

**So What's New?  
Mapping a Longitudinal Regional Office Footprint  
in Brussels**

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Over the past twenty years, a number of regions in the European Union have established representations in Brussels. The question this raises is a simple one: what are they doing there? Most scholars argue that these regions – or, at least, a subset of them – are attempting to influence decision-making in their favor. These Brussels offices don't always aggregate their preferences through their “parent” member-state; rather, they attempt to influence policy directly. Tatham (2008) argues that regions use six channels in this attempt: the Committee of the Regions, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, members of the European Parliament, Networks and Associations, and finally, through their Regional Brussels Offices (see Tatham 510, Table 1); Jeffery (2007) argues that most of these channels are less than successful; Marks, Haesly and Mbaye (2002) argue that only some of the offices – rich, well staffed, and representing legislative regions – attempt to influence policy.

But what are these offices really doing? They serve no formal role. They aren't in the Treaties. They simply seem to have sprung up in a rather piece-meal way. In 2002, Marks, Haesly, and Mbaye published an article asking what these regional offices think they're doing in Brussels. We asked:

Are subnational offices decorative or are they substantially important? What do subnational governments hope to gain by funding offices in Brussels? Are they listening posts to detect upcoming legislation? Are they means to situate particular regions and localities in European networks of similar (or different) actors? Finally, and for our purpose most importantly, are they intended to influence policy making in the EU?

Marks, Haesly, and Mbaye 2002, 1.

We believed then and I still believe that the most effective way of discovering what the regional offices think they're doing in Brussels is asking. The survey on which the 2002 paper was based, completed in 1999 and 2000 under the auspices of a working group at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Center for European Studies, replicated an earlier survey by Jane Salk

in 1998. While I don't have access to that earlier survey, I do have the 1999-2000 dataset. That survey was extensive, and the article presents but a small piece of the resulting data.

Two years ago, at the last EUSA conference, Charlie Jeffery presented a paper that questioned whether regions were shifting their strategies in terms of influencing EU policy making. Shortly thereafter, I conceived the notion of running the 1999-2000 survey again, and discovering what, if any, were the changes in regional office behavior. The Committee of the Regions was established under the 1991 Maastricht Treaty, and whilst the idea of a "Europe of the Regions" has fallen out of favor, the number of regional representations has continued to grow. From just a few offices in 1988, the number of offices has grown to well over 200 (Moore 2008, 520). What are these offices doing? Are they behaving in the same way now as they did 8 years ago? If they are not, how can we explain that shift?

The 2008 survey was conducted by Heather Mbaye, with Carolyn Moore of the University of Birmingham and Charlie Jeffery of the University of Edinburgh. The Department of Political Science and Planning at the University of West Georgia sponsored the survey, and for that support the principal investigators are grateful. The survey was sent to all of the offices for which the Commission published an address. However, despite using the most recent Commission data, many of the addresses were either incomplete or incorrect. All told, the survey was received by 220 offices. Of those, 84 responded, a response rate of 38%. The 1999-2000 survey was sent to 165 offices, of which 91 responded; the response rate was therefore 55%. The earlier survey benefitted from two circumstances with which we had to contend in 2008. First, in 1999-2000, I was in Brussels doing fieldwork, and was able to hand-carry the survey to many non-responsive offices. In 2008, the funding for fieldwork wasn't available to the investigators. Second, since our article was published, regional Brussels offices have been inundated with

requests to complete surveys. Nonetheless, a 38% response rate is respectable, especially for an international survey of bureaucrats and politicians conducted only in English. Regional Offices in Brussels are very diverse. One finds federal states well represented; Poland, Germany, Belgium, and Spain have large numbers of offices. In unitary or mixed states, one finds some offices representing regions, some representing cities, and some representing coalitions of cities. In terms of the responses received, offices from 19 different countries completed the survey. Ten of the German regional offices returned the survey; 9 Italian and 8 UK Brussels offices submitted answers. Older member states as well as new member states responded – 64 of the respondents were from the EU 15, and 20 were from the Eastern enlargement countries, including Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania; and offices representing both large, powerful regions and small regions in unitary states responded. Overall then, I am confident that the data is sufficiently representative.

Both the 1999-2000 and 2008 survey contained questions on what the offices are doing in Brussels. Responses also contain detailed information on size, resources, location, staffing, and contacts with EU bodies and other regional offices. Table 1 presents the responses to the question regarding the activities and goals of the Brussels office. The question asks for a rating of 1-5, with 5 being most important, on each activity.

**Table 1. Activities and goals of Brussels regional and local offices**

	1999-2000 Survey Mean (Standard deviation)	2008 Survey Mean (Standard deviation)
To gain information about upcoming EU legislation relevant to your region	4.4 (1.0)	4.5 (1.0)
To gain important information about funding opportunities for your region	4.7 (.8)	4.3 (1.2)
To build ties with other regional or local representations	3.9 (.9)	4.4 (.9)
To act as liaison between groups in your region and EU institutions	4.2 (1.0)	4.2 (1.0)
To explain your region's position on issues to EU decision-makers	4.1 (1.0)	4.0 (1.1)
To promote awareness of your region in Brussels	3.8 (1.0)	4.0 (1.0)
To increase knowledge in your region about the European Union	4.0 (1.0)	3.8 (.96)
To respond to requests for information or assistance from people in your region	4.4 (.9)	3.8 (1.1)
To influence decision-making in the EU in favor of your region	4.0 (1.2)	4.2 (1.0)
To gain more influence for regions generally in the European political process	3.2 (1.3)	3.6 (1.2)
To support your Committee of the Regions representatives	*	3.3 (1.4)
To support visits to the EU/ Brussels from regional and/ or local governmental officials	*	3.9 (1.2)
To host delegations of business people, business associations, and/ or industry representatives	*	3.1 (1.3)
To host academic or research visits from single researchers or groups of researchers	*	2.9 (1.3)

\*Not asked in 1999-2000.

Examining only at the responses, the activities and goals of the regional offices are not radically different. The primary functions that the literature ascribes to these offices are information gathering, networking, liaising between the region and the EU, and influencing decision making.

Since the mid-1990s, authors have attributed information gathering to regional offices as a primary goal. Offices need to be informed about legislation in the pipelines; additionally, many

of these regions are expected to implement the legislation produced by the EU, and they therefore have a strong incentive to gather information about these policies as early in the process as possible (Marks, et al 1996, Marks, Haesly, and Mbaye 2002, Jeffery 1996). Peter John (1994) argues that information gathering is the first rung on a “ladder” of regional office activities; at a minimum these offices must act as “listening posts” for their sponsoring regions (Marks, Haesly, and Mbaye 2002).

Brussels offices also engage in networking. Governments from all over the EU have representation in close proximity with each other – and opportunities for information exchange and closer cooperation result. Transaction costs are reduced: cooperation doesn’t require travel. Associations of regional and local governments provide fora for interaction. Networks make information exchange routine, and tend to orient toward focusing on and solving specific problems.

Liaising between the home region and the EU is the third function of Brussels offices. They gather information, host delegations, and link civil society, business groups, government officials, bureaucrats, and individuals “back home” to the European Union in several ways. First, they act similarly to Congressional offices in Washington, D.C.: hosting delegations of people, civil servants, and elected officials from the region at the EU capital. Second, offices are the best source of information on their regions – they provide information to other offices, associations, and EU governing bodies in addition to gathering information. They act as a conduit of information on all sorts of regional activities.

Finally, offices attempt to influence legislations. Charlie Jeffery argues that for 20 years, regions have attempted to influence policy, though they remain largely marginal to the primary policy making structures of the European Union (Jeffery 2007). Several strategies have been

employed. First, Jeffery argues, the Committee of the Regions represents an attempt to influence policy making through the creation of a formal body. However, the CoR “founded on the unclear purpose, weakness of powers and diversity of membership in the CoR” (Jeffery 2007, 13). The second strategy is only really open to regions in states in which they have the legal right to exist and act in sovereign ways in specified areas – including Germany, Spain, Belgium, Austria, and to an extent the UK. In these states, regions have “rights of access to relevant information on EU matters...” (Jeffery 2007, 6). However, the key to this strategy is regional coordination. Regions must establish a collective position, and then funnel that position upward to the EU. The combination of horizontal and vertical coordination is a difficult game to play. The strategy is at best, according to Jeffery, a qualified success in some areas and in some countries. This sort of strategy is more difficult for local and regional actors in non-federal states to employ. The final strategy is what Jeffery calls the “regional rescue of the nation state” in which the regions act through their member state government, in which regions with legislative competencies have “over the last decade or so, and in particular in the debate on the European Constitution, focused on establishing more robust constitutional safeguards around regional-level competencies in the context of European integration” (Jeffery 2007, 13).

Marks, Haesly, and Mbaye (2002) focused on explaining which regional offices think they are in Brussels to influence policy. In that paper, we teased three factors out of the question on activities and goals of the offices (see Table 2). We found that there were three essential factors: exerting political influence, liaising, and networking/information gathering. Larger, better funded offices from regions with legislative competencies were more likely to assert that they pursue decision making influence. With the 2008 survey, I am primarily interested, first, in understanding what, if anything, has changed in the goals pursued by these offices. Table 3

presents the factor analysis of the full 2008 dataset; Eigenvalues are at least 1, and loadings are at least .4.

**Table 2. 1999-2000 Factor Analysis of Regional and Local Office Objectives\*\***

	<i>Exerting Influence</i>	<i>Liaising</i>	<i>Networking/ Information Gathering</i>
To influence decision-making in the EU in favor of your region	.86		
To explain your region's position on issues to EU decision-makers	.82		
To gain more influence for regions generally in the European political process	.79		
To respond to requests for information or assistance from people in your region		.81	
To act as liaison between groups in your region and EU institutions		.67	
To increase knowledge in your region about the European Union		.64	
To gain important information about funding opportunities for your region		.52	.40
To build ties with other regional or local representations			.65
To gain information about upcoming EU legislation relevant to your region			.60
To promote awareness of your region in Brussels			.58
<b><i>Variance Explained</i></b>	<b><i>28%</i></b>	<b><i>19%</i></b>	<b><i>12%</i></b>

\*\*Source: Marks, Haesly, and Mbaye (2002), 7, table 2.

**Table 3. 2008 Factor Analysis of Regional and Local Office Objectives\*\***

	<i>Generalist Approach</i>	<i>Symbolic Pursuits</i>	<i>Liaising</i>	<i>Information Gathering</i>	<i>Anti-CoR</i>
To influence decision-making in the EU in favor of your region	.564	-.499			
To explain your region's position on issues to EU decision-makers	.634				
To gain more influence for regions generally in the European political process	.566	-.426			
To respond to requests for information or assistance from people in your region	.575			.422	
To act as liaison between groups in your region and EU institutions	.746				
To increase knowledge in your region about the European Union	.576			.607	
To gain important information about funding opportunities for your region	.537	.470			
To build ties with other regional or local representations	.714				
To gain information about upcoming EU legislation relevant to your region	.566	-.426			
To promote awareness of your region in Brussels	.691				
To support your Committee of the Regions representatives		-.423			-.478
To support visits to the EU/ Brussels from regional and/ or local governmental officials	.659				
To host delegations of business people, business associations, and/ or industry representatives		.453	.749		
To host academic or research visits from single researchers or groups of researchers		.582	.644		
<b><i>Variance Explained</i></b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>7%</b>

\*N=84

Factor one represents the generalist approach. Offices in 2008 tend to believe that they are pursuing many activities simultaneously. As the offices have established themselves more firmly, networking and talking one with another, they have taken on many responsibilities. It's also possible that the article itself has been read widely – it seems that many of the offices in Brussels are aware of it – and in looking at the 2008 data, we see that the generalist factor encompasses all those tasks that regional offices were asked about in the 1999-2000 survey, but it is missing all but one of the new activities that we have added.

The second factor represents symbolic types of pursuits. With negative loadings on the core political values, and positive loadings on information gathering activities and liaising activities, this factor likely represents the activities of the smaller, less well funded and staffed representations. The third factor presents positive loadings on a broad array of liaising activities, and factor four represents the information gathering function of the offices. The fifth factor, which we cannot drop since the Eigenvalue is over 1, is a negative value on the CoR.

The data present two snapshots in time. By 2008, offices seem to have consolidated their primary functions along lines that the literature proposed as important tasks and that the 1999-2000 data confirmed. The first factor, containing a broad spectrum of activities and explaining a high percentage of the variance, confirms this idea. However, the EU of 2008 is not the EU of 1999. Twelve countries, different from the EU 15 in many political and economic ways, have now joined the EU. It is possible that the offices representing these new states might be substantially different from the EU 15 represented by the 1999-2000 data. Tables 4 and 5 present the same factor analysis of the 15 and the new 12, respectively. Once again, Eigenvalues are at least 1.0, and factor loadings are at least .40.

**Table 4. 2008 Factor Analysis of Regional and Local Office Objectives,****Only the EU 15**

	Generalist	Symbolic	Liaising	Information Gathering
To influence decision-making in the EU in favor of your region	.573	-.533		
To explain your region's position on issues to EU decision-makers	.665			
To gain more influence for regions generally in the European political process	.536	-.433		
To respond to requests for information or assistance from people in your region	.588		-.451	.417
To act as liaison between groups in your region and EU institutions	.736			
To increase knowledge in your region about the European Union	.550			.516
To gain important information about funding opportunities for your region	.551			
To build ties with other regional or local representations	.747			-.433
To gain information about upcoming EU legislation relevant to your region	.504	-.648		
To promote awareness of your region in Brussels	.692			
To support you Committee of the Regions representatives		-.477	.476	
To support visits to the EU/Brussels from regional and/or local governmental officials	.610			.469
To host delegations of business people, business associations, and/or industry representatives		.466	.569	
To host academic or research visits from single researchers or groups of researchers	.318	.629	.506	
<b>Variance Explained</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>9%</b>

\*N=64

**Table 5. 2008 Factor Analysis of Regional and Local Office Objectives, Only the Eastern Enlargement Countries**

	Generalist	Decision Making and Information	Hosting and Constituency Service	Funding	CoR
To influence decision-making in the EU in favor of your region		.637			
To explain your region's position on issues to EU decision-makers		.688			
To gain more influence for regions generally in the European political process	.621	.516			
To respond to requests for information or assistance from people in your region	.521		.443	-.506	
To act as liaison between groups in your region and EU institutions	.840				
To increase knowledge in your region about the European Union	.625			-.614	
To gain important information about funding opportunities for your region	.652	-.422		.496	
To build ties with other regional or local representations	.699	-.483			
To gain information about upcoming EU legislation relevant to your region	.405	.722			
To promote awareness of your region in Brussels	.815				
To support you Committee of the Regions representatives	.437				.737
To support visits to the EU/Brussels from regional and/or local governmental officials	.842				
To host delegations of business people, business associations, and/or industry representatives		.433	.750		
To host academic or research visits from single researchers or groups of researchers		.525	.798		
<b>Variance Explained</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>7%</b>

\*N=20

As we can see, there are some similarities between the older members and the newer members, but there are also a number of significant differences. The four factors derived by the analysis for the EU 15 are very similar to the first four factors derived for the whole dataset. However, the factors for the newer states are very different. Most strikingly, the second factor is very focused on influencing decision making and on gathering information specifically on legislation. This factor is negatively associated with networking functions and on discovering funding opportunities. The newer member states appear to contain regional and local governments that are very ambitious in terms of activity at the EU level. I would like to examine the possibility that these regions are going to the EU directly because they are not successful at transmitting their preferences through their member state government, thus forcing them to sidestep their unresponsive national government and go directly to the European Union. However, this is beyond the scope of preliminary analysis of the data at this time. Secondly, the eastern country Brussels offices strongly load on what I would call constituency service tasks. They host delegations and gather information for people “at home”, whilst the Western countries are somewhat less likely to load on those tasks. Again, explaining why that might be is somewhat beyond the scope of this paper at this time.

The puzzle that I am most interested in explaining is the problem presented by the factors in table 3. The generalist function isn't particularly perplexing: the offices all seem to think they're doing nearly everything! However, the symbolic function is more puzzling. Why do the core political functions – decision making influence, gaining influence for regions generally, and supporting the CoR representative *load negatively* on a factor that includes the functions of hosting delegations of non-governmental officials and gathering information on funding? I suspect that the smaller offices, with few resources and small staffs, tend to focus on achievable

aims rather than on influencing decision-making. There may be a touch of cynicism as well: as Jeffery concludes in his 2007 working paper, regions with legislative functions have had some success in influencing decision making; on the other hand, the small regions have had almost no success. With the discarding of the idea of the Europe of the Regions, and the less than hoped for influence exerted by the CoR, it may be the regional and local offices that don't represent large, rich regions are more likely to attempt to achieve more symbolic, "customer-service" goals.

It stands to reason that if larger, better staffs Brussels offices backed by regions with legislative competencies are more confident and more apt to try to influence policy, that smaller offices with fewer resources would be doing something different. But what? The literature has focused on decision making and policy influence, and it has therefore focused on the large, well staffed, "rich" offices. However, that leaves us with a puzzle. Why do smaller regions, local governments, and associations continue to staff their smaller, poorer offices if they are *not* focused on decision making influence? The factor analysis is suggestive that some sort of constituency service is an important goal to these offices. Exploring these ideas is the next step in my current research project.

For this paper, I completed what might be colloquially called a "quick and dirty" regression on the data. Preliminary results, as we can see in Table 6, are not particularly encouraging.

**Table 6: OLS Regression Model of Index of Factor 2 Answers**

	<b>Standardized beta coefficient</b>	<b>Significance</b>
<b>Constant</b>		.000
<b>Country</b>	.318	.119
<b>Expenses</b>	.167	.350
<b>Current number of staff</b>	.204	.221
<b>Multiple Office Representation (1=multiple)</b>	-.239	.160
<b>Office Size</b>	.061	.759
<b>Regional Autonomy Index</b>	.032	.878
<b>Local Office Dummy (1=local office)</b>	-.017	.921

The dependent variable is an index of the answers that loaded onto factor 2 in table 3 above.

However, as you can see, none of the predictors are significant. This is probably in part do to a large quantity of missing data, and some multicollinearity in the data (one variable, a regional dummy, was dropped because it is completely collinear with the local dummy). I suspect this due to the sort of jumping around of the results and signs when some predictors are not included in the regression. Nonetheless, I would like to pursue this analysis a bit further in the future. Why do some offices choose to support constituency services as opposed to decision making influence?

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