Network Capital and Cooperation Patterns in the Working Groups of the Council of the EU

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Abstract:
This working paper presents findings from a study of network capital and cooperation patterns in the working groups of the Council of the European Union. Two successive rounds of telephone interviews with Council working group representatives from all member states were conducted in 2003 and 2006. It is demonstrated that some member states have a consistently higher stock of network capital (having close ties to a large number of powerful cooperation partners) than others, over time and across policy fields. Size explains a lot of this variation, but there is also room for actor-based factors. For small states in particular inter-personal trust seems to have a positive effect. The findings also indicate that cooperation patterns in the Council working groups follow geographical patterns. The dominant North-South dimension is consistent across policy fields. Rather than having one 'core' the EU15 Council revolved around a North (the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK) and a South (France, Italy, Spain) center, connected by Germany. The 2004 enlargement did not change this pattern, but only added new groups of countries to the periphery around the two main centers. There is evidence to suggest that the geographical cooperation patterns are mainly driven by cultural factors, rather than economic interests or political ideologies.

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