted with ever changing (and probably challenging) environments, as *seeking* to adapt and transform organizational form in order to continue to survive. Groups are 'maintained' in diverse ways, for varied reasons and informed by different images or identities. This being said, adaptations are likely to be heavily constrained by the type of external pressure, the internal group politics, organisational history and the leaders' experience, assumptions and capabilities (see Halpin 2005, esp. Chp 1).

We concur with this general thrust, arguing that groups do not *automatically* adjust their capacities to new challenges. Indeed sometimes they may be unable to do so. *Capacity renewal* 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. To varying extents 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, party political or bureaucratic goals, or they may pursue the interests of competing interest groups. In other words, interest groups are policy *takers* as well as policy *makers*. Policy change may demand new types of group resources to bring about successful implementation.

The way in which changes in policy context defines some adjustment alternative onto the agenda and defines others out is important. However, contextual demand for capacity

development is affected by institutional legacies within the group organisation. Institutional legacies may constrain some adjustment alternatives, as well as it may facilitate other types of adjustments. These institutional legacies are rooted in the formative phases of group formation in which structural choices are made. These choices include decisions on the organisational design and definition of mission. Linking back to our initial conceptual distinction between promotional and sectional groups, initial 'decisions' to commit to one or other group type establishes the type of capacities that the group develops and informs subsequent adjustments of these capacities. Thus, groups confront changeable policy contexts with a degree of adaptive potential, albeit this adaptive potential is constrained by group type and challenges to financial viability. The limitations and opportunities for capacity development within a group may not be obvious because organisational functions which are of minor importance in an organisation in the period leading up to contextual change may hold the key to the way in which the group adjust capacities when challenged by contextual change (see Pierson 2000, 75).

We accept that all groups engage in maintenance. They need to attend to organisational sustainability, and primarily financial stability. In general terms, this basic concern is a key factor in constraining capacity development; however, it does not offer much in the way of explaining the 'what' and 'how' of evolution. We offer additional insights. In summary, we seek to establish that (i) group type shapes scope of capacity development, (ii) groups seek to adapt capacity to changing policy contexts, and (iii) unless the group engages in 'radical' organisational changes (e.g. redefinition of entire purpose), adaptation of capacities is shaped within the confines of group type – change is bounded.

Denmark

The organic movement in Denmark does not date as far back as the British. Biodynamic farming dates back to the 1930's, but organic farming is a much newer phenomenon. The establishment of the organic farming movement was associated with the rise of the

environmental movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The first organic farms were established by urban people who moved into the countryside to experiment with alternative farming and a new way of life 'as a reaction to post-war industrial society and its foundation on material values' (Ingemann 2006, 9). It was soon realised that know-how and practical advice was needed to practice organic farming. As a result, throughout the 1970s, these alternative farmers became engaged in knowledge dissemination. The initial step in this process was the publication of the magazine *Bio-information* and an individual initiative of an organic farmer who offered week-long courses for organic farmers and those who considered establishing themselves as organic farmers (ibid., Holmegård, 1997, 13). In the late 1970s, the Agricultural Study Group was established. Initially the Group consisted of various groupings having different agendas, but those focusing on organic farming as a critique of industrialised farming became the dominate grouping and set the agenda for the discussions. (Lynnerup 2003). Organic farming was heavily criticised by members of the agricultural establishment. Already in 1973, an agricultural advisor stated that biodynamic and organic farming methods would ruin the soil (Ingemann 2006, 9) and the Director of the State Food Research Institute linked alternative farming with mysticism and superstition. However a report from the USDA of July 1980, which defined organic farming and argued why organic farming methods was of interest, provided a more scientific foundation upon which the Danish debate on organic farming methods could be based (Holmegård 1997, 19).

In contrast to UK organic farming policy, the Danish policy has been less stable. However, like the UK, the state has drifted over time towards a market oriented demand-led policy. Development over the recent two decades has been characterised, firstly, by attempts to design organic farm subsidies to motivate particular groups of farmers to convert by applying a trial-and-error approach. In the early 2000s it was realised that the organic subsidy scheme had to be simplified and, after several years with considerable overproduction of organic milk and cereals, it was decided that support schemes directed at selective commodity groups had to be abolished. The market, rather than selective support schemes, was perceived as a better means to determine the level and type of organic production (interview, Directorate for Food, Fisheries and Agri Business, 13

December 2007). Therefore, in 2004 flat-rate conversion and permanent organic payments replaced the complicated and commodity differentiated subsidy system. Secondly, significant economic resources and effort had been devoted to create demand for organic produce. In contrast to the arms-length organic certification system in the UK in which the state certifies non-government certifiers, state engagement in the Danish organic sector entailed a shift from certification by non-state bodies to a fully state operated certification and labelling system (the Ø-label). Until 1989 the NAOF was the main organic certifier, setting its own standards and carrying out their own farm inspections.

Group capacity –the NAOF

In 1980 a group of organic farmers took the initiative to organise the organic sector and in March 1981 the National Association of Organic Farming (NAOF) was formed. Brandt Jacobsen (2005, 100) argues that during the first few years of its existence the Association put emphasis on defining, legitimising and stabilising itself as an interest group. One of the means to do so was to establish cooperation with other organisations which would improve its members' conditions. One of the first challenges for the Association was to create better outlets for organic produce. During the spring 1981 members of the Association and the major retailer, the COOP (which is organised on a co-operative basis), met on several occasions through the country to discuss contracts for the supply of organic produce. The NAOF performed as a mediator between the COOP and individual organic producers. In April 1982, the COOP and the NAOF agreed on a standard agreement (ibid. 101). The agreement was not a contract forcing the NAOF to ensure a certain level of supply and it did not set a fixed price. Rather, the agreement operated with expected quantities of organic vegetables, guaranteed a 50 percent price premium and guaranteed a minimum price (Landsforeningen Økologisk Jordbrug 1986, 7). Though later there was talk of establishing a cooperative to supply organic produce to the COOP, it was never established. Instead, organic farmers supplied the COOP directly. This initial focus on marketing developed into a key function of the organic associations established to promote organic farming interests. It was also an important function defining their nature and mission. Thus, from its very start, it was strongly biased towards

serving farm interests (Ingemann 2006, 13) and has remained so ever since. As stated later at a board meeting in May 1990: 'We want to remain an interest association for organic farmers and growers which pursue their interests … Consumers are to be seen as supporters of the NAOF' (LØJ, 1990, 1, our translation). Since there were more than twice as many consumer members than farmer in the Association (ibid., 4), this statement clearly indicates that the NAOF was a sectional association rather than a promotional group. Other immediate challenges for the Association were to establish a set of organic production standards and an inspection system and establish an advisory service. The constitution set out the basic principles for standards and inspections (Økologisk Jordbrug 1981, art. 2 and 5-7). The Association shared many similarities with a traditional farm union concerned with serving the production related needs of its members, i.e. engage in dissemination of knowledge and promote organic farm methods (Økologisk Jordbrug 1981, art. 2).

Up until the mid-1980s, NAOF lacked regular contacts with state agricultural and food authorities, nor with the established farm unions. This changed significantly when the Act on Organic Farming was adopted in 1987. It had two main components. Firstly, subsidies (10 million DKK) were provided to ease farmers' conversion from conventional to organic farming and to support development initiatives related to processing, marketing and distribution of organic food. Secondly, a state certification system for organic farming was introduced (the 'Ø' label). Until 1989, when the state certification became fully operational, certification was carried out by NAOF. The Act also set up the Organic Farming Council (later renamed the Organic Food Council) which, initially, was composed of representatives from the organic and biodynamic interest associations, the established farm unions, the Consumer Council, the Ministry of Agriculture and its agencies and the Ministry of the Environment (Lov no. 363, 1987, article 2). Subsequently, representatives from the Agricultural Council, the Labour Movement, the Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs, the food processing industry and the retail sector joined the Council (Lov no. 474, 1993, article 20, Plantedirektoratet 2007, 40). During the first period of its existence (until ca. 1994), the Council played a limited role, executing low profile duties. However, in this period the Council may have laid the

ground for the effectiveness with which it performed in relation to the preparation of the two action plans for organic farming published in 1995 and 1999 respectively (Lynggaard 2001, 98). It was particularly in the 1990s that the Council developed into the major forum for organic farm policy making. The NAOF had thus become an insider group as a result of the altered political context of organic farming in Denmark.

The introduction of a state certification and labelling system was a serious blow to the NAOF. The NAOF had supported the introduction of the state labelling scheme in 1987, believing that its own label, alongside the state label, would continue to serve as an officially recognised guarantee of the organic origin of a product. Indeed, that was what the Minister had stated when the Act was prepared in 1987 (Nielsen 2005, 76-78). However, when the specific design of the labelling scheme was discussed in 1988, 'disputes arose over the issues of labelling and control. The organic farmers were outraged when it became clear that only state-controlled farms would be allowed to sell organically labelled products' (ibid., 76). Since the National Organic Farming Association was isolated on the issue, it had little choice than to comply with the decision. For organic interest associations the running of the certification body has been an important core activity and an important source of revenue. The NAOF certification system remained in operation after 1989 when the state certification system became fully operation. In particular, the COOP's initial uncertainty about reliability of the state label (LØJ 1990b) was an important factor maintaining the NAOF's certification system. Thus, when the COOP in 1992 stopped requiring NAOF labelling on organic produce (Ingemann 2006, 28), only the Dairy Board required NAOF certification. As a consequence of economic difficulties, the NAOF could longer pay for farm inspections in 1996 the Dairy Board paid the Ministry of Agriculture's Plant Directorate to carry out inspections of dairy farms under the NAOF certification system. This led to further deterioration of the Association's revenue base (Michelsen et al. 2001, 70) and the NAOF organic label eventually ceased to exist.

The loss of certification endangered the NAOF's identity with farmers and external stakeholders (for example the state). However, the renewal of capacities to re-establish

itself as relevant key partner for the state representative of organic farming interests could take place within the Association but had to be developed in parallel with it. A unique feature of the Danish organic farming policy is the considerable share of organic subsidies given to product innovation and marketing. However, since the state refused to provide subsidies to such activities within the NAOF because it was considered a political organisation rather than a trade association, a new association had to be formed. Therefore in 1989, the Organic Trade Coordination Committee was formed by members of the NAOF, the established farm unions and the organic commodity sector associations which consisted of both farmers and processers (in the beginning only the dairy, vegetables, beef sectors), to coordinate and assist in organic marketing activities. It was entirely funded by state subsidies until 1992 (*Økologisk Jordbrug* no. 92/04, 1992, p. 7, interviews former OSC representative, 4 March 2008 and former OTCC employee 5 March 2008), but its capacity was limited as its staff consisted off only one employee (BKU undated).

The NAOF was deeply involved in the discussions around how to maintain the Committee into the future (*Økologisk Jordbrug* no. 98/10, 1992). Supported by the NAOF, the spokesmen of the organic commodity sectors preferred to establish a new organisation which would have only organic groups as members, bring the marketing effort closer to the NAOF and indirectly provide funding to the NAOF, for instance by buying space for articles on the organic market in the NAOF's magazine (interviews former OSC representative, 4 March 2008 and former OTCC employee 5 March 2008). They got the upper hand in the debate and in 1992 the Organic Service Centre was established as an organisation separate from the NAOF. The basic idea of the Centre was to perform as 'the farmer's extended arm to the consumer and the retailer' (Økologisk Landscenter undated b). The OSC took over the responsibilities of the Coordination Committee. At one of the initial meetings of the OSC, the governing board planned to significantly expand the information activities directed towards consumers which the Coordination Committee previously had carried out. The increased activity would require additional staff (Økologisk Landscenter 1992a). In 1995, the OSC was engaged in activities such as in-store demonstrations, answering questions from consumers, carrying

out analyses of retailers' needs and attitudes to organic products, producing information material, organising open farm days, participation 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 would be funded by payments for services and state support for information activities (Økologisk Landscenter 1992b). Membership fees were spent on the organisational activities. A Project Department was established within the OSC and was fully funded by state subsidies. The relations with the NAOF were not as close as one would expect. The constitution of the OSC which reserved to seats to the NAOF in the governing board of the OSC cooperation was limited and occasional the relationship became contested (Økologisk Landscenter 1997, interview former OSC representative, 4 March 2008). Day-to-day contacts increased after 1998 when the two organisations moved to the same address (Michelsen *et al.* 2001, 63-64); however, practical rather than political concerns dictated the decision to move the two organisations to the same location (interview former OSC representative, 4 March 2008).

But while 'business' or 'maintenance' considerations serve as a prompt to rethink organisational structures, and thus capacities, they do not, of themselves, provide the answer as to how to 'resolve' them: In which direction to adaptively evolve? The separation from the more politically orientated NAOF allowed the OSC to engage with the established agricultural association and gain access to its resources. For instance, in 1997, the OSC became a member of the Agricultural Council which is an umbrella organisation for the established farm unions, the cooperatives and a number of commodity groups. As the chairman of the OSC said: 'The Agricultural Council consists of many experts who we can benefit from' (Økologisk Landscenter undated b). The membership of the Agricultural Council implied that the NAOF left the governing board of the OSC.

The OSC became an organisational success. It rapidly expanded its information activities and attracted considerable funding for these through the state schemes earmarked for such activities. This implied hiring additional staff and even outsourcing of some

information campaigns to consultant companies. In 1998 the OSC began to diversify it activities and engaged in export promotion activities and the first export promoter was hired (Økologisk Landscenter, undated 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 organic farming policy's schemes for product innovation and marketing (Økologisk Landscenter undated b). In 1999 the OSC was strongly criticised by the Organic Food Council for doing too little in relation to marketing, in particular marketing of organic dairy products. In fact, the Council had been requesting new OSC marketing initiatives since 1996. This caused urgency and critical reflection within the OSC. It was decided to apply for the funds available for marketing in order to launch a marketing campaign for organic dairy products and apply for funding for a 'grand' campaign for organic produce. It was also realised that the OSC needed capacity in strategic marketing and that it was necessary to hire a person with such qualifications (Økologisk Landscenter 1999). The neglect of the political agenda for marketing, and the associated funds, was somewhat of a blunder given that state funding for product innovation and marketing had been increasing dramatically since the mid-1990s. Spending on product innovation and marketing was almost doubled from 1994 to 1996 and more than doubled again from 1996 to 1999.

These glorious funding times were brought to a halt when the Social Democratic led government resigned in late 2001 and was replaced by a Liberal-Conservative government which wanted to cut down on funding for various organic activities – some of them with very short notice. This caused an immediate crisis within the newly established National Organic Association (NOA) which was a merger of the OSC and the NAOF. The proposed budgetary reductions for 2002 would affect all activities within the organisation and triggered intense lobbying activities to limit the cuts, which turned out to be successful (Holmbeck 2002, Økologisk Landsforening 2003, 1). However, this could not eliminate the government's intention to cut down on funding in the longer run. Funding for product innovation and marketing decreased from 52 million DKK in 2002 to 10 million in 2005 – only a tenth of the spending in 2000. The NOA's reliance on state

funding to maintain its market development capacities proved a vulnerability when political cycles changed.

This change of policy forced the newly established National Organic Association (NOA) to find new sources of income to maintain their activities and become less dependent on state funding. One strategy 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 successfully and additional staff was hired (Økologisk Landsforening 2003, 21, 2004, 16). Another strategy was to enforce the effort in relation to retailers and to commercialise the Marketing Department which had developed considerable expertise in marketing of organic food. Since the late 1990s, the Department had gathered important experiences in coordinating the activities of processors, distributors and retailers in relations to sales campaigns (Økologisk Landsforening 2003, 12). In August 2002 it was decided to utilise this capacity commercially by offering advice and assistance to food processors and retailers in the field of organic sales (Økologisk Landsforening 2002, 2). In relation to this, the Department aimed at developing into the national centre for skills and knowledge in organic marketing (Økologisk Landsforening 2003b). This strategy was successful. In particular close cooperation with selected food stores in the promotion of organic sales had proved very successful. In 2004, cooperation with the supermarkets Kvickly and Irma focussed on the visibility of organic produce in the stores. For the former this resulted in a 26 percent increase in the sales of organic fruit and vegetables while the latter experienced an increase of sales of fruit and vegetables by 45 percent and beef by 29 percent. The NOA also engaged in close cooperation with supermarket chain Netto and 30 processers and distributers on how to treble chain's marketing effort for organic produce (Økologisk Landsforening 2005, 26-27).

In 2008 the NOA had a staff of 36. The composition of the staff clearly reflects that the NOA has remained a sectional rather than a promotional group. The Marketing and Agricultural Development departments each consists of seven consultants. The Communications Department also has a staff of seven. Interestingly, only four people,

including the managing director, carry out political activities (Økologisk Landsforening 2008).

Realising that the NAOF certification system had been replaced by the state certification system, the formation of the Trade Coordination Committee and later the OSC in particular became the means to revitalise the identity of the organic associations in relation to their key constituency – the organic farmers. The emphasis on marketing activities was a continuation of previous activities. They can be dated back to the formative years of the NAOF in which the Association made an agreement with one of the major retailers, the COOP, to provide outlets for organic produce. This legacy was an important reason why this path was chosen, but the state organic farming policy with its subsidies for product innovation and marketing also provided incentives to develop marketing capacities. The decrease of state subsidies for such activities after 2001 forced the NAO to develop capacities in providing on-farm advice to generate revenue. The history of Danish organic associations demonstrates that they were capable of adapting their capacities to changing policy contexts, but that their choices relied heavily on the legacy from the formative years of the NAOF.

The United Kingdom

The organic sector in the UK has its roots in the activities of the organic movement founded in the early 1900's (Conford 2001). According to Tomlinson (2007, 39), up until the 1980s, the state had been 'conspicuous by its absence' from the development of the organic sector. Early requests in the 1950s from the fledgling Soil Association for support – subsidy for organic fertiliser, standards for organic compost, research into organic methods – were rebuffed (Tomlinson 2007, 39). The absence of state involvement was legitimated by a productivist policy frame, one that could not admit the implicit criticism that organic farming posed to conventional farming. A change of mood was evident in the 1980's, brought about, in part, by the 'crises' in UK conventional agriculture (Clunies-Ross 1990). But even such promising conditions for organic development, a

period in which major stakeholders were willing – or had no choice – but to admit problems with the 'conventional' model, did not result in broad state engagement with the sector. But it did give impetus to the evolution of the Soil Association.

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 p.142). As the certifier of certifiers, it became the first dedicated forum for state and sector interaction. It incorporated the BOSC members[3] in addition to 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, Tranter and Holloway, forthcoming). Latterly the state has funded scientific research into organic farm systems and funded information and advisory service (OCIS). But even where public financial support for the organic farming sector is linked to environmental care, rural development or health agendas, the state has consistently affirmed that organic production is a useful tool for achieving public goods because it rests on firm market demand – the organic sector is a vehicle for achieving public goods via the market.

Perhaps the key feature of the state's engagement with the organic sector is its apparent and continued insistence that the sector should rise and fall by the extent to which consumer demand is evident. The work by 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

[3] There were several organic groups in the UK movement at the time that worked together on standards, forming the British Organic Standards Committee (BOSC) in 1981.

Group Capacities – The Soil Association

The Soil Association was established in 1946 under the guiding hand of Lady Eve Balfour. Its founders were not all dedicated farmers but a diverse mix of individuals, mostly of high social status. The stated aims of the Soil Association at formation were '1. To bring together all those working for a fuller understanding of the vital relationships between soil, plant, animal and man., 2. To initiate, co-ordinate and assist research in this field, 3. To collect and distribute the knowledge gained so as to create a body of informed public opinion'. Membership was open to 'all who accept its general principles and will help to achieve its objects (Mother Earth Autumn1947, iii). From the outset, the SA was not a 'farmers union', but a diverse group of people interested in soil and human health. Organic farmers' interests, economic or otherwise, did not appear as a focal point for activity.

The dual purposes of the SA were research and education. In the early period, however, research dominated. It established a Journal immediately, which reviewed books and contained articles on production and related research. If anything, it resembled an amateur-scientific society. Indeed, the Editorial to the Summer 1950 issue of *Mother Earth*, it refers to the Soil Association as an 'agricultural research organisation', which seems perhaps the most factual description of its then functions and practices (p. 1). A key plank of the early organic movement's strategy was the scientific trialling of organic methods. In 1940 Eve Balfour commenced the Haughley Experiment at her estate, which she signed over to a Trust. It was woefully underfunded, and at a 1947 Meeting (3rd March) the SA decided to do what it took to ensure the Haughley Research Farms could be sustained (Mother Earth 1947, Harvest. p. 43). It took over the Estate, and later made it the HQ for the SA. By contrast, a Council meeting at the time noted that no fixed sum was set aside for education (Mother Earth, Spring 1948, 37).

Even at this early stage, the present day importance of engaging with consumers was evident: indeed it was central. At formation Eve Balfour states 'The Soil Association has been designed to create a great body of biological knowledge of the life of the soil, and to

distribute that knowledge far and wide to the consumer as it accrues to the cultivator' (Mother Earth 1946, v1.p. 6). It was clear from its formation that the Soil Association was never intended as an organic farmers' union. Indeed, by the early 1980's, its newsletter reported that, for the first time, 'farmers numerically do not comprise the majority of our membership' (Quarterly Review, Sept 1981, p.1). In contrast to the Danish example, farmers' numerical superiority for several early decades did not produce a farmers union out of the SA.

Apart from the experimental work at Haughley Farm and the publication of its Journal, the development of a set of organic production standards occupied the SA in its third decade. The SA was also involved in the development of the first set of farm standards in the UK in the late 1960's. In 1973 the 'Soil Association Marketing Company Ltd (now Soil Association Certification Ltd) was formed to both certify and promote organic produce.

Scholarly accounts[4] of the Soil Association suggest quite a clear cut difference between the pre and post 1980's (Reed 2004; Tomlinson 2007). Its emphasis on the development of farming methods through its own on-farm research and associated education activities to disseminate these to other farmers changed under the 'new management'. A new leadership cadre took over, motivated by their desire – and the previous incumbents' reluctance – to engage in trade and market based issues *and* to adopt a more campaigning stance. Tomlinson observes of this period 'At the beginning of the 1980's the organic movement began to diversify away from its previous scientific preoccupations, not least with a focus on the marketing aspects of organics' (2007, 151). Reed goes further, noting that the aim 'to co-ordinate research and provide information on Organic Farming' had been eclipsed by 'a more aggressive and outward facing policy' (p.255). The new leadership were largely from non-farming backgrounds and met in and around non-farm campaigning events (Reed 2004, p.254). According to Reed it 'promoted the importance of consumer power' (p.257). But it is important to recognise that this 'consumer focus'

[4] And recent interviews conducted by the authors with SA staff confirm this broad analysis.

was not entirely new – it was an explicit focus of Balfour's founding mission. Balfour's legacy has proven a useful resource for the 'adaptive efforts' of reform minded leaders.

A key factor in catalysing change was the fact that Haughley farms had almost financially ruined the Soil Association. It provided an opportunity for the new breed of savvy leaders to reinterpret the way the founding mission and the way it was put into practice. The means by which the longstanding education and research 'mission' of the Soil Association was to be taken forward was by an even more explicit focus on *direct* engagement with consumers – in fact mobilising them into supporting the Association, and using them to drive political and commercial actors to develop an organic market. A report of the Extraordinary Council Meeting of 1982, where this change was brought about, confirms that financial considerations were a key factor in bringing on a leadership coup. The difficulty in securing funding for the SA especially in respect to maintaining quality organic research was raised. The abandonment of the 'Haughley Experiment' was pointed to as a prime example of what happens when the Association overstretches its finances (Quarterly Review, March 1982, 1). The view was that scientific work was not feasible, and the more effort should go into market development and consumer engagement. In 1985 the SA moved its HQ from Haughley Farm to Bristol. Again, as in Denmark, maintenance issues were a trigger for change, but the form of the response emerged from a debate over core mission where historical legacy was influential. It is notable that despite recent (albeit limited) state funding of organic research, the SA has not tried to access such funds to return to this activity.

To confirm the change of tack with the change of leadership, the SA pursued a consumer campaign in 1983-4 ('Eat Organic Message'). It took a view that demand creation was crucial given the power of consumers – if demand was there (if it could be demonstrated) then government would have to listen to them 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'. (Quarterly review, 1982-3 Winter, 8-9). The MAFF said as much, making clear it would respond to consumer pressure where demand is there and needs to be met. Indeed, the state got involved in standards as it recognised that if consumers were paying a premium they had to be sure that they were getting what they were paying for. Mobilising consumer awareness was a key task for the SA and sat well with the states emphasis on market demand led sector development. While the SA maintained that the organic sector should and could grow beyond a niche, the state consistently framed it as a niche organic market. But this conflict was easily overcome by a common concern with market development.

This isn't to say that the SA was not engaged in other lobbying activities. The BSE, mad cow and other food scares in the 1990s prompted renewed attention to organic farming, and the Association was well placed to respond. They engaged with the state over drawing up the Organic Aid Scheme in 1993, and the subsequent programs which supported conversion (see above). But this was recognition that the campaign and market strategy had worked – the state accepted demand existed. The SA was involved, for a short time, in running a 'conversion information service' in July 1996 to increase uptake, funded by MAFF: it was subsequently overtaken by MAFF/DEFRA and recently disbanded (Tomlinson 2007, p.166). At that time the SA was still a relatively small enterprise: *growing* to just 30 staff by 1997. New tasks stretched existing resources.

But the last ten years of the Association have witnessed unprecedented expansion, and with it enhanced capacities. Today's Soil Association is a large enterprise – over 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 28000, which is relatively small for a high profile mass membership group; and particularly small as a base to sustain such a high staff compliment. Much of this expansion has been funded by increases in grants (for example from the Big Lottery fund), from increased membership, donations and legacies, resulting from more vigorous membership marketing and related activities (SA Annual Reports, Various). The growth in staff

engaged in areas such as public relations and media, new regional centres/networks, school education, and the food and farming department, 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, a Magazine and has developed regional centres to engage more directly with local partners (and also EU, state or lottery funding) in organic food projects (the 'Food for Life' partnership – organic meals in schools, is a good example).

As one would expect, the SA has a capacity in market development. But, unlike the Danish case, the SA has maintained its indirect market 'shaping role' which is central to its promotional identity. The philosophy that such indirect pressure will develop the organic market runs deep in the SA. For instance, the suggestion that the SA 'negotiate' with the state or supermarkets to develop the sector gets 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' (Interview, Bristol, Feb. 1008). The view is that if consumers want something – 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 engage in market development activities. The recent growth in the staff resources of the SA has engendered it with a more hands on approach than the very indirect 'environment setting' approach described above. Of course, on the supply side, the SA at formation was about fostering a research base of farmers. This has expanded to 'connecting up' farmers with other factors in the supply chain. It may assist product development in the sense of linking processors and supermarkets with producers (in addition to establishing relevant standards as is necessary). They run a 'Multiple Retailers Working Group' which is an information exchange between the SA and the retailers. In terms of supply and demand, the SA is active in encouraging conversion (providing general advice and targeting sectors where supply is low), fostering demand with consumers: but it also tries to 'iron out' oversupply issues by dissuading conversion where supply is likely to exceed demand (an interviewee cited the organic milk sector). They are involved in programs that put organic food in hospital and school canteens: but again in terms of resourcing projects that serve as exemplars to demonstrate what can be done. The example of Food for Life project

demonstrates its deployment of media and project management capacities, along with knowledge of supply chain actors, to win lottery funds to then work to promote organic food in Schools. One staff member described their 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.

The Soil Association of 2008, is clearly NOT an orthodox sectional farmers association. It is more akin to a promotional style group. According to its own website, it was established 'by a group of farmers, scientists and nutritionists who observed a direct connection between farming practice and plant, animal, human and environmental health'. The Association claims a high degree of continuity with this initial purpose, stating '... at its heart our mission remains the same - to create an informed body of public opinion about these links and to promote organic agriculture as a sustainable alternative to intensive farming methods' (Soil Association Website: Accessed 17/01/08). Crucial here is the stated aim to 'create an informed body of public opinion'. This buttresses our analyses that the Soil Association was conceived, and remains today, as a group much closer to a promotional or campaign 'type' of group than an 'orthodox' sectional farmers' organisation. As one long standing staff member explained at interview 'Lady Eve believed strongly that while you can make a difference through lobbying the government, the public are what will change things most quickly, which is why we have stayed strongly consumer focussed' (Interview, Bristol Feb, 2008). Whether Eve actually did say it that clearly is beside the point, the 'post 1980' direction has been buttressed by arguments of continuity with founding mission.

In its own words it is an 'educational charity'. Its main organisational vehicle is an organisation with open affiliation to the general public. The certification service – a separate business from the charity – provides important income: the decision by the state to 'certify certifiers' as opposed to subsume the role directly (as in Denmark) has assisted SA financial viability. However, its accounts suggest that the net profit of certification activities is modest compared to the income from donations, members and legacies (SA Annual Report, *various*).

It is important to recognise that the Soil Association occupies (since foundation) a rather ambiguous identity. It is a promotional group, yet it is *also* the only UK group that has organic farmers as members. It is clear that the Soil Association does not – at least publicly – claim to be a representative of organic farmers. This no doubt curtails some types of advocacy positions – for instance it does not approach negotiations with the state (say over the OAP) in sectional terms of getting as much for farmers as possible. Indeed, the SA's own reportage of the OAP process – indeed any of its lobbying campaigns directed at the state – does not find the SA reporting 'wins' in terms of money in organic farmers' pockets. However, the fact that it *does* have farmer members (and in fact, processors and retailers) does provide it with a broadened rhetorical resource base compared to a typical promotional group (say Friends of the Earth). The SA can not be criticised as *only* having ideals and lacking a concern for practice or implementation: it can retort that 'its members' are responsible for producing x value of product and managing x numbers of acres. As one SA staffer explained, 'We can walk the talk' (Interview, Bristol, 2008). The SA convincingly straddles two general images of itself. On the one hand a farmers organisation and the other a campaign group. There was a tension between supporters who wanted to eat organic, and those that wanted to farm organic (Reed, 2004 p. 257). But Reed confirms from his interviews that the organisation under Holden was a campaigning group – likening it to Greenpeace – 'a active core direct a supportive wider group' (p. 257).

Such an organisational form is highly unusual for interest groups. Involving an entire supply chain, actors from farmers through to consumers, in the one organisation is usually 'managed' with resort to specialised committees or sections: the SA has avoided that. But it has had its difficulties. At one point a spin-off – the British Organic Farmers – was formed. The BOF was identified as the organic farmers' voice, while the SA maintained a more consumer identity. In 1996 the BOF merged back to the SA – thus the merger was self-described as 'linking producers and consumers' (Living Earth No 195, July 1997). Tensions do exist, but the power of the originator's mission – Balfour's

education of *both* the ‘consumer’ and ‘cultivator’ – provides a rationale for integration rather than fragmentation.

Conclusions

The way in which interest groups develop capacities and adjust these to respond to contextual change is very much a neglected issue within group studies despite the fact that such processes are important in relation to the survival of groups. From the other direction, public policy scholars note the importance of group capacity for governance, but do not often recognise the links between evolving capacity and group organisation. In this paper, we take a first step towards theoretically guided analysis of group capacity development and adjustment. We have analysed the way in which decisions on organisational design and mission in the NAOF and the SA shaped their capacities and how these decisions at later points in time constrained, but also facilitated, the two associations’ adaption to contextual change in terms of capacity development.

Initially, the Danish organic movement was organised in one association in 1981, but later separated its activities into two organisations. The political activities were taken care off by the National Association of Organic Farming, while efforts to create outlets for organic produce were the responsibility of the Organic Service Centre. The two organisations merged in 2002 and became the National Organic Association. Though consumers have always formed the majority within the NAOF and the NAO, the associations have remained sectional groups mainly representing the interests of organic producers. The Soil Association, formed in 1946, shifted from a largely inward looking scientific and education group to a campaigning and consumer/societal awareness group in the early 1980s. However, it has never been a representative sectional group – it has not the capacity to claim to represent a section or farmers directly.

We have demonstrated that organic groups in Denmark and the UK have adapted their capacities to changing policy contexts. Both groups confronted a changing policy context where states drifted towards a market-led model of sector development. This is most

evident in Denmark where policy shifts have been more profound than in the UK. But alterations in capacities have not lead to change in the nature of the groups. Rather, they have remained within the type of group crystallising during the early 1980s. State engagement in the Danish organic sector in the late 1980s had an important impact on capacity development within the NAOF and the OSC and later the NOA. A unique feature of Danish organic farming policy is its emphasis on creating demand for organic produce by supporting product innovation and marketing of organic produce. Since the NAOF had already been involved in creating outlets for organic produce right after its formation, further capacity development came natural; however, the state refused to provide subsidies for such activities within the NAOF because it was considered a political organisation rather than a trade association. To receive marketing subsidies the Trade Coordination Committee was formed, but its activities were later taken over by the OSC which was an independent trade organisation, but controlled by people who were active within the organic farming and processing community. When the state cut down on organic subsidies in the early 2000s, the newly established NOA commercialised its marketing activities to compensate for lost revenue.

The SA has adjusted within an overall promotional group structure to develop capacities that match the demand orientated policy contexts. The UK policy network has been dominated by SA activity – it is the dominant group actor. Its promotional form has focussed its involvement in crucial ways. It has engaged in public criticism, seeking to embarrass government. It has deployed scientific research and its string links with fellow environmental campaign groups, to make arguments that further state support for the organic sector. It has demonstrated that market development has taken place, but crucially not engaged directly in its development: or certainly not in any way that could be construed as directly promoting the economic interests of particular organic producers (or segments thereof). Maintenance issues are however key considerations in adapting capacities. The SA case demonstrates how its determination to develop independent scientific research capacities was terminally checked by the sheer difficulty in funding Haughley Farms. Similarly, the SA's determination to grow public engagement in organic food, and thus develop the market, is tested by a relatively small supporter base

(certainly compared to other promotional groups such as RSPB) and its commitment to value for money in its profit-making certification business.

That both organic groups confronted broadly similar shifts in their policy environment in different ways – developing different types of capacities – reflects their initial choice of type. As one would expect in such a policy environment, both groups engage in some type of market related activity and seek capacities in that direction. But, they stay 'true' to type and elaborate capacities that reflect their identities: a campaign group engaging consumers to build a sustainable organic system, and a farmers union protecting farmers' interests by building specific areas of demand and supply chain systems to 'drag through' the supply from its members.

Organic interest groups' capacity to assist directly or indirectly in the implementation of organic farming policy and the way in which they adapted their capacities to policy change may have important impact on the extent to which the policy objectives are reached. Indeed, this may be an important key to understanding why the British and the Danish organic food sector developed differently. Interestingly, organic sector growth in the two countries has been very different. Based on 2001 data on market share, Hamm and Gronefeld (2004, 123-4) group countries into three categories: emerging market countries, growth market countries and countries beyond a small market niche. Within Europe, Denmark is considered to be the stand out case of successful organic development. Hamm and Gronefeld (2004) put Denmark in the most developed organic market category, countries beyond a small market niche. It has a relatively high organic market share (3.5 percent) and has recently experienced rapid growth rates. The UK is grouped in the category growth market countries with 0.9 percent in 2001. Though the market share of organic produce has increased considerably in both countries in particular from 2005 onwards, but they are still remarkably different. We acknowledge that the British and the Danish state have pursued very different policies (see Daugbjerg, Tranter and Holloway, forthcoming), but the major difference in two association's capacities related to creating demand in the market cannot be ruled out as an important factor explaining why the Danish market for organic food is at a much more mature stage than

the British. But more research is needed to establish the link between organic interest group capacities and policy implementation.

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