



Becoming in-crowd: constructing EU power in informal governance. A study of the role of the European Union in the G8 summit

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Abstract

This project analyses the role of the European Union in the informal setting of the G8 summit. The G8, as an instance of informal governance, forces us to reconsider existing conceptualisations of the EU's role or power. The G8 summit is not about formal agreements, but about fostering mutual understanding and cooperation through the building of an identity network. Consequently, we require a more process-oriented understanding of power that investigates if and how the EU participates in a social infrastructure. To this end, this study employs an inductive approach, combining theories of EU actorness with conceptualisations of informal governance and power as practice, to build an innovative conceptual framework to understanding EU power.

Chapter two traces the process of inter-organisational cooperation between the EU and the G8, depicting how the relation was thwarted initially, but then set up anyway, and subsequently deepened over the following decades. This development can be explained by the simultaneous complementarity and contrast between the supranational nature of the European Union and the informality of the G8. Moreover, a logic of path dependence helps to explain how this dynamic was socially locked in.

Chapter three analyses the delegation structure of the EU in the G8, using a principal-agent perspective. We describe how disagreements among principals resulted in a seriously disadvantaged agent, but also in flexibility. Consequently, as European integration progressed, the informality of the G8 facilitated the emancipation of the agent, in this case the European Commission, enabling them to change principal preferences with regard to delegation.

Chapter four analyses EU actorness within the G8 in the period 2004-2008, using Jupille and Caporaso's behavioural operationalisation of actorness. The analysis concludes that despite formal limitations, there is still a considerable degree of EU actorness in the G8. The informality of the summit offsets these formal limitations, allowing for recognition without membership and separate participation without formal authority or independence.

Following these conclusions on the limitations of a behavioural approach, chapter five reconceptualises actorness as partaking in a practice. Connecting actorness to the practice turn helps us to understand the process of becoming part

of an influential international community, and also allows for the recognition that such participation is a form of power. I demonstrate that despite ample social acceptance (and possibly even because of it), the EU has an actor identity that sets it apart from the other G8 members, and that hampers its ability to shape the practice.

This conclusion is supported by the findings of the final chapter, which analyses external and internal reform attempts of the EU in the G8. We conclude that both in transforming the G8, and its own position in the summit, the EU has been willing nor able to pursue its preference of effective multilateralism.

These findings culminate in the general conclusion that the informality of the G8 allows for a flexible role of the European Union, in parallel yet subordinate to its member states. As an undefined participant, the European Commission was able to partake in the summit almost like a regular summit member, but it never really became one, because it did not have to. Consequentially, because the EU never really had to resolve its internal struggles of international representation, weak EU autonomy and erratic EU cohesion continue to affect the EU's role at the summit.

Because of this representation structure, EU participation, and hence power in the G8 differs per level. While the EU is not quite a member on the formal level, they do participate informally in all elements that make up the summit. But if we look even closer, at the identity level, we see that although the EU participates, its post-sovereign identity prevents it from being a true member of the core group. The EU has managed to shape its own identity at the summit to some extent, but its ability to shape the identity of the group remains limited.

The case of the EU's role in the G8 illustrates how informality constructs power, but also affects the EU's ability to wield this kind of power. I argue that informal governance allows for creative and effective EU participation in governance processes despite formal limitations. However, identity networks are particularly important in informal governance and it is this identity that the EU continues to fall short on. This seems to be inevitable, given the fact that the EU can by design not be autonomous, and autonomy, or sovereignty, is the very foundation of our global system.