



Master thesis European
Governance

Lobby strategies within the EU

The European Youth Forums access to decision-making
bodies in regard to E+



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List of abbreviations

CSO- Civil society organisation
CULT- Committee for culture and education
DEI- Domestic encompassed interest
DG- Directorate General
EAC- Education and Culture
EC- European Commission
EEI- European encompassed interest
EI- European Interest
EK- Expert Knowledge
EP- European Parliament
EPP-European Peoples Party
ESC- European Solidarity Corps
EU- European Union
E+- Erasmus+
INGYO- International Non-Governmental Youth organisation
LLL Platform- Lifelong-learning Platform
NGO-Non-Governmental Organisation
MFF- Multiannual Financial Framework
NYC- National Youth Council
NFE- Non-formal education
OLP- Ordinary legislative procedure
OPC-Open public consultation
YFJ-European Youth Forum

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1. Civil society interest representation in the EU

The European Union is characterized by its diversity, which also forms part of its slogan 'united in diversity'. This diversity is deeply rooted within the EU and reflected in basically all areas of EU activity. Throughout the development of the EU including the increased integration, the scope of EU policies has widened and the EU covers ever more policy areas. The EU thereby advanced into an increasingly complex undertaking, which due to its nature is often referred to as an elitist driven project. With on-going Europeanization of policy areas also the administrative space within the EU became increasingly Europeanised. As Herwig Hofmann (2008) in his work on the European administrative space outlines, "the European administrative space is an area in which increasingly integrated administration jointly exercises power" (p.663). With the Europeanisation of the administrative space inevitably linked to political administration as well as policy and decision-making also interest representation or lobbying became more Europeanised. Lobbying as a practice foremost entails the steering and influencing of policy processes. Van Schendelen in his work *The Art of Lobbying the EU* states, "Trying to influence somebody is as old as human life" (p.45). He further refers to the Latin origin of the word while further underlining the old tradition of lobbying. Inevitably linked to lobby are interest groups- they provide a forum in which lobby practices are exercised and used.

In very basic terms interest (advocacy) groups seek to exercise power and influence on decision-making and policy formulation (Mahoney, 2007). Coen and Richardson (2009) assert that Interest groups "have both framed the integration process and been re-defined by treaty and institutional developments" (p. 5). Cirone (2010) describes them "as any organized group of actors that pursue their political interests (policy preferences) through a wide range of interactions outside of formal, elected office (Beyers et. al. 2008)" (p. 2). Coen (2007), goes further and states that interest groups play an important role in policy-making processes. There is a great variety of interest groups, both in terms of topics covered but also regarding organisational structures, from hierarchically organised groups to activist based, rich and or poor resources, public organisations and private companies (Beyers, Eising and Maloney, 2008). As with a lot of policy areas and actors also interest groups have become Europeanised.

Transnational, European wide, associations emerged with the intention to steering EU policymaking. This development can be explained with a power shift from member states to EU institutions, deepening of EU policies, as well as with the extension of policy areas transferred to the EU, widening of EU policies. In line with the great diversity within the EU there is also a great diversity among interests that are represented. This interest representation can be broken down into various categories and types of actors. Actors range from big pharmaceutical companies over small and medium sized enterprise representation to civil society organisations.

The focus of the study is put on civil society organisations (CSO) as one form of interest groups that act within the EU sphere and their ways of altering EU policies. For this reason, the other forms of interest groups are not being looked at in the framework of this work. According to the European Commission civil society organisations “serve the general interest [...] and play[s] the role of mediator between public authorities and citizens.” (Eur-Lex). CSO or often also Non-Governmental-Organisations (NGOs) cover a great variety of topics, often representing the underrepresented ones, such as women, disabled people and also young people. Although the EU has strong ambitions to develop into a more inclusive area these groups are still disadvantaged. Lobbying is a useful tool to foster their position and make their voices heard. Lately CSOs have been steering policy and legislation making to a great extent. Especially in regard to the EUs trade policy CSOs were able to make themselves heard throughout Europe and abroad. Corporate Europe Observatory released an article stating that civil society organisations were particularly concerned about the role that business would play within EU legislation making after TTIP (Haar, 2017). Thus, focusing on equal access in regard to lobbying the EU, but also putting emphasis of ‘citizens, workers and the environment’.

One CSO devoting its capacities to represent young people within EU policies is the European Youth Forum (YFJ). The European Youth Forum serves as an umbrella platform in Europe to foster the rights of young people from all different backgrounds (European Youth Forum, 2017). The YFJ consists out of 104 member organisations of different forms, National Youth Councils (NYC) and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations (INGYO) (ibid.). Inter alia the YFJ is concerned with advocacy work for more investment in young people. There are different schemes available

within the EU, like the Youth Guarantee, the Youth Employment Initiative and the Erasmus+ programme. Through all these programmes the EU wish to foster youth employability and generally aim at enhancing the possibilities of young Europeans. The YFJ strives for more social inclusion within these programmes and the EU in general. A core belief of the YFJ, set out in its document on strategic priorities 2013-19, is that strong youth organisations contribute to greater social inclusion and foster the role of young people within the EU (European Youth Forum, 2016). Youth organisations and their programmes are financed through the Erasmus+ programme. Hence, this thesis looks at the European Youth Forums advocacy efforts in regard to this programme. The research question central to this research is *'How do lobby strategies utilised by the European Youth Forum affect the access to decision-making institutions regarding the E+ programme?'* To answer this question several sub questions have been developed to guide and structure the research. These questions are as follows: *Does the Youth Forum have access to EU institutions that are pertinent for Erasmus+? How did the YFJ gain access? Do strategic choices such as who, when and how to lobby play a significant role?*

To answer the sub questions and ultimately the central research question this thesis draws from data gathered through conducting interviews as well as analyses of official documents. To give answers and conclusions the thesis is structured as follows. Within the first introductory chapter definitions of core concepts such as interest groups, civil society organisations, lobbying, access, and strategies are provided. The second chapter gives insights to the case study and introduces the European Youth Forum and the Erasmus+ programme in more detail. The third chapter presents the theoretical framework. The Fourth chapter entails the establishment of and the justifications for the chosen methodology. The empirical analysis including a section on recommendations as the central part of the thesis is to be found in chapter five. The last chapter, 6, gives a conclusion summarising the main finding.

Next to the above already defined terms interest group, civil society, and lobbying, also the terms access and strategic choices/strategy must be defined. This is essential to be consistent and clear in what is being investigated. Beyers (2002) defines access “as the channelling or the exchange of policy relevant information” (p. 587). For Bouwen (2002) and Chalmers (2013), access is given to actors that can deliver

demand access goods and refers to influencing legislative processes. “The three access goods that are identified concern three different kinds of information and can be specified as follows Expert Knowledge, Information about European Encompassed Interest and Information about Domestic Encompassed Interest” (Bouwen, 2002, p. 369). The possession of one or several of these goods contributes to the ability to access institutions. Chalmers clarifies that access can be “understood as a function of the informational needs of decision- makers” (p. 40). Further Joosen and Princen in their work on the power of lobby networks, while referring to Beyers (2002) argue that access can be put equal to influence. This notion is also supported in this work. Access is a very important precondition for influence, which is what organisations mostly seek to be able to exercise. Strategy, within this scope is very closely linked to access as it is a strategic choice how, when and to whom which access goods are utilised. The YFJ in of its documents uses a very applicable definition: “A strategy is a combination of the goals for which an organisation strives and the means and methods by which it seeks to get there.” (European Youth Forum, 2017). With this all core concepts within the paper are defined and will be used in the ascribed meaning.

The ultimate goal of this research is to come up with recommendations regarding what strategic choices to follow in order to lobby successfully. The recommendations are divided into recommendations for the European Youth Forum and recommendations for other civil society organisations.

2. Background on Erasmus plus programme and the European Youth Forum

The Erasmus plus programme celebrates its 30th Birthday this year and is often called the EU's flagship programme. This chapter aims at providing more insights into the development, structure, significance, and outlook of the programme. Further, focus is also put on the European Youth Forum in terms of development and structure. This chapter shall thereby explain the rationale behind the case selection as well as provide general information about the chosen case study.

2.1 Development and ambitions of the Erasmus programme

The Erasmus programme within the EU deals with education, training, youth and sport, and was firstly launched on June 17th, 1987 with a first exchange of 3000 students between eleven member states of the European Union (European Union, 2012). Over the years increasingly more countries joined and the programme was extended to cover several more areas than just student mobility. The former Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism, Youth and Sport Androulla Vassiliou stated, "Erasmus has changed the lives of almost three million young people" (ibid.). The European Commission, as well as the European Parliament, seem very determined to keep up the success story of the Erasmus programme while transforming it into a more inclusive programme, thus increasing its outreach. By now focus has shifted and the programme is aimed to tackle the socio-economic challenges the EU is faced with today (European Commission, 2017a). The current programme merged several existing programmes into one programme. The former programmes in the previous Multiannual financial Framework (MFF) included: "the Lifelong Learning Programme, the Youth in Action programme, The Erasmus Mundus Programme, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink and programmes of cooperation with industrialised countries in the field of higher education" (European Commission, 2017a, p. 6). The European Commission justifies this merger by underlining the promotion of "synergies and cross-fertilisation throughout the different field of education, training, training and youth, removing artificial boundaries between the various Actions" (ibid.).

2.1.2 Structure and regulation of Erasmus+

Article 165 TFEU provides a legal base for Union action in order to encourage the development of youth exchanges and exchanges between socio-educational instructors, i.e. youth workers, and to encourage the participation of young people in Europe's democratic life. The article serves as a legal base for the Erasmus+ programme. This is crucial as the EU only possesses very limited competences, namely "competences to carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the member states", in the field of education, vocational training, culture and youth (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2007). Member States, as stated by a German representative being interviewed in regard to this, strongly emphasise this division of competences when the Council for education meets in which Erasmus+ is discussed. Further, the specific rules and regulations for the current Erasmus programme are set out in regulation 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport, indicating that the ordinary legislative procedure applies to the Erasmus+ programme. Erasmus+ is financed through the EU budget and belongs to the heading Competitiveness for growth and jobs (European Commission, 2014). The total amount of the MFF 2014-20 dedicated to Erasmus+ accounts for 14 774,52 million euros to be distributed over seven years. For comparison the Common Agricultural Policy receives 312 735 million euros over seven years (ibid.).

The regulation further sets out a division of the budget within the Erasmus+ programme according to different areas: education and training, youth, Student Loan Guarantee Facility, Jean Monnet, Sport, operating grants and administration. Each area has its own budget line, for this thesis of most interest are the areas of education, youth and operating grants. This is due to the focus the European Youth Forum takes in his advocacy work towards EU institutions. These areas receive the most funding of the money available for Erasmus+, education and training receive a share of 77,5 per cent of the allocated 14 774 524 000, which then is to be divided among different forms of education (Regulation 1288/2013). The youth chapter 'Youth in Action' of the Erasmus+ receives a share of ten per cent while less than four per cent are dedicated to operating grants (ibid.). When it comes to monitoring of the implementation of the

programme national authorities play a significant role. The regulation sets out that member states have to determine national authorities, which are then supposed to transfer monitoring powers to national agencies. These are expected to implement the regulation in a cost-efficient way and report back to the Commission on a regular base while being responsible for the coordination of funds (Regulation 1288/2013).

The objectives of the Erasmus+ programme as spelled out by the European Commission are to contribute to the objectives inter alia set out in the Europe 2020 strategy and in the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training and the promotion of European values (European Commission, 2017).

2.1.3 Significance and Future Outlook of Erasmus+

Throughout the years the programme's outreach to young people within the EU and outside of the EU has increased substantially. Just between 2014-16 the Erasmus programme has impacted the lives of around two million young people (European Commission, 2017b). In total, since its establishment nine million young people have benefitted from the Erasmus programme (European Commission, 2017). The programme developed from an exchange programme for higher education into a programme that "offers a wide range of opportunities in higher education, vocational education and training, school education, adult education, youth and sport" (ibid.). It is the European Youth Forum's and the European Commission's ambition to further increase the programme's outreach and to improve its design.

As the programme has gone through various changes over the years it is expected to further change within the future. External influences such as the Brexit might influence the structure as well as the funding of Erasmus+. Further, the development of similar programmes directed at young people, like the European Solidarity Corps, can have a substantial impact on Erasmus+. There are various possible scenarios concerning how the new programme for youth can and will look like. The European Youth Forum however sees itself responsible to feed in the process and bring forward ideas on how

to change and improve the programme. Preferably this is done in close contact to the European institutions that are involved in the process of legislation making, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. Before going into the theoretical chapter guiding the research and helping to answer the research question the European Youth Forum as the example civil society organisation is introduced.

2.2 Development and structure of the European Youth Forum

The European Youth Forum is an umbrella non-governmental platform for around 100 national and international youth organisations. In 1996 the prior three different organisations that were active in the field of youth policies since the 1960s pulled their resources together and fused into one big platform. It is an association under Belgian law where its headquarters are located (European Youth Forum, 2014). The YFJ is divided into three different bodies, one of which represents the member organisation, the General Assembly, one sets out the political direction and is voted upon by the General Assembly, the Board, and the Secretariat in which the actual work takes place.

These three organs must work together and coordinate their interests as well as resources and intelligence. As interviews with staff members, as well as with one board member have underlined, it is the board sets the direction in accordance with the member organisations, hence their concerns, demands, and needs are at the core of the YFJ. Board member Andrea Casamenti, who also works for one member organisation of the YFJ, supports this notion. Further, he adds that for example his organisation, the European Confederation of Youth Clubs, is immensely dependent on the Erasmus+ operational grant available for youth organisations. However, due to limited resources, the organisation is not able to pursue its own advocacy towards e.g. the Commission but expresses its needs towards the YFJ, which advocates among others in their favour. In general, the YFJ coordinates a huge bulk of the advocacy work for its member organisations and also keeps them informed regarding policy developments in the EU that are relevant for the youth sector.

Further, the European Commission as well as the Council of Europe play a significant role for the Youth Forums development as well as finances as the YFJ is to more than

90 per cent funded through these institutions. A majority of the money is spent for employees in the Brussels office. Thus, most money can be said to be spent on advocacy work towards institutions. Lobbyfacts.eu, which summarises information from the EUs transparency register states the YFJs lobby expenses reach almost three million euro for a timeframe of a year (lobbyfacts.eu).

2.2.1 Ambitions of the European Youth Forum and demands regarding Erasmus+

The Youth Forum's general mission is to be "the voice of young people in Europe, where young people are equal citizens and are encouraged and supported to achieve their fullest potential as global citizens" (European Youth Forum, 2017). Next to this, its ambitions include to "increase the participation of young people and youth organisations in society, as well as in decision-making processes" (European Youth Forum, 2014). Also "being a recognised partner for international institutions, namely the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations" is a set motivation (ibid.). A further crucial ambition that is inevitably linked to the Erasmus programme is the striving for "sustainable and independent youth organisations" (ibid.). This goal includes an adequate way of funding these organisations from institutional side. For this, the Youth Forum operates very actively in the EUs institutional setting and tries to steer into policymaking processes.

An important component of this steering work is meeting EU officials who work for the relevant institutions, Directorate Generals (DG) and committees. Further the setting up of policy papers is a vital part of the YFJs advocacy activity in regard to Erasmus+. The board and the General Assembly must approve important policy papers and other documents produced by the secretariat. This serves for establishing legitimacy and the inclusion of all diverse point of views but also slows down processes. As the policy and advocacy coordinator responsible for investment in youth clarified in an interview, member organisations provide the secretariat with a mandate which determines the advocacy plan. Erasmus+, due to its broad scope and also due to the operating grant scheme is a crucial programme for most member organisations, thus it is one of the priorities of the whole platform. The programme is being midterm reviewed in 2016/2017, the Youth Forum focuses on giving inputs to this review aiming at influencing the proposal for the successor programme.

To better feed in the process of the midterm review the YFJ revived its 'Erasmus coalition' with the Lifelong-learning platform. The Lifelong learning platform is, like the YFJ, an umbrella organisation in the field of education, training, and youth. The LLL Platform currently gathers 40 European organisations within this field (Lifelong learning Platform, 2017).

2.3 Rational behind case selection

The Erasmus programme as described above is a successful programme with an increasingly great outreach to young people within Europe. Though young people have gained significantly more attention within EU politics, mainly due to high unemployment numbers during and after the financial crises, it is still a programme that according to civil society organisations needs more funding. The Youth Forum with its ambition to foster youth organisations and their work as well as the general funding for young people advocate strongly for more funding. Next to more funding, focus is also out on the design and the regulations regarding Erasmus+. As the Erasmus+ programme is part of the MFF it is currently being midterm evaluated which opens a significant advocacy window for the European Youth Forum and its member organisations. Many different events concerning Erasmus+ like the 30-year anniversary in Strasbourg are taking place, which is why this study was conducted in the frame of a research internship at the European Youth Forum's Secretariat in Brussels.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter aims at providing theoretical background and building a theoretical framework that is tailored around the needs of this research. It thereby gives a short literature review while placing itself within the field of literature. To be able to answer the research question the several sub questions as presented in the introduction are answered while giving definitions of the several parts of the central research question. The dependent variable in this case is access of the YFJ to EU institutions and decision makers and it is determined by the independent variables, strategies. This work focuses on NGOs as actors within EU politics and its peculiarities. While introducing the independent variables, two forms of strategies, hypotheses regarding their characteristics are developed.

3.1 Inside or outside lobbying?

Introducing the theoretical framework, first attention shall be paid to *inside and outside lobbying* as a precondition for the focus on access. Inside and outside lobbying differ in their approach to bring messages from interest groups to policymakers. Dür and Mateo (2013), label inside and outside lobbying as strategies that can be utilised by interest groups in their lobbying exercise. Inside lobbying, as the name suggests is more concerned with influencing policies by gaining access to the inner circle of (EU) policymaking whereas outside lobbying rather focuses on media campaigns and engaging the broad public to put pressure on policymakers (ibid. and Chalmers, 2013).

For the specific case this thesis investigates inside lobbying is of more salience as it determines the choice to opt for access, which is regarded another precondition for the investigation of which (inside) strategies are more effective in influencing policy-making. Inside lobbying while using Dür and Mateo's work can be defined as "activities that are directly aimed at influencing decision-makers" (p.662). Outside lobby includes broader actions, such as demonstrations or launching media campaigns. It entails "activities that aim at mobilising and/or changing public opinion" (ibid.). Dür and Mateo further claim that civil society organisations, due to their broader membership, often rather focus on outside lobbying to satisfy the public audience, while smaller, especially business firms focus on inside lobbying. Beyers (2004), on the other hand claims that

both forms of lobbying are compatible with each other. Further, he argues that inside lobbying is 'synonymous' with seeking access (p.213). It has to be noted that opting for inside lobbying does not immediately lead to also getting access. The proper access of organisations to decision-makers is still dependent on strategic choices on how to utilise resources available. Further, access does not immediately grant influence, however it is a crucial precondition.

Weiler and Brändli (2015), bring in another dimension that affects inside lobbying, the institutional framework of the political system in which interest associations perform. Referring to Mateo, they underline that the political system alters the choice for either in or outside lobbying. The EU is a prime example of a system in which lobbying takes place on a high level. EU institutions depend on input from lobby and interest groups that possess relevant information. Hence, the EU should be more responsive to inside lobbying than other political systems. Beyers, in this vein while comparing seeking access with inside lobbying states that they (access seeking and inside lobbying) concern "venues where political bargaining takes place [...] advisory bodies, technical committees, agencies and to some extent parliamentary committees [...]"(p.213). To gain access to these 'venues' information is a crucial part of inside lobbying. This is also supported by Pieter Bouwen who focused his work on the exchange of information and access in a demand/supply scheme.

This thesis will not further go into detail regarding the strategies that belong to outside lobbying but builds on the concept of inside lobbying as a precondition for the further strategic choices investigating in this scope. Thereby, media campaigns and other wide-scale events are not considered within the remainder of this chapter. The decision to focus on inside lobbying affects the range of strategies available for organisations. Before going into the strategic choices that are available to organisations that opt for inside lobbying access is defined and elaborated on in the following section.

3.2 Access theory

The access theory brought forward by Bouwen is central to this research as it is regarded to be a precondition for actors, like the YFJ, to develop and apply lobby strategies and ultimately alter legislative processes and decisions in their favour. Access as shortly mentioned in the introduction is defined as being able to exchange relevant information with decision-makers. There are two reasons why organisations attain access to decision-makers. The EU has long been accused of entailing a democratic deficit, to overcome this deficit EU institutions aim to enhance their legitimacy and to receive political support by engaging various stakeholders in the legislation making. Next to that decision-makers are also dependent on information that can be delivered by organisations. Both follows a demand and supply logic. Before going into detail concerning the exchange of information for access attention is paid to legitimacy.

3.2.1. Legitimacy through interest group representation

According to Bouwen, legitimacy is an important issue present in all areas of EU policy-making. Drawing further from Scharpf (1999), legitimacy can be divided into input and output legitimacy, for the scope of this thesis input legitimacy is more relevant. Input legitimacy, following the argumentation of Scharpf, refers to the incorporation of citizen and interest groups in the policy-making process. This is key to EU policy makers since the EU in general is said to lack legitimacy. Interest groups that represent broader societal interest can hence increase the legitimacy of EU institutions. Further, Beate Kohler-Koch (2010) while focusing more detailed on the role of civil society organisations regarding the democratic deficit in the EU argues that their existence diminishes the democratic deficit. She goes on noting that civil society organisations perform a valuable task in the political sphere by representing citizen's interest. Dür and Mateo (2012) are in line with this argumentation and further underline the positive effects of interest group participation that "may enhance the legitimacy and quality of decisions by allowing for different voices to be heard and expertise to be transmitted to decision-makers" (p.969). A variety of scholars confirms these observations, between which Mena and Palazzo (2012) who point to the importance of engaging different stakeholders in political processes (Mena and Palazzo, 2015).

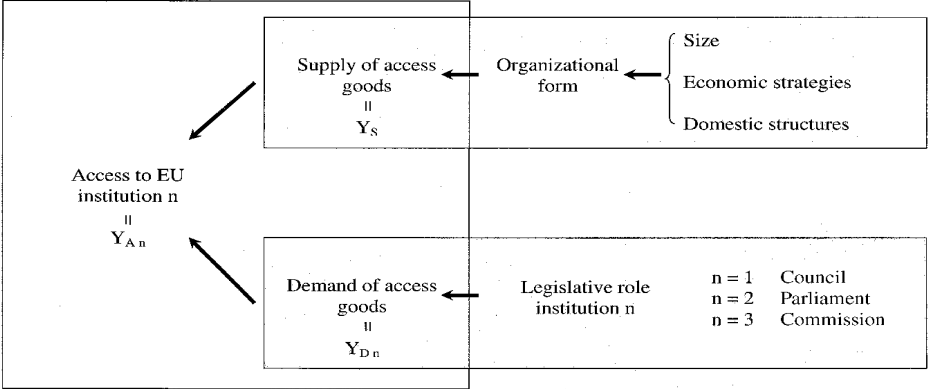
Rendering from Christine Mahoney's (2007) argumentation that "policy-makers that are accountable to the public should be more responsive to civil society organisations since they are reliant on the public for re-election and organised interest represents citizens interest" (p.36) the importance of civil society organisations for the legislative process within the EU is pointed out. Hence, to incorporate as many opinions and views as possible, policy-makers should have a broad range of organisations providing them with interest. However, civil society organisations must fulfil some criteria to be able to count as substitutes for private firms. This means that they can only get access and play a significant role in the legislative process when they provide institutions with relevant and demanded information. Michalowitz (2005), in her work also focuses on the influence and opportunities of civil society organisations in the shaping of EU policy and legislation making, claiming that they play a valuable and important role.

3.2.2 Access goods and their importance

Interest groups can make use of the lack of legitimacy and increase their chances regarding their impact on EU legislative processes; "the provision of access goods is crucial for private actors in establishing an exchange relationship with the targeted institutions at EU level" (Bouwen, 2002, p.375). Chalmers (2013) provides an on-point description in the importance of information by stating "The currency of lobbying in the European union (EU) is information" (p.39). Bouwen explains that in the political sphere of the EU private and public actors become interdependent. This interdependency refers to the need of access to EU institutions on private actor side and the need for information on public actor side. The interdependency is reliant on whether the demand of institutions in terms of information is matched by the information supplied by organisations. Bouwen calls these information access goods. For Bouwen these access goods are essential to be able to get access and hence influence legislative processes within the EU.

The demanded information can be divided in three different categories, first Expert Knowledge (EK), which entails "the expertise and technical know-how required from the private sector to understand the market" (Bouwen, 2002, p.369). Second, information about the European Encompassing Interest (IEEI), which "concerns the

information required from the private sector on the encompassing European Interest (EI)” (ibid.). Third, information about the Domestic Encompassing Interest (IDEI), which refers to “the information required from the private sector on the Domestic Encompassing Interest (DEI)” (ibid.). Every institution relevant for the scope of this thesis demands one of these forms of access goods. The following graphic summarises the relationship between both sides very well.



(Source: Bouwen, 2002, p. 372)

The graphic further shows that the differences in demands of institutions is closely linked to the role the respective institution plays in the legislative process. Moreover, the graphic shows that the supply of information depends on the form of organisation. Following Bouwen not every organisation possesses the same capabilities in delivering access goods. In his work, the author differentiates between three different types of actors: EU association, national association, and individual firm. For him every organisational form can provide one access good better than the rest. For organisations, it is hence pertinent whom to address with the access goods available to them. This is demonstrated in table form.

Organisational form	Best provided access good	Ranking of capacities to provide access goods
Individual firm	EK	EK, IDEI, IEEI
European association	IEEI	IEEI, EK, IDEI
National association	IDEI	IDEI, EK, IEEI

(Table 1) Bouwen, 2002)

Bouwen further differentiates between the demands of institutions regarding Information demanded. The European Commission is mostly interested in Expert Knowledge, the European Parliament in European Encompassed Interest, and the Council in the Domestic Encompassed Interest.

Institution	European Commission	European Parliament	Council of Ministers
Role	Policy Initiator	Co-legislator	Co-legislator
Type of information required	1. EK 2. EEI 3. DEI	1. EEI 2. DEI 3. EK	1. DEI 2. EEI 3. EK

(Table 2) Bouwen, 2002)

Though Bouwen in his work focuses on private actors such as businesses, his conclusion proposes to apply these characteristics also to civil society organisations. This thesis aims at contributing to the debate regarding access to EU institutions by applying the framework to civil society organisations while examining if they are able to provide the same access goods as businesses. The three criteria provided by Bouwen (EK, EEI; DEI) are hence still paramount to this study and a precondition for access to EU institutions. It is to be assumed that civil society organisation provide different types of information than business organisations. This is traced back to the diversity in organisational form. However, it remains to be tested within the empirical part if this is really the case. Having provided insights on what access goods are and how critical they are for gaining access, the chapter turns now to the strategic use of those access goods. This also includes a more detailed assessment and explanation of which institution requires which access good(s). The strategic use is important to be looked at because the main interest of the thesis us to explore how they influence the access of the YFJ to decision-making bodies in regard to Erasmus+.

3.3 Lobby strategies

If interest groups have managed to gain access to policy-makers due to their ability to deliver demanded information the question on how they use their information in an effective way remains. At this stage, it is paramount to look at different strategies that

can be applied by interest groups. Strategies as defined in the introduction set out a way in which resources available to an entity are deployed. This relates to decisions as to how, when and to whom information are presented and not like tactics to the way in which information is presented. There is a distinction to be made between strategies as such and tactics. Tactics refer to the way in which information is presented, whether organisations write policy papers or set up meetings with EU officials. Chalmers (2013) stresses the grand variety of tactics that are available for lobby groups, from writing letters over phone calls to personal meetings. The form of tactic chosen can also potentially increase the salience of a message that is to be delivered. Chalmers subordinates these actions to the supply side as they are utilised by the organisations aiming to enhance access to policy-makers. In the decision of which strategies to utilise information tactics and types are crucial to be considered as they can have a great impact on how access goods are received.

This thesis identifies and tests (through interviews) different types of lobby strategies, concentrating on access points to and ways of how to lobby within the EUs institutional framework. Therefore, focus is put on questions such as: *Who to lobby? When to lobby* And *How to lobby?* *Who to lobby* refers to the notion that some actors are more useful to lobby than others. This is closely interrelated to the provision of access goods. Further it refers to the question which institution is most fruitful to lobby with the access goods available. *When to lobby* refers broadly to the EUs policy cycle and further also to 'external' influences on the policy area concerned. *How to lobby* relates to the organisation of the lobby work, more particular on the impact of coalition building in EU lobbying. Each of these approaches is explained in more detail in the following while setting up hypothesis that are answered in the analytical part that follows the methodological chapter. Within these different strategic choices, the decision about information tactic is also touched upon.

[3.3.1 Access Points](#)

First, focus is paid on the *Who to lobby*, for this the studies conducted by Bouwen and Cirone focussing on the several actors within EU policies and their accessibility to lobby groups are used. The EU encompasses a "complexity of diverse access points" which

makes lobbying in the EU a complex topic in itself (Cirone, 2011, p.3). The author while underlining the complexity and variation in access points identifies the EC, the EP and the Council as the main access points within the EU (Crombez, 2002). Further she stresses the different mandates and nature of the three institutions, which are crucial for the organisations to take into account when deciding on whom to lobby. As abovementioned, institutions need different types of information, the Council has very different needs than the European Commission. Therefore, it is expected that access is not equal to all institutions that are relevant to this case, the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council of Ministers. The following sub-section goes into this matter more detailed.

Access Point one: The European Commission

To understand who to lobby a thorough knowledge of the institutional set up within the EU and of the division of influence is necessary (Marshall, 2010). Looking at the Commission first, its role within the policymaking process has to be determined shortly. The Commission is famous for its central role in the EU legislative process (Bouwen in Coen and Richardson, 2009). Article 289 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union sets out that the Commission is the Institution that proposes a legislative act in form of a regulation, a directive or a decision. It thereby is the sole initiator of EU legislation. While initiating legislation the Commission may consult stakeholders such as the EP, national experts or Non-Governmental organisations. This might be done via consultation procedures but also via individual contacts with relevant stakeholders (European Commission, 2012). Van Schendelen (2003) and Crombez (2002) stress the under-resourced nature of the Commission, which justifies the great demand for external input.

Following the argumentation developed by Bouwen, the EC mostly needs technical information, and hence lobby groups that are able to provide the EC with technical knowledge are welcomed to present their expert knowledge. The need for technical knowledge stems from the fact that it is the Commission's task to draft legislation. "Expert knowledge is therefore the critical resource for the Commission [legislative]"

work” (Bouwen, 2002, p.378). Further the EEI is of crucial importance for the EC “[T] to play its role as promotional broker in the Eu legislative process” (ibid.). This can be explained by the supranational nature of the EC. The Commission is described as the most European institution and hence Commission officials should appreciate greater insides in a common European will and interest. As mentioned above in the section on access, legitimacy is a critical concern for the EC, which is why different consultations are taking place from Commission side. From these observations, it can be concluded that organisations that possess expert knowledge and information about the Encompassed European Interest do well in lobbying the Commission.

Turning to the organisations that have according to Bouwen’s theory the greatest chance to access the European Commission, large individual firms lead the ranking followed by European associations and national associations. This follows the assumption of access goods available to the different forms of organisations. It is assumed that large individual firms are best able to provide Expert Knowledge.

Bringing in a time aspect of when to lobby the EU, the Commission as agenda setter is an early lobby target, “in particular, the strategic choice of ‘early lobbying’ applies to the European Commission as an agenda setter” (Bouwen in Coen and Richardson, 2009, p.20). Bouwen further argues that it is common knowledge that the time before the adoption of formal documents is the best time to influence legislators. Once official documents designed and/ or published, altering them becomes increasingly difficult. Further at this stage the Commission, loses its role as most influential institution and hence becomes less of a lobby target for organisations. This is the rational, as confirmed by Cirone, for most organisations to lobby more than just one institution.

Hypothesis 1

If the YFJ is able to produce (position papers) including Expert knowledge on Erasmus plus then the YFJ gets more access to the European Commission

Access Point two: The European Parliament

Since the Lisbon treaty (2009) the EP takes over an increasingly active role in EU policy and decision-making processes (Cirone, 2011). Lehmann (2009 in Coen and Richardson) underlines this development by stating that a while ago the EP would not have been considered to be an important actor for lobbyists. He further stresses that through these inter institutional changes by now the EP has gained significant prominence among private and public actors in the EU sphere. The demands of the EP though differ considerably from the demands of the EC. These differences mainly stem from the very different internal structure in the EP in contrast to the EC and also national governmental bodies (ibid.). The flatter hierarchical structure in the EP makes it easier for lobbyists and interest groups to contact the EP. Further, the EP's role in the legislative process is very different than the role of the Commission. Further though most legislative acts (89 policy areas) are dealt with the OLP, there are still few when the EP's role is not as powerful as the Council or the Commission. Hence, if a proposal is discussed under the OLP, the EP is much more interesting for interest groups.

The EP is according to Bouwen mostly interested in EEI, as it seeks to represent an aggregated European interest. Further, Members of the Parliament are eager to get re-elected and in order to achieve that need to know what the European citizens want. Similar to the EC the EP is also understaffed and therefore thankful for interest groups that are able to provide useful information on EU wide sentiments regarding newly proposed legislation. National interest is also of importance for MEPs as they next to a political party also represent their country of origin. Bouwen concludes that the EP "has both supranational and intergovernmental characteristics" (p.380) and therefore also needs a mix of information. Although the EC is obliged to inform and gather information from EP and Council, MEPS according to Lehmann feel the need to gather more information on the issues at stake, in these cases they consult third parties, often interest groups.

Taking a closer look at the EP and its structure, using David Marshall's (2010) work, it becomes apparent that most work is done within the twenty-two committees of the EP

and that who to address in those committees plays a significant role. This is also supported by Bouwen (2004) in its work on business lobbying in the EP. He states that though the plenary is the place for decision-making, work is done in the individual committees. The committees all deal with different topics ranging from foreign affairs over Economic and Monetary affairs to Culture and Education. The committees are governed through an internal structure; each committee has its own chair. Additionally, every political group also appoints a coordinator/ speaker within each committee (Marshall, 2010). MEPs are supported by their assistants as well as policy advisors. Policy advisors hence are a good alternative to get access to the EP. It is within the committees where the rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs write the reports and opinions that are later voted on in the plenary and which also serve as a position paper towards the EC. Following David Marshall's work and a personal conversation, approaching the rapporteur is a must do. This does not only stem from the fact that "considerable emphasis is placed on the power of the rapporteur" but also from the fact that "the EP generally defines its negotiating position during the committee stage in advance of the first reading in plenary" (p.555). Additionally, Marshall, while referring to Mahoney, states, "lobbying is largely confined to the rapporteur and perhaps the shadow rapporteur and the committee chair" (p.556). Thus it is to be assumed that the choice who to lobby immensely impacts the access to decision-making within the EP.

Further Rapporteurs but also general MEPs and their advisors need to be able to "assess the legislative proposals made by the European Commission" (ibid.). Hence, Expert knowledge is demanded. The EEI is nevertheless assumed to be of greater importance to the EP as MEPS aim to feed the European interest in the proposals initiated by the EC. Further, Chalmers (2013) brings forward that the EP demands "information about the social impact of a policy proposal" (p. 49). This social impact can be well portrayed by civil society organisations as they are very close to the public and its needs. Michalowitz (2004) takes this notion even a bit further as the author claims that aggregated public opinion secures the most access to the EP.

Hypothesis 2

If the YFJ is able to provide quality information regarding the EEI on Erasmus plus then the YFJ will have more access to the European Parliament (CULT committee)

Access Point three: The Council

The council is perceived to be the most intergovernmental institution within the EU. By nature, it aims to represent national interest within the EUs supranational setting. It can be briefly described as the ECs counterpart, it is however a complex institution, “it is the place where national and European interest collide or clash” (Renshaw, 2009, p. 71 in Coen and Richardson, 2009). Within the legislative process its role is to co-legislate with the EP. The respective configuration within the Council receives a proposal set up by the Commission and then can put forward amendments. In this regard, it is promising arena for lobby efforts. However, this very much depends on the policy area and the level of competences the EU has in the respective area. The Council is not composed of fixed members but holds its meetings in ten different configurations according to the policy area that is at stake (Euroepa.eu, 2017). The respective Ministers from the member states attend the high-level meetings. Literature on lobbying the Council is more limited than literature regarding the EC and the EP, Hayes Renshaw (2009, in Coen and Richardson, 2009), puts forward that this might be the case because the Council is lobbied less and/or different. Moreover, in comparison to the EP and the EC, council meetings are held behind closed doors, further the lack of permanent personnel also makes it more difficult to establish personal contact and mutual trust which are key to lobbying (ibid.).

For the Council, domestic interest is mostly pertinent, while expert knowledge is not considered to be of relevance and there is some interest in the EEI. To lobby the Council, it is therefore mostly effective to first provide information about national interests and to follow a bottom up approach from local to national level within the member state (Biliouri, 1999). Bouwen further concludes that national associations have the greatest access to the Council of Ministers, decreasing its importance for this research significantly, which is why this section does not go into as much detail as the preceding sections. European associations have significantly less access to the Council than national associations, however Bouwen claims that they have more chances to get access than large businesses. For European associations, it is probably easiest to gain access to the Council if they consist out of several national branches or

different member organisations that represent national next to European interest. Nevertheless, this is also subject to the empirical analysis in this work.

Hypothesis 3

The YFJ due to the type of information available to the Forum (EEI and EK) does not have access at all to the Council of Ministers

3.3.2 Timing

Timing next to who to lobby place a crucial role in the decision on how to use the available access goods. In very general terms one can say that the earlier lobby efforts start in the institutional legislative process the better. It is pertinent to keep the policy cycle of the lobby object in mind while designing a timetable for lobby work. The Commission as the agenda setter and initiator of legislative processes is an often-chosen access point in the early beginnings of the legislative process (Bouwen in Coen and Richardson, 2009). However, it should not be dismissed that especially in this early phase also EP and Council are already active in reaching out to the Commission and presenting reports or resolutions on the issue at stake (European Parliament, 2016). Hence not only focussing on the Commission should be fruitful for organisations. In accordance with the treaties the EC is obliged to contact widely before starting to formulate a new legislative proposal. The rationale behind this is the principle of subsidiarity, which is one of the core principles governing the EU. Crombez further distinguishes between a proposal and a vote stage. The proposal stage thereby refers to the earlier stage of the legislative process. In general, however, lobbying is an on-going process, which is also linked to maintaining close and good relationships to initiators and legislators. Next to these, the evaluation phase is also of great significance within the EU. Expressing experiences and sharing best/worst practices can have a significant impact on a future initiative, programme or project. It is crucial for organisations to keep this in mind when arranging their lobby work.

Depending on the policy area, timing might be influenced by some external factors such as recent political changes or new initiative that are either supporting the lobby target or also might be competing with it. The EU as a cross-sectorial undertaking connects various policy areas with one another, thus always staying alert for changes

and new initiatives is a vital part of lobby work, as indicated by David Marshall in a personal conversation (2017).

Hypothesis 4

If the YFJ determines the right point in time to put forward lobby work, the YFJ will have more access to EU institutions.

3.3.3 Coalitions to lobby more effective

Before going into detail on lobby coalitions within EU politics general definitions of coalitions and networks are provided. Helen Yanacopulos (2005) in her work on global networks and NGOs delivers some useful notions on how coalitions develop and how they work. Following her argumentation, for NGOs it proves useful to become members of coalitions to compete with many emerging actors in an increasingly globalised world while remaining independent and still working together in coalitions. Engaging in a coalition is voluntary based, can be issue specific but “involves a higher level of commitment from members” than a network (Yanacopulos, 2005, p.94). Mostly these coalitions are of a transnational nature and motivated through sharing the same values rather than professional concerns or resources. Holyoke (2009), identifies competition among interest groups as an additional driver towards coalition building. This can also entail that NGOs from slightly opposing ‘teams’ with different priorities get together and form a coalition because they still fight for the same goal just from different backgrounds (while sharing same values). Christine Mahoney (2007) states that (ad hoc) coalitions bring some advantages that encompass showing “that a policy position has the support of a large and varied group of interests” (, p. 368). From these different notions, it can be concluded that coalitions among NGOs are formed on a value-based nature, to fight competition, to underline the importance of an issue and to pool resources together.

When it comes to the duration of coalitions Fowler (1997 in Yanacopulos, 2005) asserts they can be of short or long term. Additionally, coalitions can be of national, continental, and global nature, translating these to the EUs setting, one would refer to

local, national, and supranational levels. One of the most crucial features of coalitions in regard of lobbying is the pooling together of resources. Mahoney, puts forward that “the coalition can provide a framework for more efficient use of resources”, this also entails that actions might be more economic (2007, p. 368). The pooling of resources decreases the costs for the individual participants of a coalition and thereby increases their range of possible channels to reach out to. Representatives from Oxfam also stated “that with shared infrastructure, we can do more, with all the money than [an individual NGO member] could ever do on its own” (Yanacopulos, 2005, p. 102). Lobbying in the EU is resource intensive activity, hence forming a coalition is an ‘easy’ way on how to increase resources.

The decision to join a coalition is a strategic one that is accompanied by negotiations with the coalition partner(s) (Yanacopulos, 2005). Likewise, it can be assumed that organisations /NGOs conduct cost-benefit analyses before making the decision to form/engage in a coalition. This means that advantages such as increasing the salience of issues are contrasted to possible disadvantages. Possible disadvantages could be that not all key topics from one organisation are being prioritised to the same extent and some concessions have to be made. However, the benefits of having decreased costs in one field of action are assumed to balance out these shortcomings. If this were not the case then the organisation would be better off while refraining from joining a coalition.

Whitford (2010) describes coalitions as ‘low-cost means’ to portray minority interest in a more powerful way. Further Mahoney and Baumgartner (2004) in their work on lobbying in Washington, also put forward that “coalitions are weapons of the weak” (p.2). Indicating that especially organisations that are not well resourced or not well established yet. In general ad hoc or issue specific coalition building in lobbying is characterised by a rather informal organisation of the coalition. Still, participants of the coalition meet up regularly to keep each other informed about developments and also to exchange more technical information.

Heike Kluever (2011) claims that the lobby success of interest is not only dependent on the salience of issues but also on the size of coalition formations. She further claims that the more interest groups, also of different nature, lobby the EU on the same issue the more likely that lobbying is successful. This is an interesting point of view and can

be extended to umbrella organisations that already in it operate as kind of permanent coalitions. On the institutional side, Mahoney claims that direct accountable policy-makers are more likely to respond to coalition pressure, which in the EU would be the EP. Here we can draw back to Bouwen who suggests that the EP is more interested in the Encompassed European Interest that can be well portrayed by coalitions. From this point of view, it is arguable that the decision to join a coalition also determines the institutional actor that is being lobbied. However, this is to be found out through empirical research (interviews).

Hypothesis 5

Joining a coalition with the Lifelong-learning Platform increases the access of both organisations.

Hypothesis 6

Joining a coalition decreases the burden on the YFJ as well as on the Lifelong-learning Platform and increases their legitimacy.

3.3.4 Tactics employed by interest groups

Having introduced different kind of strategies in EU lobbying, it should not be forgotten that a crucial element of lobby strategies and lobby work is the presentation of the lobby activity which Chalmers (2013) calls informational determinants. It is an additional factor to look at which is inherent to all strategies and is determined by who and how to lobby. Following Chalmers observations “the medium [...] is more important than the message’ (p. 39). The informational tactics include a choice of how to present the information inherent to interest groups. Lobby groups can choose from a wide range of informational tactics, such as writing policy papers, writing email, letters, having personal meetings or telephone calls (Chalmers, 2013). The decisions on which informational tactics to use are closely interconnected with the decision to either opt for in or outside lobbying. This choice to a certain extent determines but also limits the range of available informational tactics. Chalmers notes that in general next to

being less costly inside lobbying is more successful, contributing to the choice for inside lobbying by most actors. In this study, it is assumed that the choice who and how to lobby plays a role when determining the use of informational tactics. While analysing the Who and how to lobby attention is also paid towards the way of presenting information. It is to be assumed that with a shift in resources being available to an organisation also the way of lobbying changes.

After having introduced the chosen lobby strategies this study will look at and investigate the hypotheses that were developed during the theoretical part. It is tested whether they are to be approved or neglected through the empirical analysis that is to be followed. This is done to be able to answer a final hypothesis developed in this theoretical chapter, namely: *the choice of lobby strategies determines the access to decision-makers the YFJ attains in regard to E+*. This last hypothesis is very closely linked to the research question. The rationale behind this is to explore how the independent variables, strategies, impact the dependent variable access. Ultimately and through this study I hope to be able recommend the YFJ and other civil society organisations the most effective way to access policy and decision-making bodies within the EU according to their preference and interest.

4. Methodology

The methodology chapter aims at shedding light on the methodology applied while writing the thesis as well as justifying the choices for the case, the decision to conduct interviews and the rationale behind this. The chapter is divided in different sections starting with the rationale to use interviews while also explaining what types of interviews are being used. The next section deals with the supporting documents being made available by the EC and the YFJ on the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the E+ programme. A final segment summarises the persons being interviewed and the scope of the questions asked.

4.1 Why using interviews and what kinds of interviews?

Within the existing scope of literature on lobbying in the EU qualitative research is a prominent way of analysing the relationship between interest groups and policymakers (Bunea and Baumgartner, 2014). Bunea and Baumgartner in their piece of work look at different journals, authors and articles while assessing how EU interest group lobbying is analysed. The case of this research is however, a very specific one focusing on the impact of civil society organisations on EU policymaking and the strategies being utilised. Even more detailed one civil society organisation, the European Youth Forum and the impact of their lobby strategies on the YFJs access to decision makers in regard to Erasmus+ is at stake. The rationale is to find out how strategic choices altered the level of access to EU institutions. For this reason, interviews, also belonging to the family of qualitative research, are chosen to give better and more detailed insights in the actual lobby work and its outcomes. Beyers, Braun, Marshall and De Bruycker (2014), assert high importance to conducting interviews when studying interest group strategies. However, the authors also claim that only using interview data is not sufficient while analysing the activities of interest groups. Significance is also given to publicly available documents encompassing communications, consultations and media sources, such as press releases but also social media. Still, interviews are a useful tool to fill the gaps that are not being communicated to the public and to complement the analysis

In line with inter alia Bunea and Baumgartner's research, this study focuses mainly on one stage of the legislative and lobby process, which is the Erasmus+ midterm review.

This point was chosen, as it was the main issue at the same when the research was conducted. Still, different stages that are also important to get a better idea of the lobby activities that are carried out by the Youth Forum throughout the whole legislative process. This also entails that a variety in access points and point in time could be mentioned when talking to representatives from both sides of the spectrum. Especially on Youth Forum side it is the aim of the research to clarify how strategic choices are made and also how they impact the level of access. These choices are hard, nearly impossible to assess by only looking at policy papers, however they still play a confirming role (Beyers et al, 2014). Furthermore, the rationale behind setting up and or joining existing coalitions is looked at which is nearly impossible to analyse via official documents (ibid.). Questions vary between the different persons interviewed according to their positions. On Civil Society organisation side for example in regard to coalitions it is of interest to see if being part of a coalition facilitates the work by the individual members and if resource pooling brings advantages. Of course, also the outcomes of coalition building in regard to policymaking and the level of access to decision-makers is assessed.

On the other side of the spectrum the impression of EU officials regarding coalitions are looked at. Through interviews notions from both sides can be gathered which then will be able to give an idea about the effectiveness of coalitions in EU lobbying as well as concerning the other strategic choices made (ibid.). Further regarding the empirics that ought to be analysed in this thesis focus is put on an on-going legislative process, hence conclusions are only of preliminary nature. In regard to the Erasmus+ evaluation the EP already published a report on the implementation of Erasmus+ in which regard the YFJ had a great level of access. This is determined by analysing draft reports, amended proposals on YFJ side and then again, the final report. The same process applies to a parliamentary resolution on the future of Erasmus+. Beyers et al (2014), note advantages as well as disadvantages concerning analysing on-going processes. Interviewees are currently (at the time of the interview) involved in the process and thus do not suffer from 'memory loss', therefore can give detailed and actual information. As processes are on-going interviewees however, might be reluctant to give out information that might hamper their negotiation / lobby position. This was especially faced when aiming to establish contact with Commission officials that

claimed to be in the middle of the evaluation process and therefore not confident to give out information.

Going further into detail regarding the kind of interviews available to be conducted, reference is drawn to Edwards and Holland (2003) who identify three different styles of interviews. Interviews can be in the forms of structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Edwards and Holland, 2013). Each of these types contains positive as well as negative assets. When conducting structured interviews, all interviewees answer prepared questions in the same order. For the analysis this might be a positive asset however, when it comes to flexibility it has to be acknowledge that this form of interviewing is less flexible than the other two approaches. Further, structured interviews rather belong to the quantitative scale and rather used for surveys (ibid.). This way of interviewing focuses on obtaining “comparable information from a potentially large number of subjects” (ibid. p.3). It belongs to the positivist style of analysis. Positive analyses in general simply deal with straight facts and explain how things are without asking into consideration why.

Another kind of interviews is semi-structured interviews, as the name already stipulates those interviews follow a structure but are not as strictly ordered. The interview rather follows the structure of a dialogue between two or even more participants. This can lead to interviewees being more open about the topic central to the interview (Edward and Holland, 2003). The semi-structured interview follows a topical approach and shall still represent a coherent approach of thought. This style entails that the interviewer follows his/her interests but still leaves room for additional information that in the end might add value to the research. Another crucial characteristic of the semi-structure interview is that the interviewer should be aware how knowledgeable the interviewee is. This is an important prerequisite to have a fruitful talk/interview. The different styles of interviews unstructured interviews cannot be left out. Unstructured interviews follow basically the same logic as semi-structured interviews; they however, allow more room for unconscious processes. They make it however harder for the interviewer to stick to the topic of concern and are thus more suitable for open interviews which seek no specific answers (Edward and Holland, 2003).

Additional to the style of the interview it is also pertinent to keep in mind who the interviewee is. Different types of interviewees might react different to questions. In general, it can be assumed that high level politicians are less willing on giving out peculiar information that might be needed. In this case, semi-structured interviews allow for more room to manoeuvre. This is also underlined by Beyers et al (2014) and Navarro (2013) in their observations on interviewing elites. He further claims that elites, be it politicians or experts, are not impressed by researchers asking questions and thus need a different treatment. Navarro suggests that for this kind of interviewees semi-structured interviews where topics and questions have been communicated in advance are mostly suitable. Further, Beyers et al, stress how important it is to ask the right questions when interviewing experts, also in regard to wording and placements, as even small variations can alter the outcomes. Interviewers also should not have wrong illusions about what is being feasible regarding the collection of information. To avoid this, it should be clear from the beginning onwards what is at stake and what the interviewer's ambitions regarding the scope of required information are. When it comes to selecting who to interview it is crucial to keep in mind what is supposed to be analysed and which research goals are at stake. If the interest is tailored around one specific policy area, different stakeholders engaged in this are a valuable interview choice. This can deliver outcomes that help "explaining how specific group strategies affect the unfolding of concrete policymaking processes" (Beyers et al, 2014, p. 181). This is exactly what this research aims to do while conducting semi-structured interviews. A selection of interview partner's including an explanation for the choices follows in section 4.3.

4.2 Official documents issued by European Institutions and civil society organisations

For the empirical part of this work firstly interviews are used, nevertheless official documents made available by EC and YFJ are also a substantial part of the analysis regarding the level of access from YFJ towards EU institutions. Official documents by institutions help to understand policy positions and preferences on institutional side and further allow to double check the actual policy development. A variety of data can

help to overcome bias that might arise from only conducting interviews (Beyers et al, 2014). Relying on only one source of information, e.g interviews can distort the reality of access to institutions from YFJ side. This can happen either because YFJ officials overestimate their level of access or also underestimate their access. Confirming documents can thus confirm claims made and vice versa. Especially when it comes to lobbying EU officials might not want to openly show how deeply private actors influence them.

The policy documents looked at include inter alia the distribution of funds within the MFF, the midterm review voluntarily set up by the EP, Commission plans and communications, as well as public communication between the institutions and the civil society. As outlined in the theoretical section the Council of Ministers is due to the nature of the organisation assumed to be not as relevant as the Parliament and the Commission. Still, it will be tried to either refuse or confirm this assumption by respective officials. Next to the abovementioned document types the analysis will also contain data on the frequency of meetings between YFJ staff and Commission officials. The data is extracted from online sources like the Commission website, the transparency register and lobbyfact.eu, which summarises the sources. These sources also need to be read with care, as both institutional and CSO side voluntarily publicise this data. This means that information can be altered or incomplete. However, interviews with the Youth Forum and also its coalition partner confirm the picture that can be drawn from the online sources.

On the civil society organisation side, policy papers and other publications set up by CSO are assumed to give insights in the ambitions and process employed by CSO, in this case the YFJ, its members and coalition partners. It is crucial to take into consideration that the Youth Forum in itself is a network with several members that also pursue lobby activities whose impact cannot be neglected. However, the member organisations vary substantially in size and activity therefore not all can be included in the analysis of this thesis.

The policy documents are analysed while partially following the logic of a discourse analyses with paying specific attention to several keywords that are identified as crucial

for this study. These words include *Erasmus+*, *youth*, *funding*, *European Youth Forum*, *increase*, *share* within communications and reports by the Commission and the Parliament. This requires that documents be coded which is also done with the conducted interviews. More generally the documents are analysed regarding their *arguments*, *identified problems* and *solutions*, as well as *goals*, *proposals* and *solutions*. This is applicable to both forms of documents, institutional and civil society documents.

In the end this way of analysing the interviews and documents shall help to find answers to the developed hypothesis. The thematic content analysis will give a broad insight in the actual lobby efforts of the YFJ as well as the rationale behind it, as well as outline how this is perceived by the lobby targets.

4.3 Who to interview?

In the course of setting up the research proposal of this work and during the accompanying internship relevant interview partners were identified. There are certain limitations to this research, which relate to the scope of interviews conducted. Only a limited number of interviews could be conducted, this has to be taken into account when it comes to generalisations and validity. For the objective of this research it is crucial to not only focus on one set of interview partners but to be able to include a variety of different stakeholders and official EU representatives. The variety is aimed at understanding both sides of the lobby work. The organisational side, including the development of who and when to lobby, as well as how to lobby, shall give insights in the development of strategies. The institutional side in contrast shall portray whether the ambitions and strategies operationalised by interest groups are effective or whether institutional demands vary from what has been stated in the theoretical literature and framework of this study. Further, the ability of the Youth Forum to deliver Bouwens access goods can be derived.

First looking at the interviewees from the CSO side, secretariat members of the YFJ are being interviewed in regard to their experience with lobbying EU officials and their planning. In this regard, the Policy and Advocacy Coordinator dealing with funding is a

valuable source to interview. It is expected that he can provide comprehensive vision regarding the development of strategies employed. Further, he is the responsible representative within the E+ coalition with the Life Long Learning Platform. Another interviewee on YFJ side is the YFJs institutional coordinator whose main task is the coordination of institutional contacts, which is an essential part of lobby work. The director of the coalition partner on E+ was also identified as an important expert on lobby activity and especially on the effectiveness of coalition networks in EU NGO lobbying. A representative of one member organisation, who is at the same time a Board member of the YFJ is also interviewed to give a broader scope of the lobby activities.

Second, interviewees on the institutional side have to be identified. Unfortunately high level EU officials do not have the time and interest to answer questions for this kind of studies, thus political advisors and junior level officials were chosen. On EP side, one close contact to the YFJ is the coordinator of the youth intergroup in the EP. The coordinator of the youth intergroup closely works together with MEPs on all cross cutting issues that affect youth policies. One of these is the E+ programme. His task is to mediate between interest groups and MEPs as well as among MEPs from different political groups and committees while promoting youth policies and the E+. This interviewee is assumed to deliver an understanding how lobbying and the chosen strategies are perceived among MEPs and to help assess if they are fruitful. Two political advisors from within the CULT committee dealing with among others education are also interviewed on their views on E+ lobbying towards them and towards the EC from them. Officials from the DG EAC in the position of political advisors were asked to give their views on YFJ lobbying, but refused to do so. A last group of interviewees represents national agencies dealing with Erasmus+, as monitoring authorities. All conducted Interviews are summarised in the table below.

<u>Organisation/ Institution</u>	<u>Occupation</u>
European Parliament	Coordinator youth intergroup
European Parliament	Assistant to a MEP
European Parliament	Assistant to a MEP
European Parliament	Political Advisor
European Youth Forum	Policy and Advocacy Coordinator
European Youth Forum	Institutional Coordinator
Lifelong Learning Platform	Director
European Youth Forum	Board member
Permanent representation of Niedersachsen	Head of Education and research
Belgian National agency	Director
European Parliament	Political Advisor
Academia	Professor at LSE
European Parliament	MEP

(Table 2) Interview Partners)

It is expected that interviewees share their experiences in lobby activities as well as their ambitions and limitations. Questions asked will focus on what kind of lobbying is pursued, how lobby activity is prepared and conducted. This takes into account the tactics, timing and access point chosen by interest groups and coalition. Together with the analysed documents the interviews contribute to a greater understanding of the applied strategies by YFK and its coalition partners. Further positions, perceptions and preferences of policymakers are investigated so that in the end a well-researched opinion on the use of strategies in NGO- EU politics lobbying can be given.

5. Analysis of findings

This chapter of the thesis aims at presenting the empirical results gathered through interviewing combined with an analysis of official documents from Institutional and European Youth Forum side. In doing so it is first of all pertinent to give a detailed outline of the Erasmus legislative procedure and explain the midterm review timetable. Further it is paramount to determine the Youth Forums access to decision-making institutions in regard to Erasmus+, before turning to the strategic choices contributing to the level of access. The chapter is then structured in a way that follows the assembling of the theoretical chapter above. Each section includes findings from the conducted interviews, which are supported or refuted by official documents. Through this, the hypotheses made in the theoretical chapter are tested to be valid or to be dismissed which is done to see how the strategic choices made by the Youth Forum and its coalition partner lead to more or less access. By analysing a narrowly defined case the thesis seeks to be able to give recommendation to the subject of the thesis and also general recommendations to civil society organisations regarding the art of lobbying within the EU.

Due to the variety of actors interviewed, the interview questions differ from each other while still focusing on the same scope. The interviews are, as explained in the chapter on methodology, analysed in a thematic way, implying that the style of analysis is a content analysis.

5.1 Decision-making process of E+, considering the midterm evaluation of the programme

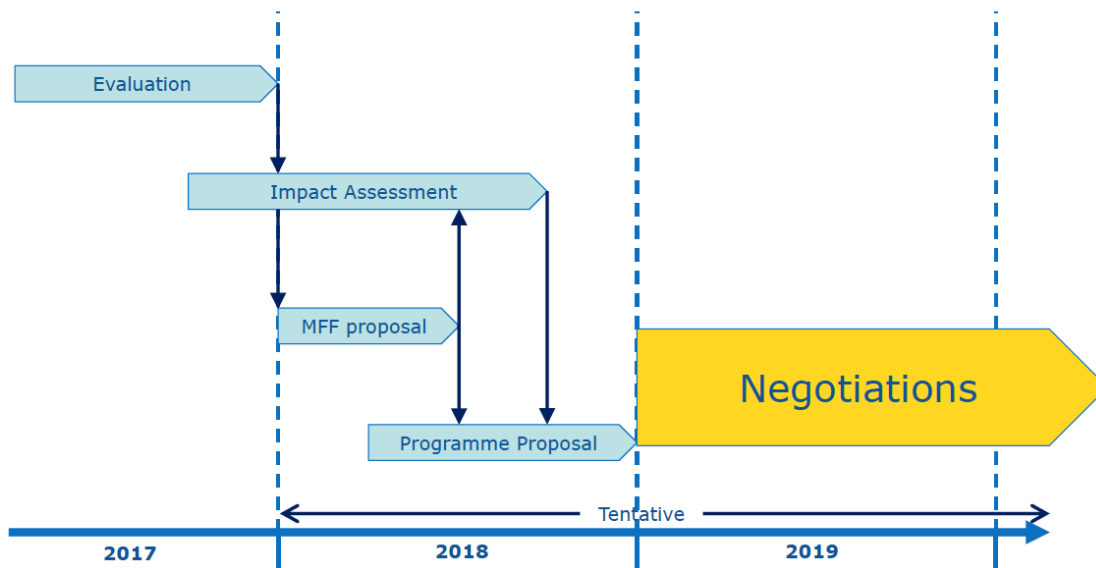
The Erasmus+ programme as touched upon earlier is dealt with via the OLP, which means that the European Commission drafts a proposal, which then will be presented in the EP, in the respective committee, here the CULT committee. The members of the committee have then the chance to table amendments for the proposal, after that the amended proposal is sent to the Council. Members of the responsible configuration

within the Council are given the opportunity to table amendments or also accept the proposal as it is. In case of amending the proposal, the Council sends a final draft version to the EP. Within the EP either the amendments are accepted or altered once again. If the latter is the case, then the draft legislation must be send back to the Council. Either the Council approves the changes made by the EP or proposes new ones, which leads to the coming together of a conciliation committee existing out of member of the Parliament and the Council. After this the proposal has to be either adopted or rejected. Adoption can also be achieved already after first readings (European Parliament, nd). By now most legislative proposal are being adopted after the first readings. This can be traced back to an increase in the use of trilogue to reach agreements between the involved institutions. Article 294 in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union further lays down the legal base for this procedure. The Erasmus+ programme is not only bound to the OLP but also to the negotiation of the MFF. The MFF is designed for a timeframe of seven years and with set budget ceilings for each year within this framework. However, negotiations regarding the MFF are basically timeless and happen on a constant basis.

The midterm review is a vital point in time to bring forward advocacy work in regard to the future Erasmus programme. As elaborated on in the background part of this work, the Erasmus programme has experienced incremental changes throughout the years. Therefore, the midterm review is a vital point in time to feed into the process as chances are high that the architecture of the programme will be changed significantly. It further gives the chance to point out short comings as well as virtues of the programme. Taking actively part in this process increases the visibility of organisations and can improve their future access to institutions significantly.

The graphic below summarised the timeframe for the midterm review as well as a timeline for the introduction of the new MFF and negotiations. The new MFF proposal is supposed to be published in early 2018, however, as the 'tentative' indicates this is just a provisional timeline. Already in May 2017, the Budget Commissioner Oettinger announced that most likely the MFF proposal will be delayed till mid 2018 (EPP group, 2017).

Use of Erasmus+ evaluation



(Graphic 1) European Commission, 2016)

The graphic further shows that throughout the year 2017 evaluations of the Erasmus plus programme are conducted. These evaluations take place on national and EU level. The European Commission launched a public consultation which was open till the end of May and in which participants could share their experiences with Erasmus+ as well as their needs, demands and ideas for a better programme (European Commission, 2017). The outcomes of these evaluations and the impact assessment crucially feed into the design of the programme proposal, which will be introduced in 2018 after the overall MFF has been developed. Both the MFF and the programme proposal need to be taken into consideration by the YFJ when organising lobby work. The overall MFF is vital, as the Youth Forum would like to increase the share of the budget spent for young people under the Erasmus successor. The programme proposal is crucial regarding the structure and design of the new programme.

It is essential to keep this timeline and the process in mind while looking at the efforts undertaken by the YFJ to gain access to the relevant institutions.

5.1.1 Access of the YFJ to decision-making bodies regarding Erasmus+

While determining the concrete access of the Youth Forum and its coalition regarding Erasmus+ midterm review reference is taken to Pieter Bouwen and Adam Williams Chalmers and their works on trading information for access.

Bouwen as explained in the theoretical chapter of this thesis focuses mostly on input legitimacy as rationale for institutions to give access to private actors in exchange for information. He further stipulates that institutions within the EU are chronically understaffed and therefore are dependent on obtaining relevant information from private actors. Their need in information is thereby dependent on their role in the legislative process. Following Bouwen, the Commission as policy initiator is mostly interested in Expert knowledge (>EEI>DEI). The European Parliament having the role as co-legislator with the Council is mainly interested in European Encompassed Interest (>DEI>EK). In this scheme, the Council is foremost interested in Domestic Encompassed Interest (>EEI>EK). Thus, according to Bouwen, Expert knowledge is not an access good demanded by EP and Council.

While Bouwen draws more attention the demand side, Chalmers states that the supply side is a crucial factor to be investigated. This thesis puts forward a mixed approach by looking at both sides. Referring to the demand supply scheme, one can clearly state that the YFJ while being a European association existing out of 104 member organisations in all different EU countries is well able to represent a European Encompassed Interest. On the supply side Bouwen asserts this to be crucial to gain access to the EP (Bouwen, 2002 and European Youth Forum, 2017). In this regard the YFJ while delivering the wanted information is able to access the EP. Additionally, Chalmers declares that measuring access in terms of meeting frequency of lobby groups with EU institutions is “consistent with other empirical research on access in the EU” (p. 47). Hence this will be used as a measurement for access in this work as well.

Following the findings from the conducted Interviews with officials working in the EP this notion is supported. Among others, the Interview with Anahi Vila (Political Advisor in CULT) showed that the YFJ has access to the EP though her alone one to two times

a month. She further stipulates that if concrete problems/proposals are at stake and more information is required access in terms of time intensity further increases. From Youth Forum side Alfonso Aliberti, as well as Jan Wilker, confirm constant access to officials within the Parliament. Further, the access to the EP is diverse in terms of professions within the EP, meaning that the YFJ has access to MEPs, their assistants, Policy advisors and the Secretariat. The Youth Forum was one of first and only organisations that was able to speak about youth policies including Erasmus+ in EP's plenary, underlining their access to the EP as decision-making body in regard to Erasmus+ (Interview Frederique Chabaud). Moreover, and probably the most important argument for YFJs access to the EP is that the YFJ was able to contribute to a resolution on the future of Erasmus+ from the CULT committee. The YFJ was invited to send a list with amendments that included their priorities for the future programme to members of the Parliament, most of these amendments were tabled and will be incorporated. Additionally, the YFJ already in November 2016 was able to put forward amendments on the implementation report, which have also been incorporated in the final version.

Turning to the EC the same way of determining access is applied. Bouwen claims that the EC, due to its role as policy formulator foremost demands Expert knowledge as the 'currency' for access. From the theoretical logic, the YFJ as a European association would not be the preferred source for Expert knowledge (Bouwen, 2002). However, looking at the supply side the YFJ argues to be able to deliver technical details and expert knowledge, partially derived from its member organisations (Interview with Alfonso Aliberti and Anahi Vila). Following Chalmers and his focus on the supply side the YFJ should hence still have access to the EC. Moreover, the EC is not only interested in EK but also in the European Encompassed Interest, which as stated above the YFJ is able to produce. Access of the YFJ to the EC is then naturally less than to the EP but still there is access to the EC. This is supported by a list of the meeting, which took place between the EC and the YFJ over the course of two years.

DG	When	What
EAC (Tibor Navracsics)	May 02, 2017	EU youth strategy post 2018
EAC (Tibor Navracsics)	March 06, 2017	The role of young people in the discussions on the future of Europe, the future of Erasmus plus , the post 2018 Youth Strategy and European Solidarity Corps
Health (Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis and Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis)	March 02, 2017	Towards a renewed EU Alcohol and Health Forum
EAC (Tibor Navracsics)	November 23, 2016	New Youth initiative – Bratislava process youth dimension
Employment (Vasiliki Kokkori Julie Fionda Baudouin Baudru)	November 7, 2016	Recent developments related to the Youth Guarantee
Better regulation (Frans Timmermans)	October 12, 2016	SDGs
EAC (Christine Mai)	July 15, 2016	Youth radicalisation, E+, Brexit
Jobs and Growth (Aura Salla)	April 14, 2017	Investment Plan- youth unemployment and investment in education
EAC (Szabolcs Horvath Christine Mai)	April 12, 2016	Best practices on integrating young refugees in education and the labour market
EAC (Christine Mai)	March 18, 2016	New work plan for youth, structured dialogue with youth

Lobbyfacts.eu <https://lobbyfacts.eu/representative/bbfe8a55e19f4ef5b8f045b86e3db5c3/european-youth-forum>

Keeping Chalmers in mind, one can observe that the YFJ does have access to the EC while looking at the number of meetings between YFJ and Commission officials. Further, this is supported by Interviews and also by the EC mentioning the European Youth Forum in e.g the annual work programme for the implementation of Erasmus+ (2016) “the active contribution by the European Youth Forum to the political processes relevant to youth at European level” in regard to cooperation with EU institutions is stressed (p.61). Thus, further strengthening the claims made regarding access to the EC in Erasmus+ matters. However, it is also to be taken into account that in the wake of the midterm review the institutions operate differently. While the EP composed a report on the implementation of the programme and now works on a resolution for the future, the EC launched an open public consultation and works more behind closed doors to prepare the evaluation. This has an impact on the analysis of this thesis as

more focus is put on the EP than on the EC. The EC will be a greater target as soon as the review by the EC itself is published. Nevertheless, the EC is also a lobby target of the Parliament. The YFJs significant access to the Parliament also leads to an indirect access to the EC as MEPs and Advisors incorporate demands from YFJ side in their position on Erasmus+ towards the EC.

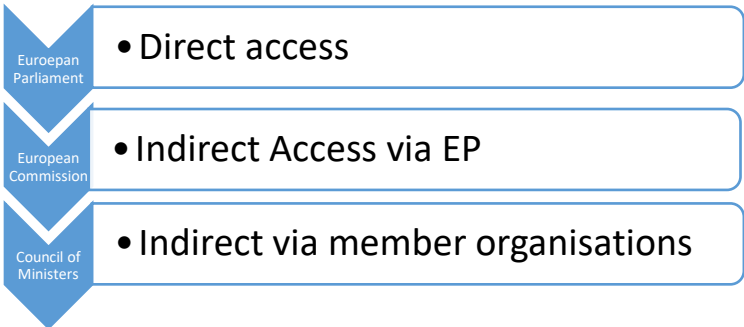
Access to the Council of Ministers shows to be more difficult to be attained by the YFJ. The Council, like the EP does not publish meetings with interest groups and hence the determination of access depends on interviews and press releases, as well as the matching of demand and supply of information as indicator for access. The Council, as stated by Bouwen, is mostly interest in Domestic Encompassed Interest “the influence of national interests prevails in the Council” (p.381). National organisations, businesses or agencies best deliver this type of information. Looking at a table provided by Bouwen, European associations, which the Youth Forum falls under, are best able to provide European encompassed Interest, then Expert Knowledge and least Domestic Encompassed Interest. However, the Youth Forum can also represent domestic interests, which stems from its multilevel structure which includes a diverse membership. The individual national youth councils as well as youth organisations that are member so the European Youth Forum are very active at national level as well (Interview Jan Wilker). Further, the European Youth Forum at least on EU level is the Council’s main stakeholder and gets invited regularly (Yearly) by the respective Presidency to give a speech with new ideas on youth policies in general (ibid.). The Council resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), states

“the Commission is invited to convene a European Steering Committee for each 18-month period consisting of inter alia representatives of the Trio Presidency countries’ Ministries for Youth Affairs, National Youth Councils and National Agencies for the Youth in Action Programme, as well as representatives of the European Commission and the European Youth Forum.
“ (Annex III).

This is not explicitly directed at Erasmus+, however it gives the Youth Forum an opportunity to bring forward its claims on youth policy including youth in action which is part of Erasmus+. It further shows that the Council is interested in the expertise of

the Youth Forum. The access to the Council from Youth Forum side is however significantly less than to the European Commission and especially to the European Parliament. Through the national member organisations, the YFJ does have an indirect access to the Council. The education sector is additionally a difficult area to exercise influence on EU level as the EU only has limited competences in this field and most decisions are taken at national level. With the Erasmus+ programme the EU fulfils its obligations to foster youth exchanges as laid down in TFEU 165 which makes the programme a hybrid of EU and national policies. In the scope of this thesis the individual member organisations' relations to national decision-makers in terms of access and how this contributes to more indirect YFJ access cannot be analysed.

Summarising the YFJ definitively managed to get access to EU institutions in regard to Erasmus+ and more specifically the midterm review. The level of access thereby varies among the institutions. Access is on the highest level with the EP, the second highest with the EC and least to the Council.



5.2 Strategic choices and how they impact(ed) the level of access

After having shown that the level of access varies between the institutions and throughout time this section looks at how the strategic choices influenced the level of access. It this seeks to answer why access to the European Parliament is greater than access to the Commission and Council of Minister. Thereby the strategic use of access goods in regard to, to which institution they are presented, at which point in the legislative process and how they are presented is analysed. Focus is put on the midterm review of Erasmus+ and the Future of Erasmus. Both are vital for the designing and funding of the successor of the current programme. As the European Youth Forum in one of its documents described: “A strategy is a combination of the

goals for which an organisation strives and the means and methods by which it seeks to get there.” (European Youth Forum, 2017). The main goal striven for is access to relevant bodies, which has been achieved, to alter funding as well as design of Erasmus for the future. Looking at the question how this was achieved, first the choice of to whom the access goods is presented.

5.2.1 Strategic consideration one: Whom to present the available access goods to?

This section looks at the access goods available to the youth Forum and to whom they were employed in an exchange for access to the Erasmus+ midterm review. Thereby the section aims at finding out which strategic choices have shown most impact on getting the desired access.

5.2.1.1 How to access the European Commission in the wake of the midterm review?

The European Commission from February till the end of May gave civil society organisations the chance to participate in an open public consultation regarding the Erasmus+ programme (European Commission, 2017d). This is a step from the Commission to engage civil society organisations in the process of designing a successor programme. The information, gathered through such a consultation, is ‘ground-level’ information on the feasibility of technical details, underlining the assumption of Chalmers that the EC is mainly interested in Expert knowledge in terms of operational information, hence on how legislative texts affect the efficiency and feasibility of programmes like the Erasmus+. Taking part in open public consultation can contribute to the visibility of organisations. An Interview with Koen Lambert, working for the Flemish national agency responsible for the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme affirms the ability of the Youth Forum to deliver technical details, by stating the national agency and the YFJ mainly table the same concerns regarding the implementation of Erasmus+.

There are different strategies to get and then maintain access to the relevant institutions (Interview Alfonso Aliberti). Reaching out to the respective official in DG EAC via e-mail is a legitimate way of approaching Commission officials (ibid.). Aliberti adds that if the respective person does not reply simply picking up the phone is a good alternative. In the wake of the midterm review one action undertaken by the Youth Forum is to set up a policy paper on the future of Erasmus and its successor programme which entails the need and demands of the youth organisation the YFJ represents at EU level. The paper is set up with an expert group whose members are representative of member organisations and that have technical, especially operational knowledge about the Erasmus+ programme in relation to funding. The paper entails detailed proposals on how to design the future programme as well as concerning funding. The paper is not yet ready to be published as it has to be adopted by all member organisation in a General Assembly. An unofficial version of it however stresses the importance of combining Non-formal education with formal education, hence linking the youth part of the current Erasmus Programme with the higher education part. Earlier documents by the European Youth Forum, like a resolution on funding from 2015, already set out concrete ideas on how to maintain better funding and better access to funding under the Erasmus+ scheme for youth organisations.

Positioning oneself in the institutional sphere of the EU and identifying the DGs within the EC that are responsible for the policy area an organisation operates in is crucial to lobby more successfully (Interview, Alfonso Aliberti). The European Youth Forum is as an organisation active for more than 20 years and regarded the main stakeholder regarding youth policies. It therefore already has a rather dominant position within the youth sector and the programmes that relate to it. It rather has to maintain the position that is has developed over the years. For that quality work plays a crucial role both in getting and maintaining access to EU institutions.

All interviewees from the civil society side as well as Frederique Chabaud and one MEP assistant from the EP state that either YFJ alone or in a coalition utilises its close relationship to the European Parliament to reach the 'European Commission's ears'. This is characterised as indirect influence and entails that the European Youth Forum and the EP, especially the CULT committee, advocate the same position in regard to Erasmus+. Having the European Parliament on one's side can significantly contribute

to more access to the European Commission. This relates to the fact that if the EC receives the same claims from institutional partners, as well as from civil society side salience of issues addressed increases. Further, the EP is a more powerful player towards the EC than private actors.

5.2.1.2 How to access the European Parliament in the wake of the midterm review?

The European Parliament plays a very different role in the legislative process within the EU; hence their interest in information varies from the EC and also the approach by the Youth Forum is different. The EP with its flatter hierarchical structure also provides a greater scope of contacts. The relevant committee for Erasmus+ is the CULT committee with its 30 members of Parliament and the respective Assistant as well as Policy advisors. The level of access from European Youth Forum side is greatest to the EP.

Reasons for this are manifold and mainly in line with the theoretical argumentation of Chalmers and Bouwen. One additional reason, that is not addressed by the literature is the impact of intergroups within the EP. An intergroup is not an official EP body and also does “not represent its official view” (European Parliament, 2015a). Intergroups include MEPs from different committees and political parties, that are particular interested in one policy area, such as youth policy. As published on the European Youth Forum’s website, the Youth Forum welcomed the re-establishing of the youth intergroup very much. Further, MEP Eider Gardiabazal Rubial stated that she was looking “forward to continuing to work with youth civil society, and particularly the European Youth Forum” (Farndale, 2014). Underlining the good relationship between the youth intergroup and the YFJ as well as showing the YFJs access to the European Parliament through the youth intergroup. Wout van Caimere, coordinator of this youth intergroup, in his interview affirmed the close and good relationship to the intergroup and added that the European Youth Forum lobbied for the re-establishment of the youth intergroup. This close relationship might also have had its positive influence on the access of the Rapporteur regarding the report / evaluation on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme, Milan Zver, who is a member of the youth intergroup (European Parliament, 2015b).

A broad contact to all different kind of officials within the EP further increases the chances of accessing decision-making officials within the EP. The contact to Rapporteurs and shadow Rapporteurs as stated by David Marshall is crucial for any group that aims to lobby the EP successfully on any topic. Through the Youth Forums diverse membership, also existing of youth branches of political parties, contact to MEP Zver could be established. His membership in the youth intergroup already indicates that he might be more open to listen to youth organisations than other MEPs who are not members of the intergroup. Alfonso Aliberti emphasises in this vein that it is pertinent to establish a trust relationship with officials in the EP. The YFJ's ability to provide quality work largely contributed to this trust relationship (Interviews Anahi Vila and Frederique Chabaud).

Further, especially targeting the rapporteur and shadow rapporteurs of the implementation report, part of the midterm review, proved to be successful. Each report also has shadow rapporteurs, which are also crucial to be considered while aiming to feed into reports and or resolutions. In the case of the midterm evaluation, the YFJ did not have direct contact with the shadow rapporteur. Nevertheless, through the good position of the YFJ and through existing contacts, the Forum was able to work with the shadow rapporteur and channel amendments to her (Interviews Alfonso Aliberti and Anahi Vila). Again, being able to channel amendments to relevant policy-makers demonstrates a high level of access and ultimately the chance to influence legislation.

The provision of EEI to the EP was named as a pertinent precondition for organisations to access the Parliament. As the Youth Forum consists out of several member organisations the Youth Forum is able to provide this kind of access good. The EEI is of special importance for the EP when the whole plenary meets and general directions for the future of Erasmus+ are at stake. Being one organisation that is able to deliver the needs and demands from young people all over Europe, the Youth Forum can be said to definitively possess EEI, which helps while accessing MEPs.

Not only, but especially concerning the midterm evaluation, the expertise by the YFJ majorly contributed to its access to relevant officials. Here we see a division between the MEPs and their assistants who claim to be more interested in the general European interest regarding Erasmus+, also in regard to the midterm evaluation, and the policy

advisors on the other side that are more interested in the technical details, hence expert knowledge.

5.2.1.3 How to access the Council of Ministers in the wake of the midterm review?

The theoretical chapter on access to the Council of Ministers predicted that for European associations access is very limited due to the demand and supply mismatch. Though the Youth Forum in general managed to be recognised as the main stakeholder at European level and also has good contact to the youth unit in the Council, in regard to the midterm review there were no specific lobby efforts on Youth Forum side (interview with Jan Wilker). Reaching out to the Council is tricky, one channel for European association that have member organisation is to address the respective national ministries via them. 'Going via national youth councils' is possibility available to the Youth Forum due to its multilevel entity. This relates more to funding, in the sense that national youth councils then again at national level stress the need for more money for Erasmus+ (Interview Alfonso Aliberti). This is an important step, as it is the member states who decide how much money to spend and if the budget can be increased. However, establishing contacts to Finance Ministers and or Heads of States is rather difficult for youth organisations and civil society organisations.

An Interviewee from the permanent representation from lower Saxony argued that when in doubt regarding some details of Erasmus+, contact will first be established to the different educational departments in the other German permanent representations and member states. Showing that there is no outreach towards civil society organisations in general. Jan Wilker explains that also trying to advocate in the youth council in Brussels is not that effective because mostly opinions 'are formed at home'. Mr. Walsdorf (Permanent representation of lower Saxony) confirms that among the different Bundesländer in Germany as well as among the member states, there is a consensus that Erasmus+ is a good programme. He nevertheless states that youth organisations like the Youth Forum could be valuable partners in lowering the administrative burden for schools to also take part in Erasmus activities and exchanges. However, in regard to the midterm review the Council is not specifically targeted by the YFJ. Koen Lambert from the Flemish national agency stated that the

'member states next to the EC are the agency's bosses' and that reports will be forwarded to them. As the messages between the national agency and the YFJ are often in line the YFJ can save resources and better focus its lobby work on the EP and EC which is generally more fruitful for them (Alfonso Aliberti, Interview).

5.2.2 Strategic consideration 2: Timing

Next to making a choice on whom to lobby, it is also worth to consider the timing as being crucial for lobbying. Paramount for this is that the legislative 'timetable' is well known and kept in mind when organising lobby activities. For this it is important to not only take into consideration the timetable of Erasmus+ and the EC, but also a general EU timetable which also incorporates which country holds the Presidency at which point in time. The literature on the dimension of timing in regard to lobbying is rather vague.

However, one general notion is that the earlier an organisation contributes to a legislative process the higher the chances of contributing to it. Jan Wilker from the YFJ states when it comes to the timing of advocacy efforts there are different ways. One way is to stick to the YFJs calendar in term of General Assemblies (with representatives from all member organisations of the Forum) where policy papers are ratified and then sent out to relevant institutional contacts. Another way is to focus on the institutional calendar; Mr Wilker says that a mix of both is prone to be more successful than choosing one of them. Wout van Caimere, in line with the literature, stresses that advocacy shall start as early as possible, from his point of view also better with evidence. This entails that organisations/ the Youth Forum need to be very quick in gathering evidence or setting up policy papers. To be able to start as soon as possible the constant contact from YFJ and EP is a crucial asset.

For the Erasmus+ midterm review the YFJ already well ahead of the actual negotiations started feeding into the process. In October 2016, just two years after the launch of the current Erasmus+ programme the YFJ already started feeding in the process of the programme's midterm evaluation. While the European Commission, as

stated above, sets up a midterm evaluation, also the YFJ hired an external analyst who writes a shadow evaluation report. This report is supposed to be published at the same time as the Commission report, hence before the actual start of the negotiations and the new Commission proposal for a new programme. Alfonso Aliberti, asserts that this is a good timing to again give inputs in the designing of a new programme.

In October 2016, the Juncker Commission announced the launching of a new initiative aimed at fostering solidarity and volunteering among young people while boosting their employability (European Commission, 2017e). The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) is thus a new initiative that is directed at young people and shall replace the European Volunteer Service, which is part of the youth in action chapter within Erasmus+. As this initiative is closely linked to the Erasmus+ programme the YFJ, when feeding into this legislative process also used the attention given to young people to again stress the need for adequate funding for Erasmus+ programmes. Anahi Vila underlines the YFJs efforts to advocate for Erasmus+ while having early stage meetings on the ESC. Further, inputs given in regard to one initiative or programme can have a positive impact on access to decision-makers in regard to another programme. The Proposal for a regulation for the ESC also takes reference to Erasmus+ in relation to its funding as well as the implementation, thus the two programmes are closely interlinked and the ESC shows to be a good opportunity to also advocate for Erasmus+. The coordinator of the youth intergroup also confirms this notion and stresses that the reaction to the ESC is rather a defence mechanism, as the initiative is closely related to programmes that ran under the Erasmus programme and now will be moved into the ESC. Nevertheless, also defence advocacy can bring about the wished results. He further notes that lobbying against the ESC is difficult as it is a plan initiated on request of President Juncker.

Furthermore, in 2017 the Erasmus+ programme celebrates its 30th birthday, which increases the attention given to the programme. So naturally this also provides an extra opportunity for the YFJ to address the great value of Erasmus+ while at the same time ask for more funding (Interview with Alfonso Aliberti). The YFJ was also present at the anniversary celebrations in Strasbourg where the Erasmus+ Advocacy coordinator delivered a speech on the future of Erasmus+. Extraordinary events, like this are a great opportunity to increase the visibility of the YJF once again. It also serves as a

good opportunity to make claims towards further increasing the funds available for the programme. Especially when even the Commission President himself says “Every euro that we invest in Erasmus+ is an investment in the future- in the future of young people and of our European idea” (European Commission, 2017f). If the general institutional public opinion is pro Erasmus+, then further advocating rather easily finds confirmation and support.

5.2.3 Strategic consideration 3: More successful advocacy work through coalition building?

How to lobby and bring one’s message across is a crucial strategic decision which can have a huge impact on the level of access. One way how to organise lobby work is forming a coalition with a like-minded organisation, which is why the European Youth Forum and the Lifelong-learning Platform form the so called ‘Erasmus coalition’. The Lifelong learning platform covers education in general, formal, informal, and non-formal. The intersection between the two platforms is the non-formal educational sector, which is of great importance to both organisations and is fostered through the Erasmus+ programme. Further, the platforms have some common member organisations.

The rationale behind this coalition is that according to Youth Forum side both platforms realised that at institutional level (higher) education and the former youth programme youth in action, along with other programmes, were merged into one programme, Erasmus+. Both YFJ and LLL saw that coordinating their advocacy work concerning Erasmus+ is strategic move to save resources and also have a coherent approach, as well as demands towards the institutions. The coalition meets on a regular base and gathers intelligence, exchanges information and shares resources (Interviews Alfonso Aliberti and Brikena Xhomaqi- Director Lifelong Learning Platform)

The approach by the coalition is more comprehensive as more than one sector is covered (Interview, Brikena Xhomaqi). The Lifelong learning platform mainly works on education aspects while the Youth Forum covers next to non-formal education

foremost the position of youth organisations. As portrayed by academics, forming a coalition not only with partners that deal with the same area but a slightly different one can increase the scope of both organisations and hence increase access to decision-makers. Yanacopulos (2005), argued that being member of a coalition requires a certain amount of commitment towards the coalition partner. However, the coalition between the LLL platform and the YFJ is a rather informal ad-hoc coalition that joins forces whenever there is a good point in time and Erasmus is high on the agenda (Interview with Alfonso Aliberti).

In terms of access to decision-makers the Director of the LLL platform states that the coalition between April 2016 and May 2017 had around five face-to-face meetings with EC officials in light of the Erasmus+ midterm review. However, representatives of both organisations argue that their access regarding the EU institutions did not increase with joining the coalition. Still, it is asserted by the Director of the LLL Platform that their combined voices have more weight in the institutional arena.

Interview partners from the European Parliament confirm this notion, when asked about their perception of coalition building and also the specific coalition between the LLL Platform and the YFJ. Looking at the interviews it becomes apparent that there is a divide among MEPs/Assistants and the attitude towards coalitions. An internal EP source stated that information provided by coalitions is mostly used for plenary sessions when the broader European interest is at stake. However, joining a coalition can also decrease the diversity of interest representation and thus decrease access to decision-makers, 'just having one interlocutor might decrease diversity' (interview Anahi Vila). It should thus be paid attention to not becoming too big as a coalition. Frederique Chaubaud, also a policy advisor but from the Green party also argues that coalitions do not enhance the access to her personally. Hence, one can draw the assumption that coalitions do not improve the access to political advisors, as they are more interested in expert knowledge and technical details from the ground.

A further Assistant of an MEP within the CULT committee points out that though every single voice is vital for the work of the MEP she works for and everyone is taken into account, combined messages, like through coalitions ease her work. This statement is further to be taken with caution as it is rather unlikely that all demands are equally taken into account. Further, she argues that a balance, especially in regard to youth and

higher education, the two biggest budget lines, is met, also in terms of advocacy. In this regard, a coalition that already provides a balanced proposal can be very useful for decision-makers. A different source from within the EP in the form of coordinator for the intergroup on youth, Wout van Caimere, sees that the coalition helps the Youth Forum to bridge the gap to higher education. In terms of individual personalities within the EP, one can observe that there is some diversity in the way in which the Erasmus coalition is perceived.

Looking at an event co-organised by LLL platform and the YFJ in October 2016, the Erasmus+ coalition was able to reach out to MEP Milan Zver, Rapporteur of the EP report on the E+ midterm evaluation next to MEPs Emilian Pavel and Andrey Novakov to discuss the implementation of Erasmus+ (Lifelong learning Platform, 2016).

Further going onto this matter and referring to the midterm evaluation of the EP written by MEP Milan Zver, and the amendments proposed by the Erasmus coalition one can see that the coalition had access to a great extent. The draft report of the Erasmus midterm in Article 8 referring to the student loan guarantee stated; “ Notes that the Student loan Guarantee [...] participating in this innovative tool;” (Zver, 2016). The amendments handed in by the Erasmus coalition regarding this point wished to eliminate innovative and add: “and calls for critical assessment of the Loan Guarantee Facility considering the purpose and accessibility” (Erasmus Coalition, 2016). The final adopted version of the report in Article 32 states: Notes that the Student Loan guarantee [...]; calls for a critical assessment of the Loan Guarantee Facility, examining its purpose and accessibility throughout Europe, and [...] (European Parliament, 2017). This shows that the coalition was indeed able to get access to decision-makers and have their concerns visible in a parliamentary resolution. How much influence this parliamentary resolution then in the end exercises on the new proposal by the EC is not yet clear, however the EP plays an crucial role within the legislative process.

On the member states/ Council side an interview with the head of Research & Innovation, Universities, Culture, and Education of Niedersachsen confirmed the assumption that lobbying in a coalition is beneficial for its members as the visibility of the individual actors is increased substantively.

5.3 Summary of findings

This section of the analysis chapter seeks to summarise the findings regarding the access to EU institutions and how this was achieved.

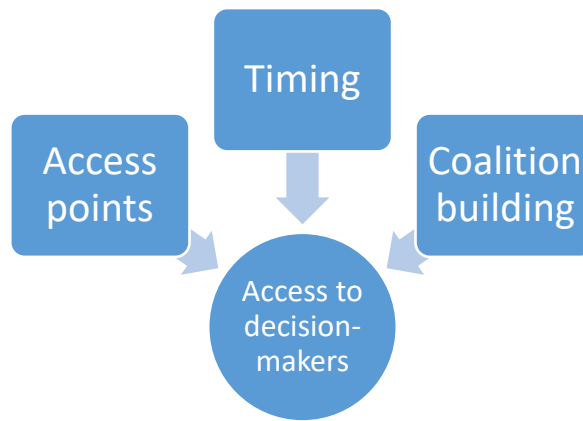
To a certain degree the YFJ was and is able to attain access to all relevant institutions. However, ties are, as assumed in the theoretical work by Bouwen, closest to the EP, where the Youth forum has access to MEPs, their assistants and Policy Advisors in regard to the midterm review. This is mainly due to the fact that not all institutions are equally active in this regard. The European Commission rather operates behind closed doors and at national level, it is the national agencies that are active but also like the EC in setting up their own, national, evaluations.

The provision of EEI towards the EP, gathered from member organisations is crucial for the MEPs and the expert knowledge and valuable asset when trying to access Policy Advisors, the provision of both has helped to the generally high level of access to the EP. On Commission side, the provision of Expert knowledge through the open public consultation helped to reach access to the Commission. The Council, as not active in term sof the midterm review can still be addressed indirectly via member organisations.

Timing proved to be very important first of all the early work in form of the Erasmus coalition seemed to be very fruitful and second the anniversary of the Erasmus programme with a significant attention on political level, was a good momentum to again put forward claims and ambitions. Further, also related to timing is the fact that not all institutions are equally active at all times in the legislative process. For the midterm review the EP is more active, gathering inputs by targeted organisation for their reports, whereas the Commissions sets up a wider evaluation via the OPC.

Institution	European Parliament	European Commission	Council of Ministers
Level of access	Direct access via report on implementation of E+ and future of Erasmus	Indirect via EP and via open public consultation	Indirect via member organisations
Timing	Early in the midterm review proved to be a good point to start lobbying for new programme already	Currently EC rather worked behind closed doors regarding midterm review	Not active regarding midterm review
Coalition impact	Feeding into report, co-organise event with relevant MEPs	5 'face to face' meetings with EC officials	-

The effects of the independent variables such as access points, timing and coalition building impacted the dependent variable access significantly. The strategic decisions made by the Youth Forum contributed to the access to decision-makers the YFJ could achieve. Though being analysed separately the independent variables also affect each other and mostly are also interlinked. Especially the timing factor plays an overarching role that is always important, if the YFJ operates together in the Erasmus coalition or alone. Further it is always an important component to keep in mind while addressing institutions. This is summarised and visualised in the graphic below.



However, these are not the only factors that contribute to access. The framing of messages for example could also be looked at, this was not possible in the scope of this thesis. Also, it is to be kept in mind that access does not in all cases lead to the desired influence on legislative processes.

6. Conclusion including limitations and suggestions for further research

After having analysed the interviews conducted and analysed relevant documents this chapter gives some concluding remarks. The goal of this thesis was to determine how the lobby strategies chosen by the YFJ in regard to Erasmus+ enhanced its access to the respective decision-makers. The thesis thereby focused mostly on the midterm review which stems from the rationale that a narrow timeframe provides a deeper and more precise insight.

The mixed approach of conducting interviews and analysing official documents led to a presentation of a bigger picture of the whole process. The strategic decisions of the YFJ and the perception of those on institutional side could be analysed and matched. Especially the broad approach towards the EP as well as utilising the EP as a channel to reach out to the Commission is a good strategic move. The YFJ definitively has managed to make itself a trust worthy partner that is consulted by various institutional officials in regard to Erasmus+ and that is also able to access the relevant institutions. However, what can be taken from the analysis is that the level of access of the YFJ varies between the three-chosen institution at different points in time, in the scope of this thesis, the midterm review conducted by the EP was the best point in time to access decision-makers. The major outcome of the thesis is that with all EU institutions quality work is the most important element. The YFJ next to providing quality work is also the main stakeholder in its field of activity which strengthens its position majorly. In the following the hypotheses are either confirmed or refuted before answering the research question and giving recommendations.

Looking at the first hypothesis of this thesis being *If the YFJ is able to provide quality information regarding the EEI on Erasmus plus then the YFJ will have more access to the European Parliament (CULT committee)* it can be partially confirmed. Providing

EEl indeed increases the access to MEPs in the CULT committee. The assumption that the YFJ can provide the EP with EEl is confirmed through first the fact that the YFJ gathers information across the EU regarding the consensus on Erasmus+, which is confirmed by MEPs. However, when looking at Policy Advisors and their demands, for them Expert knowledge plays a greater role than the EEl. The YFJ can provide this Expert knowledge through collecting details regarding the structure, design, and implementation of Erasmus+ among its 104 European wide member organisations. By going so, the YFJ can provide the advisors with knowledge from the ground and from organisations that deal with the regulations concerning Erasmus+. The distinction between different officials in the EP is not made in Bouwens work but would be an interesting addition to his work. For the YFJ the ability to provide both kinds of access goods increased the level of access. Only through the access to all different kind of officials in the EP the YFJ is able to channel all its demand and have impact on the legislative process of the midterm evaluation.

In terms of writing amendments for the implementation report and a resolution on the future of Erasmus+, Advisors as well as MEPs are highly interested in receiving inputs from the Youth Forum and mostly tabled the by the YFJ suggested amendments. Being able to provide officials in the EP with amendments, which are tabled within committee plenaries, again shows the access that the YFJ enjoys in the EP and proves that the decision to use more resources to reach out to the EP positively contributes to the YFJs position towards the institutions. In terms of presenting the access goods the interviews have shown that there is no single way to how channel information, apart from that the earliest possible point in time is the best and preferably with evidence.

Overall through the EP the YFJ is further able to indirectly access the European Commission. Assistants as well as advisors confirm this notion, which is shared by the Erasmus coalition. Thus, the YFJ is able to channel its information via the EP to the EC where it might be taken into consideration when drafting legislation. This indirect kind of access is ignored in Bouwen's work on access to EU institutions but deserves more attention. It is a very interesting deviation from Bouwen's framework which should be investigated further. The other deviation in regard to the EP, referring to the informational need and Bouwen's assumption that the EP is least interested in Expert

Knowledge. In terms of access to the EP the framework would need some revision.

The Commission as portrayed by Bouwen mainly demands Expert knowledge to draw up legislative proposals. This becomes apparent again when looking at the Open Public consultation released by the EC in February and in which participants of Erasmus+ are asked to give detailed feedback on the technicality of the implementation. According to Youth Forum staff members the YFJ is well able to provide this knowledge and has access to the European Commission. The ability to provide Expert knowledge is confirmed by Policy Advisors within the Cult committee and as this study puts more focus on the supply side the Hypothesis being *If the YFJ is able to produce position papers including Expert knowledge on Erasmus plus then the YFJ gets more access to the European Commission* can be partially confirmed.

Looking at the Council and the hypothesis made in regard to access to it *The YFJ due to the type of information available to the Forum (EEI and EK) does not have access at all to the Council of Ministers* it can be confirmed that the YFJ per se does not have the desired domestic information and thus not the access to the Council in regard to Erasmus+, on EU level. However, the YFJ as a multilevel organisation does have member states in all EU member states. These member organisations are very active at national level and sometimes in very good contact with their Youth and Education Ministries. As they are member organisations of the Youth Forum and the Youth Forums political direction is decided commonly, the member organisations follow (at least mostly) the same goals as the YFJ as a whole. Thus, it is possible to argue that the YFJ does have access to the Council through its member organisation. This would be an indirect access but nevertheless, partially refutes Bouwen's theoretical framework in which European associations do not have significant access to the Council of Ministers.

The Council of Ministers released a note summarising a strategic agenda for the next three Council Presidencies including as a priority "*MFF mid-term sectoral review* (including reviews of Horizon 2020, Erasmus+, Connecting Europe Facility, Creative Europe, the proposal to simplify the financial rules) ensuring predictability and flexibility in implementing EU policies and priorities." (Council of the European Union, 2017,p.6).

The next three presidencies include Estonia, Bulgaria and Austria. This could provide a good opportunity to get in touch with the respective permanent representations and ministries already very early to give inputs on the Erasmus+ midterm review. The YFJ has limited resources in terms of Policy Officers, hence a choice in terms of who to lobby has to be made. If chances to attain access to the Council are perceived to be less because of information available to the organisations; it is a strategic good decision to not spend too much time on trying to and narrow down the scope regarding the Council. Further the respective Council, in this case the youth council, meets less regularly than the MEPs and Advisors in the CULT committee or the officials in the DG EAC. Trust takes much longer to be build and in contrast to the other two institutions 28 different Ministries have to be lobbied. Therefore, it would be fruitful to coordinate and formally divide tasks with the respective member youth councils, which so far did not take place to considerable degree.

The Timing of lobbying seems to be rather ascribed by the institutional and legislative calendar, so that the YFJ 'only' has to take these into consideration when planning advocacy actions, contacting the institutions or setting up policy papers. For the Erasmus+ programme the midterm review as well as the open public consultation, the 30-year anniversary and the discussion concerning the future of Erasmus are fruitful points in time to again bring forward YFJ claims. The respective hypothesis can be confirmed, timing plays an important role. This is also strengthened when looking at the current development of the European Solidarity Corps and how it relates to the Erasmus+. It would definitively be a missed opportunity to ignore the development. Looking at the success of sending amendments for the future of Erasmus right after the 30-year anniversary was a good point in time.

The coalition with the LLL Platform also proves to be successful and beneficial for both organisations in regard to accessing EU institutions. Setting up the coalition in the wake of the midterm review of the programme is a strategic move that eases the work of both organisations. Though representatives on civil society organisation side claim that the level of access in terms of meeting officials did not increase, coordinating one's work and bringing across the same message increases the weight and leads to more coherence and ultimately to higher chances of altering legislative proposals. As explained in the analytical chapter the coalition was able to table amendments in an EP report which will also be used by the EC while designing the new programme.

Further, events with relevant MEPs should also be seen as a way to obtain access to decision-makers. This is where the coherence plays a great role, as it is easier for policy-makers to listen to one voice which already balances two, still interrelated, areas instead of having two organisations that present their claims separately.

The hypothesis that forming a coalition increases the level of access cannot be fully confirmed. This is mainly due to the already good positioning of both organisations. The coalition is therefore rather important for internal simplification of working processes and for increasing the weight of the individual organisations. However, the representatives of the coalition might not realise that maybe less MEPs would have come to the co-organised event if it had only been organised by one organisation alone. The general perception on the institutional side regarding coalitions is very positive thus it is still considered as a vital strategic decision by the YFJ.

Looking at the research question *'How do lobby strategies utilised by the European Youth Forum affect the access to decision-making institutions regarding the E+ programme?'* one can confirm that the increased focus on the EP in the momentum of the midterm review has shown that the timing of lobbying as well as the target play a major role in lobbying. The YFJ however, in terms of the whole Erasmus programme at large proved to have good access to the EP, the EC and partially the Council. Though interviewees claim that their access to EU institutions did not increase through the coalition, the representatives from the institutional side stated that a coalition enhances access. Moreover, the contributions of the coalition to the implementation report set up by the EP underlines this observation.

Turning to the theoretical framework, the assumptions brought forward by Bouwen in terms of access by European associations to EU institutions can as abovementioned partially be confirmed. The thesis further adds to his work by applying the framework to civil society organisations. His work eased the process of identifying demands of EU institutions and hence contributed to investigating if the YFJ is able to supply the right access goods (information). While positioning itself on the EU institutional level and attaining access to decision-makers the matching of demand and supply is a paramount precondition to be able to actively take part in the EU legislative process. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that his assumptions are only partially confirmed;

especially in regards to the access goods demanded by the EP, the division between different officials is crucial and should have a place within the theoretical framework. Further, the assumption that European associations do not have access to the Council is also not to be taken for granted. European associations that operate as multilevel organisations still can have access to the Council via the various national members.

Recommendations for the European Youth Forum foremost entail to keep up the level of access to the European Parliament and through it channel its ambitions to the European Commission. Another crucial recommendation is to increase the level of access to the Council of Ministers. This can be done via more coordination with active member organisations that have good positions within the member states. This is a crucial factor as in the end it is the governments of the member states that decide how much money can be made available for programmes like Erasmus+. A deeper coordination with member organisations would also decrease the burden on the secretariat in Brussels.

For other civil society organisations recommendations include inter alia the identification of the relevant DG, as well as providing quality work. Taking part in stakeholder meetings as well as public consultations are further ways to engage with the EC. Moreover, the delivery of well-researched and quality policy papers also serves as a door opener to the EC.

Furthermore, it is pertinent for civil society organisations aiming to get access to the EU legislative process through the EP to pay attention to this division of information demand. The successful access to the EP on YFJ side stems from their ability to provide both types of information. Another contribution to the access is that the YFJ reaches out to all major political parties within the EP. In the end, it is important to convince a whole committee, for that broad support is crucial.

Especially for resource poor organisations joining a coalition can be helpful. Being part of a coalition can decrease the internal organisational burden and further lead to a bigger voice towards institutions which can increase access. However, one should keep in mind that a coalition shall also not be too big as ground level especially

regarding technical expertise is a crucial factor to get access to Policy Advisors. Next to gaining a bigger voice and more weight coalitions can also bring messages across more coherent, this is especially paramount when considering how many emails and policy papers are being exchanged between civil society organisations and institutions.

This thesis with the chosen case study encountered several limitations. In general, what has to be mentioned as a limitation is the nature of the policy area this thesis focuses on. Erasmus+ is often referred to as the EU's flagship programme. Almost every interview partner asserted that the Erasmus+ is a very appreciated programme. Further also the strong support in the EP, including MEPs from all parties and almost all committees, shows that there is no strong ideological bias regarding Erasmus+ which further emphasises the broad political support for the programme. The Erasmus programme is a tool that aims at reaching out to young people and which shall positively contribute to the lives and employability of young people, thus it is regarded as an investment in Europe's future. Due to these characteristics, the Erasmus programme naturally does not have strong enemies or interest groups that lobby against its existence. This is an important detail, which contributes to the good position and high level of access on YFJ side. Having the President of the Commission expressing his wish to put nine times more ambitions into the future Erasmus programme underlines the consensus regarding the programme and its added value to society within the EU and across its borders (European Commission, 2017). Again, underlining that there is consensus and appreciation of Erasmus+.

Further, crucial to be acknowledged as well is that several member organisations that are part of the YFJ also on their own undertake advocacy work on Erasmus+ matters which plays in the hand of the YFJ. This is because they again stress the same or at least similar messages as the YFJ, which to some extent is natural as the main claims, like for example for more funding are shared by most stakeholders. When it comes to details on the design or the structure, messages are coordinated to avoid contradictions.

For further research, it might be interesting to investigate the YFJs access to decision makers in regard to different policy areas and compare that to the field of the Erasmus programme. This would show whether the success is truly dependent on the lobby

strategies and not on the nature of the Erasmus programme as the EUs flagship programme. Another possibility would be to compare the YFJs access to a similar organisation, maybe even its coalition partner, the LLL Platform. Though they form a coalition both organisations still perform advocacy work on their own.

Summarising, to find out which information to present, in which way to whom is mostly crucial to bring an organisation's message to the decision-making level. The European Youth Forum certainly managed well to position itself in the institutional arena and maintain a generally high level of access to decision-makers, which further increases in times like the Erasmus+ midterm review especially in regard to the EP.

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