

# Industries and citizens' groups networks in EU food policy. The emergence of 'unholy alliances' in multi-level governance?

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## Abstract

'Unholy alliances' are unusual collaborative patterns that temporarily bring together antagonistic groups behind a common cause. This work deals with such 'transversal' co-operations in food policy between citizens' groups (NGOs, consumers associations) and economic stakeholders (food industries, retailers, advertisers...). The multi-level governance approach demonstrates the importance of all stakeholders for the EU institutions as sources of expertise, compliance, and legitimisation. A continuum of stakeholder interaction patterns are analysed under the 'policy network' notion, exhibiting varying degrees of pluralism, constraint and institutional involvement. Within these networks, stakeholders communicate with each other, and under certain conditions this can lead to a transformative process that influences future behaviour.

The empirical part of this work is divided between two examples of networks that represent different segments of the 'policy network' continuum. The first case study is the European Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, a permanent stakeholder forum chaired by the Commission that brings together business and well as NGOs and consumer representatives. The second case study is the 'Common Fisheries Policy Reform Alliance', a coalition formed between fish processors, retailers and the WWF. The first finding is that the rationale behind the adoption of collaborative partnerships comes from a case-by-case cost/benefit analysis, with hopes of improved access to institutions and of creating a more positive and powerful image towards external actors. The second finding is that membership in a collaborative network indeed leads to a learning process, but it is closely linked to the network's performance and can therefore be negative as well as positive. Finally, coalitions *can* have a better *reception* — rather than an *automatic* better *access* — depending on several factors independent of the stakeholders themselves. As a conclusion, one should not expect a sudden generalisation of collaborative behaviour.