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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Do communicators take over? Mediatization and conflicts in civil society

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Abstract
The article investigates internal strategies and struggles in civil society organizations’ (CSOs’) policy advocacy work from the vantage point of policy professionals by using the concepts of field, symbolic capital, and logics. A main claim is that mediatization acts as a strategic-tension mechanism within a CSO, putting communicators at the center of policy units, which in turn is consequential for the strategies chosen for the organization's policy work. In this way, mediatization as a process celebrates certain professionals and strategies as particularly relevant, creating frustration among employees not specializing in communication. The study identifies a trend for organizations to put more resources and influence into communication and less into actual policy analysis. This article combines research on organizational logics, policy professionals, and mediatization by drawing on 38 interviews with, and ethnographic work among, policy professionals in Sweden, Latvia, and the Netherlands.

KEYWORDS
civil society, civil society organizations, communicators, CSOs, Europe, experts, Latvia, mediatization, Netherlands, organizational logics, policy advocacy, policy networks, policy professionals, public administration, strategic political communication, Sweden, symbolic capital

Related Articles
Shifts in civil society connected to professionalization and mediatization have prompted debate on strategies in civil society organizations (CSOs) about how strategies change when organizations become professionalized and organization staff take over their direction (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Grafström, 2021; Grafström et al., 2015; Heylen et al., 2020; Hwang & Powell, 2009; Maier et al., 2016; Salamon, 1999; Sanders, 2012; Sanders & McClellan, 2014; Skocpol, 2003; Stride & Lee, 2007). The increasing mediatization of politics has created a situation in which interest groups have had to put more effort into their work to influence the public discourse (Grafström, 2021; Grafström et al., 2015). This process has seen more organizations adapting to media logic to meet their goals (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Ihlen et al., 2021; Shanahan et al., 2011). Studies have suggested that interest groups access media and policy makers through various media efforts, and that their success is related to employing staff for this work (see e.g., Binderkrantz, 2005; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Grafström et al., 2015; Staggenborg, 1988; Vesa & Binderkrantz, 2021). Regarding this kind of policy work, much research has focused on CSOs’ choice of strategy (see, e.g., Beyers, 2004; Binderkrantz, 2005; Trapp & Laursen, 2017), but less is known about the professionals making these strategic decisions. This article builds our knowledge of expert personnel in high-ranking positions (cf. Mechanic, 1962) in professionalized CSOs, so-called policy professionals (Svallfors, 2020), working on policy-related knowledge production, media, communication, and strategy. The study focuses on organizations that form part of a longstanding social movement advocacy tradition relating to, for instance, environmental, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and labor market issues. More specifically, to analyze the dynamics of mediatization in these CSOs, the article targets policy teams having the specific task of developing the organizations’ political skills, policy content, and communication. In this capacity, the group is of specific significance for the organizations’ political advocacy efforts (Garsten et al., 2015; Selling & Svallfors, 2019) and is thus of pressing interest. Although changes in organizational power dynamics pertaining to hired personnel have been debated since David Mechanic’s (1962) classic article information on policy professionals—particularly communicators’—role in CSOs is still scarce.

From earlier research, we know that policy teams comprise a range of competencies based on various educational paths, types of capital, and motivations for entering the labor market of policy professionals (Mellquist, 2022a, 2022b; Selling & Svallfors, 2019; Svallfors, 2020). We also know that organizations relate to and are affected by external processes (see e.g., Arvidson et al., 2018; Berkhout, 2013; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Hwang & Powell, 2009; Sanders & McClellan, 2014; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999). This article focuses on the composite group of policy professionals and how it is affected by, and relates to, processes of mediatization by which these professionals adapt to media logics to meet their goals. A main claim is that mediatization puts communicators at the center of policy units, in turn influencing the strategic choices of the CSO and frustrating those professionals not specializing in communication. Bourdieu’s concepts of the field and symbolic capital, together with the concept of organizational logics (Berkhout, 2013; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999), are used to describe and explain the struggles within policy units, and the ensuing consequences for power relations within the group.

To this end, the article draws on, and combines, research on policy professionals, civil society, organizational logics, and mediatization by analyzing strategies among policy units in CSOs. The analysis is based on 38 interviews with, and ethnographic work following, policy professionals in Sweden, Latvia, and the Netherlands. The focus is on large professionalized CSOs and not on
the broad civil society sphere. The article examines how the increasing mediatization of politics affects CSOs’ policy work, raising two specific questions:

- How does increased mediatization affect strategic decision making within CSOs?
- How does increased mediatization affect conflicts in CSOs’ strategic work?

The article is divided into four parts. First, earlier research on CSO advocacy strategies is discussed. I then address the theoretical conceptualization of the study, focusing on field theory, organizational logics, and mediatization. The next part describes the methodology used in this study, before I present the findings and offer concluding remarks.

EARLIER RESEARCH ON CSO ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

Several studies have analyzed how social movements and CSOs work to change public discourse and policy outcomes, demonstrating how CSOs attempt to shape long-term policy agendas (see e.g., Carpenter, 2021; Woodly, 2015). As shown, an important part of this work is carried out by policy teams working on policy research and communication within CSOs, leading to the conclusion that most political interest groups use both access and voice strategies, which are hard to separate (see e.g., Beyers, 2004; Binderkrantz, 2005; Trapp & Laursen, 2017). Access strategies have been understood as dependent on reliable expert information, defined as content generated by professionals using scientific and technical methods (Lundin & Öberg, 2014; Weible, 2008, p. 15). However, voice strategies, connected to raising public awareness, could involve expert knowledge, information politics such as press conferences, and more disruptive tactics such as protest politics (Beyers, 2004). Framing strategies can also be part of both voice and access strategies when expert information is loaded with value—in arguments or when potential support or opposition has been taken into consideration (Beyers, 2004, p. 215).

The choice of policy strategies is often explained in relation to institutional context and on whose behalf political mobilization takes place, in relation to “the institution on which they are putting pressure” (Beyers, 2004, p. 2035) or to particular policy goals (Beyers, 2004; Binderkrantz & Kroyer, 2012). Furthermore, a CSO’s choice of strategy is a result not only of internal organizational factors, such as type of organization, resources, and capacity, but also of the particular policy field, political opportunity structures and culture (Albareda, 2020; Arvidson et al., 2018), and the local political environment (Lundin & Öberg, 2014).

The idea of “strategic political communication” has come to play an important role in policy professional work, referring to an organization’s management of information and communication to realize policy goals (Falasca & Grandien, 2017; Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2014). The concept emerged in relation to practices within political parties but has since traveled (Czarniawska & Joerges, 2011) to other organizational spheres such as CSOs, where it has gained legitimacy (Brady et al., 2015). Strategic communication and media work are today used by most types of interest groups to get “their” issues on the public agenda (e.g., Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Dür & Mateo, 2013; Jacobs & Glass, 2002). Media work should be seen as a key part of long-term, well-considered lobbying strategies rather than as a supplement to them (Mykkänen & Ikonen, 2019).

In this regard, when combined with other strategies, media work has three important functions: to motivate policy makers to address the chosen policy issue, to manage the ongoing lobbying process, and to strengthen relationships with policy makers (Trapp & Laursen, 2017). In practice, media strategies are many and diverse, involving, for example, monitoring, pitching, persuasion, press briefings, access, and transmission of expert information (Mykkänen & Ikonen, 2019, p. 45). To summarize, earlier research indicates that CSOs see a need to develop strategies such as strategic communication and various other specialized strategies, and that the
use of such strategies is connected to institutional contexts, size of staff, financial resources, and organizational identity and culture.

FIELD THEORY, ORGANIZATIONAL LOGICS, AND MEDIATIZATION

There is a growing body of literature regarding civil society that draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the field (see e.g., Barman, 2016; Galli, 2016; Georgakakis & Rowell, 2013; Johansson et al., 2021; Uhlin & Arvidson, 2022; Wagner, 2013). In this line of research, attention has commonly been on what are termed the “leaders” and “elites” of civil society (Johansson & Uhlin, 2020), without specifically examining policy professionals; that is, those employed by CSOs for strategic work. To the extent that they have been recognized at all, they have been seen as just one type of elite agent among others. Here, policy professionals are understood as professionals inhabiting a particular field, working with policy advocacy in civil society, a field with specific rules, expectations, and resources (Svallfors, 2020, p. 4; see also Heclo, 1978). The term “policy professional” could be seen as an umbrella term, and in closely related research fields, these actors could be conceptualized as public affairs practitioners (Falasca & Helgesson, 2021; Tyllström, 2013), policy entrepreneurs (Kingdon, 1984), spin doctors (Quinn, 2012), hacks and wonks (Medvetz, 2012), or policy brokers (Knaggård, 2015). In this article, I scrutinize a specific part of the struggles inside this varied group of employees, with reference to the strategic tensions found in CSOs between policy professionals working as “policy experts” and as “communication experts” (cf. Mellquist, 2022b; Moens, 2021).

Bourdieu (1996) defines “the field” as a system of relationships and positions in which players within the field struggle over power and influence (see also Barman, 2016). For this article, I use the field concept to analytically describe the subfield of policy professionals in civil society, where they compete for consequential positions. Although policy professionals, when asked, would rather identify with the empirical policy matters they are working on, rather than positioning themselves in a generic field of expertise, this study uses the field perspective because policy professionals share very similar goals and methods of working with policy advocacy (Mellquist, 2022a; Svallfors, 2020). As part of this subfield, these professionals will move and fight for positions, attempting to uphold the image of being of consequence within the subfield. What happens internally within the organizations that the professionals move between, such as greater value being placed on media and communication, will therefore be reflected in the subfield. What the field approach specifically facilitates is the analysis of what forms of capital contenders within the field regard as important in order to do this work well.

In the analysis of the power struggle within a field, Bourdieu drew attention to social, cultural, and symbolic forms of capital. Cultural capital refers to academic knowledge, expertise, and technical skills important to the field (Bourdieu & Richardson, 1985). Social capital refers to relationships and to members of “a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 95). Symbolic capital is the capital a person is recognized for in the field (Bourdieu, 1996), providing players with recognition, status, power, legitimacy, and influence. The forms of capital that will be the most valued in a field differ, depending on the context. Therefore, the political, civil society, and cultural fields will all have different types of symbolic capital that are important in them (Wagner, 2013).

In this article, I draw primarily on the concept of symbolic capital to understand the assets and characteristics that mediatization implies for the field of policy advocacy. The production of civic, social, and organizational capital in civil society has been widely discussed (Mellquist, 2022a; Putnam, 1995; Skocpol, 2003; Swain, 2003). In short, the field has been characterized by the dominance of, and struggle over, social and symbolic capital related to civil society and organizational skills. However, because of the increasing importance of the media logics that mediatization fundamentally entails, I argue that this type of capital is challenged by a stronger emphasis on communication and strategic skills.
The argument is based on the concepts of Schmitter and Streeck (1999), who described how the “logic of influence” and “logic of membership” could sometimes conflict within an organization. Later, Berkhout (2013) added the logic of reputation, specifically addressing media influence on organizational behavior. While the first logic refers to the organization's relationships and constraints regarding its external environment, affecting its access to lobbying venues and policy makers, the second logic refers to the organization's constituent members (Bunea, 2019) and entails constraints in relation to upholding democratic principles and representing members in formal decision making. With the third “logic of reputation,” focus is on how organizations structure themselves to attain a media presence. CSOs need media validation both for their political issues and “to continuously reaffirm their validity as relevant actors” (Berkhout, 2013, p. 241). A growing literature on mediatization and its role in policy advocacy processes describes how increasing mediatisation forces political players to adapt to media logic (Cook, 2005; Schulz, 2004; Strömbäck, 2008; Strömbäck & Esser, 2009).

In this article, “mediatization” serves as a key concept in the analysis of the field, being regarded as a “sensitizing concept” in the study of the media's transformation and integration of society (Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Hug & Leschke, 2021). I follow Couldry and Hepp (2013, p. 195), who understand mediatization “as a way of capturing the wider consequences of media's embedding in everyday life.” What is interesting about mediatization, in the case of CSOs, is not necessarily the “increasing media power” but rather how a media logic has entered civil society as an important discourse. Mediatisation is, then, understood as the processes by which organizations not only adapt to this particular logic but also internalize standards for routines, methods, media values, newsworthiness, and news presentation (Grafström, 2021; Grafström et al., 2015, p. 228). As politics has become increasingly mediatised, CSOs, like other organizations, have seen it as necessary to expand their media efforts to gain media presence (Esser & Matthes, 2013; Mykkänen & Ikonen, 2019). The mediatisation of politics has in some ways given interest groups more and new opportunities to influence politics and raise public awareness through lobbying and campaign strategies (Esser & Matthes, 2013). A further effect of an increasing mediatisation on organizations is however that, to stay influential, they must devote more time and resources to the task of news management (Esser & Matthes, 2013, p. 186).

Two explanatory notes regarding media tactics and the effects of mediatisation in organizational life are due at this point. First, the rise of social media has made the conceptualization of mediatisation more complex since media logics related to social media must be understood more in relation to sharing behavior and preferences of individuals than of journalist's and mass media preference (Klinger & Svensson, 2014). Working with social media in CSOs is further understood as highly resource-demanding and always combined with other strategies (Scaramuzzino & Scaramuzzino, 2017). Second, a distinction between organizations' media strategies and communication strategies and how they are affected by mediatisation is also of importance. Research in communication often separates communicators from media managers (Lemish & Caringer, 2012) and external communication into bridging and buffering, where bridging is understood as a more symmetric two-way communication and buffering is a more asymmetric defensive strategy which serves to protect the organization (Wonneberger & Jacobs, 2016). Because organizations handle or respond to traditional media with a certain language profile—which could be different from the profile CSOs use when they speak to or communicate with their own constituents or members via, for example, social media platforms—the understanding of how mediatisation affects policy work could be read as more complex. However, in the interest of providing insights into decision making and conflicts following from an increased mediatisation, this study takes a somewhat overarching stance toward these concepts. For professionals working with policy, mediatisation of politics entails fast reactions and skills in framing and packaging political content in order to gain media attention and compete in the “policy market.” In this environment, CSOs face different media environments and venues, ranging from social media platforms such as Facebook,
Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn, to TV news, podcasts, etc. These platforms demand various media responses and skills from the organization and its professionals.

This study does not analyze relations to particular media forms and platforms, but rather directs attention to the role that strategic media and communication plays within policy units, and how this role has implications for the organization in general. The policy professionals studied in this article need to respond to and handle both traditional media, social media, external communication, and communicate with their members. And as Wonneberger and Jacobs (2016, p. 381) have shown, most organizations do apply a “mix of communication strategies consisting of accommodating or bridging as well as advocacy or buffering strategies.” Being able to master mass media, social media, and internal and external communication are all imperative for organizations’ policy work and therefore for its employed professionals. In this broad understanding media logics come to influence organizations’ internal decisions and actions (Grafström et al., 2015; Klinger & Svensson, 2014; Strömbäck, 2008).

Furthermore, the increasing mediatization has been said to affect civil society strategies in terms of the importance of controlling both media attention and the stories created in the media to maintain legitimacy (Grafström et al., 2015). In this article, mediatization is accordingly understood as a mechanism that creates new demands, such as controlling and creating media content, operating and being present in multiple media platforms, working more with strategic communication, and branding the organization. Using Strömbäck and Esser’s (2009, p. 217) understanding of media interventionism as “professionally motivated behavior by journalists to increase their influence, authority and prestige—and, ultimately, their control over the news content,” the present analysis empirically links this process and behavior to that of policy professionals working with communication, attempting to influence public policy through media and communication.

The empirical analysis of this research is centered on policy professionals’ understanding of how to gain influence over internal and public policy making. The analysis further examines how mediatization establishes a basis for certain strategic choices rather than others, considering how this affects the value of symbolic capital and sharpens tensions in the field. The focus on logics serves to highlight how CSOs’ strategic work is developed in relation to and partly constrained by these logics, how strategic work affects conflicts connected to these logics, and what policy professionals are central to these strategic choices.

**METHODOLOGY**

The article is based on 38 interviews with policy professionals working at 22 organizations in civil society in Sweden, Latvia, and the Netherlands. Additionally, shadowing was undertaken at three of these organizations (in Sweden), following multiple employees in their day-to-day work. The main story is that of professionalized CSOs in Sweden. The empirical examples, including policy professionals from CSOs in Latvia and the Netherlands, were chosen strategically to help us understand the situation in Sweden rather than compare civil society cultures (e.g., Katzenstein, 2003; Svallfors, 2020). Swedish civil society is characterized by strong CSOs bearing the legacy of a popular mass movement tradition (Svallfors, 2020, p. 7; von Essen, 2019). Swedish CSOs, especially trade unions, have a long tradition of employing policy professionals and researchers in their organizations (Hellberg, 1997; Svallfors, 2020). Compared with Sweden, the field of policy professionals in Latvia is significantly smaller, and most Latvian CSOs struggle with funding, meaning that they hire professionals on a project basis (interview with representatives of Civic Alliance Latvia, 2018), rather than in permanent policy teams. Latvian civil society is largely made up of small CSOs characterized by fewer active members; these organizations are run by strong leaders and are seen as rather professionalized (Howard, 2003; Huber, 2011; Lindén, 2008; Uhlin, 2010, p. 844). In contrast to the Latvian situation, many Dutch CSOs have well-developed policy teams, often with policy professional staff primarily dedicated to policy
work. The relationship between governmental institutions and civil society is well developed, and as in Sweden, Dutch CSOs are expected by policy makers to lobby and advocate for social change (Government of the Netherlands, 2014; Van Wessel et al., 2020). An important difference in the Dutch, versus the Swedish, case is that trade unions' neutral research centers are co-owned with employer federations and, as such, are geared toward more neutral research, advice, and statistics, rather than the politicized policy professionalism found in Sweden (Svallfors, 2020, p. 9).

The interviews were conducted with policy professionals working at advocacy-based CSOs addressing environmental, sexual, and reproductive health and rights, and trade union policy issues. In the interviews, the policy professionals were all asked about their special skills, and in what capacities they saw themselves as valuable to their organizations; they were also asked to give examples of how they had been involved in and changed a policy issue. Furthermore, they were asked about “allies” and “enemies” in policy work. Interestingly, conflicts within organizations and between policy professionals surfaced as a theme mentioned by the policy professionals themselves. In the initial interviews, this theme would be raised in reaction to earlier research on policy professionals (outside CSOs) that some of the professionals had read, in which the rise of this group was described as entailing legitimacy issues (see Garsten et al., 2015). The interviewees wanted to counter this image, stating that, as experts in CSOs, they did not represent illegitimacy issues—although they would add that communicators do. There were no indications in the interviews that these contestations were caused by other internal relations; rather, the increasing value placed on media and communication was spoken of as the main change within the organizations.

The empirical analysis centers on two conceptual roles based on the interviewees, as well as specific work tasks, education, previous careers, background, and motivations, as described in Table 1. These roles are described as “policy experts” and “communication experts” and should be understood as ideal types whose work in practice sometimes overlaps. Generally, policy experts have higher education, often in the social sciences, than policy communicators who are often educated in media and communication coupled with political science. The policy expert works more on research and creating expert information, for example, responding to government commissions and participating in panels and reference groups, whereas the communication expert works more on the CSO’s strategic communication, its voice and advocacy strategies, and managing media and social media. The organizational structures varied between organizations. Still, most organizations differentiated between internal and external communication, with the latter specifically being strategic communication targeting policy advocacy. A typical but anonymized organizational chart (see Figure 1) of one of the studied CSOs shows communicators’ central position within the organization.

In this organization, the management support unit ensures the organization’s central media and opinion-building work, encompassing a speech writer, assistant to the chair, and operational management support. The management support unit focuses on the press, policy advocacy, and external communication. The work related to communication with members occurs in the communication unit, which works side by side with the research and policy unit, a structure often copied from political party organizations (Esser & Matthes, 2013, p. 189).

Besides interviewing, the shadowing (Czarniawska, 2007) part of the study entailed 80 hours of observation in Sweden. The aim was to examine policy professionals’ relationships with one another and with elected representatives in their organizations, so that we would not rely solely on their own statements about these matters (e.g., Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). During the shadowing, I focused on how the policy professionals participated in meetings, policy workshops, and seminars with other actors, and how their strategies were displayed and received. In the following analysis, I draw on both types of data.

All interviews and field notes were transcribed and coded in NVivo. For both the interview and observation transcripts, this process showed that conflicts among policy professionals over “how-to strategies” in relation to policy work were quite common. These were conflicts between policy professionals over how to approach policy makers, create campaigns, decide on policy topics and strategies, and, ultimately, how to gain influence. One especially salient aspect of these tensions
TABLE 1  Conceptual roles of policy professionals in CSOs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical titles at organizations</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy experts</td>
<td>Investigator</td>
<td>Expert knowledge of the policy issue in which they specialize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policy officer</td>
<td>Generic writing skills and knowledge of statistical methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policy adviser</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication experts</td>
<td>Communicator</td>
<td>Communicating politics, media management, strategic communication, framing, and agenda setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Press officer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PR manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 1  Anonymized organizational chart of policy departments.

was identified: in-depth knowledge versus framing. In the analysis, this analysis is connected to the increasing importance of communication as well as the process of the mediatization of the sector.

THE ENHANCED POSITION OF COMMUNICATORS

Shadowing groups of policy professionals at work provided insight into CSOs’ strategic work and the central position of communicators. When observing a policy workshop at a large environmental CSO, the central, but contested, position of communicators surprised me. At this workshop, two policy experts from the research department, one expert from the communication department, and the press manager were to determine the organization’s strategy for exerting political influence regarding a specific matter in a two-hour meeting. In this meeting, the press manager who had called this meeting was eager to start the workshop, proposing to first review the CSO’s overarching goals, and then follow the workshop structure. This manager was soon interrupted when one of the policy experts asked, “Now we have decided to have a campaign, but is there any report we can release at the same time? I mean, it would be good if we released something more substantial at the same time.” The press manager answered by saying, “I understand your question. You wonder if there is a report and more work to bring to the theme? But after all, we have had a communications campaign for a whole month on this theme. Indicating that that should be enough for this policy issue.” Ending the discussion, the press manager turned
toward the whiteboard and started working on the goals, saying “What can a political goal be? Let’s brainstorm!” The press manager immediately started expressing her own ideas.

After two intense working hours, the policy professional from the communication department was summarizing the activity plan when one of the policy experts voiced a concern. She was dissatisfied with the fact that the campaign would be held in June, saying “it would be better if the campaign were in April, when everyone starts to leave their homes again” because of approaching spring. Here, the press manager intervened, stating that the media and campaign schedule was too crowded at that time, declaring more decisively: “Eva, I think you should be happy! You got a full month’s campaign for your policy issue. So you should probably be happy with that.” Then she continued in a friendlier tone: “A memo, a paper about the theme would still be good to have.” The expert seemed to accept this answer and asked how the paper should be formulated: “Can I make it like a fact sheet?” To this the press manager declared, “I think it rather should include what we have talked about now—why it’s important, how it works, and what we suggest. We could make a policy paper, two pages maximum! Then Hanna [i.e., the communicator] and I can help rearrange it, so it is understandable for politicians.”

The unfolding of the workshop was startling. By the end of the meeting, the two policy experts’ call to write a report was neglected, and the press manager got her proposal through. The press manager started by introducing her proposal as a question, but as the workshop proceeded, she held on to her suggestion, which was eventually accepted. The policy experts surrendered to the press manager and the communicator, who were the ones driving the workshop forward. This workshop showed how policy officers with in-depth knowledge of specific policy issues can have a hard time asserting the importance of their capital in strategic discussions. In these instances, capital related to strategy and media trumps other types of expertise.

From fieldwork such as this, it can be noted that PR managers, communicators, and press officers have important roles in determining the policy directions of organizations. In the case described above, it is notable how the logic of reputation constrains the CSO through the workings of communication personnel. Based on both experience and recognition, the press manager came to be recognized for holding symbolic capital, which trumped the policy experts’ capital in the form of education and technical expertise. Seen in the light of competition within the field of policy professionals, we can understand why the former might outweigh the latter form of capital: being someone who knows the policy game is to be a strong player in terms of capital recognized by others in the field.

This central position of the communicator was confirmed in many of the interviews. One interviewee described his central position in policy work as follows: “I see the media as a tool for achieving business goals and political goals, not as an end in itself. Therefore, I as PR and press manager should permeate the entire organization. In that capacity, I supervise a group of people—political analysts, project managers, press communicators” (JCS-18 Swedish environmental CSO). This press manager described how media management should permeate the organization’s entire policy work. In this capacity, he used his capital, connected to the media, which enhanced his position and entailed supervising a large group of other policy professionals. Likewise, in the policy workshop described above, the press manager and communicator not only had central positions in deciding on and formulating policy advocacy strategies but also had the last word on how to frame the organization’s standpoint—demonstrated, for instance, by their communication capital giving them the final say in how the fact sheet should be formulated.

In teams working on communication and management support, we find vast numbers of communicators, press secretaries, and brand builders, all working at the core of the organizations, with close relationships to the chairs and CEOs. One interviewee, a top-level manager working closely with the elected president of a trade union, described her function as head of one of these units: “I was a brand strategist, and then I was asked if I wanted to be involved in building this staff function…. We are a support unit for the operational management, but with a focus on press and policy advocacy” (JCS-27 Swedish trade union).
At this organization, and many others, the policy professionals working closest to management were those with the most capital related to media and communication. For instance, every morning, the support unit would prepare a news summary for the chair, management, and policy unit, heavily influencing the agenda for the day or days to come. In their daily activities, the communicators were those working closest to, and exerting the most influence over, management, the chair, and, by extension, the policy development of the CSO. In this case, the head of this support function was a brand strategist working to enhance outside knowledge of the organization’s policy advocacy profile. As is also clear from the interviews, the increasing focus on the media means that organizations have organized their work to meet what are described as new demands for “media presence,” which includes both media monitoring and creating content for multiple media and social platforms. At the workplace, this entails policy experts having to work on communication, creating blog content, recording podcasts, writing articles, and so on.

Some informants silently resisted this development by ignoring demands for media presence, arguing that they had to safeguard their schedules to ensure time for complex analysis: “They asked us to blog and be active on Twitter and everything like that, but I never did. I always felt that the important thing was to have a solid foundation for your policy suggestions” (J-14 Swedish trade union). However, most policy professionals stressed the importance of working with the media and communication in policy work. One interviewee described her most important assets as follows: “Being creative, being able to spot opportunity, when you can link your issue to an issue that’s already attracting attention. A lot of it is also building relationships. Interviewer: What are your most important resources, then? The media!” (JCS-42 Dutch CSO).

This policy professional working at a Dutch CSO, who was hired primarily to work on direct lobbying, described the media as one of her most important resources. A professional at an environmental organization described a power shift between the different units of the organization:

I think that… five years ago it was the research department that was the organization, and the communication department was a kind of service unit. At that time, if something needed to be written on the web, a press release would be sent out and so on. Now much more is driven by communication [professionals]. Communication has become much more important.

(JCS-20 Swedish environmental CSO)

This policy professional stressed that the increasing importance of communication has changed the entire dynamic at the CSO. In statements such as the one above, policy professionals described a change in the importance of strategic communication as particularly significant. Generally, no references were made to other internal conflicts or changes; rather, what was described was how the CSO communication department is no longer understood as a service unit, but as one of the organizational power centers where policy is formulated. Arguably, the increasing importance of communication described here mirrors a similar structural change within European party organizations (Esser & Matthes, 2013, p. 189), where communication is no longer viewed as a mere “add-on” to policy making but has become the center of policy work at the organization. In the case of Latvia, with smaller CSOs, both staff and leaders had to develop this kind of communication skill, whereas in the Dutch and Swedish cases, most CSOs had specific units working to advance the organizations’ media efforts.

CONFLICTS OVER FRAMING VERSUS IN-DEPTH KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

In line with earlier research (see e.g., Berkhout, 2013; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Dür & Mateo, 2013; Jacobs & Glass, 2002), media work emerged as a strategy highly valuable to all policy professionals
interviewed for this project, to get “their” issues on the policy agenda. Still, it is possible to trace conflicts regarding the mediatization of politics because it has changed the roles of professionals working on policy, placing communicators at the center of policy teams and CSOs in general. In some interviews, this power shift caused resentment: “Communication has been given too much space in general, not just in politics. They may have had a little too much influence over what issues should be pursued and how they should be pursued” (J-15 Swedish CSO).

A common feature of the three countries studied here is that the larger the organization, the larger the policy unit, and thus the more pronounced the division of labor (cf. Albareda, 2020). In the Latvian case, policy professionals often had work tasks beyond simply working with policy. In the Swedish and Dutch cases, larger CSOs had more resources to fund external consultancies for their advocacy work (cf. Åberg et al., 2019; Öberg & Svensson, 2012). The professionalization of civil society, understood as employing more experts (Salamon, 1999), in these contexts obviously affects the division of labor and the degree of tension between professionals, with a clear tension within the political and policy-professional CSO field regarding in-depth knowledge production versus framed, communicable messages. This conflict was expressed in all three national contexts, and although it had intensified due to mediatization, the tension seemed to have longstanding precedents. One Dutch policy professional commented as follows:

> Sometimes we see text on the website that… from what we can see is not correct. It's not in compliance with legislation, it's not in compliance with policy. It's made up by these people from the communication department themselves, without checking. In one way or another, the relationship between the policy department and the communication department has always been problematic.

(JCS-41 Dutch trade union)

In this quotation, the tension between policy professionals is salient, highlighting how strategic tensions could feed into power struggles between professionals in the field. This conflict occurred between those working with expert knowledge and those working on communication. In these cases, policy professionals working on knowledge production reported that the influence of communicators, and hence the importance of their symbolic capital, had increased at the organization. The conflict this situation generated concerned strategic positions regarding the best way to gain policy influence and how the organization should be managed.

The change in the power balance between the roles of communicators and researchers was regarded as both an external matter, concerning how to influence public policy, and an internal matter, concerning who should exert the most influence on the organization's policy work. In Bourdieu's understanding, this struggle can be translated to a struggle over what type of capital should be most recognized and valued in the field. An informant at an environmental organization working on communication described how the struggle between communication and in-depth knowledge is inevitable when trying to popularize a message:

> There is a struggle over what main theme we should communicate and how it should be communicated and formulated, and how much we can simplify things. I think that this struggle is present in all organizations where you have a desire to popularize things so that they are possible to understand and to excite commitment, versus “This is what it's called” or “We have to say all these things.” But the communication department has become much more important than before.

(JCS-20 Swedish environmental CSO)

As indicated in the quotation, the tensions were not primarily connected to the use of access or voice but rather to the fact that communication and media efforts seemed to permeate the organization's entire policy work. This change in focus distorted the power balance between profes-
sionals within the organizations, causing resentment among investigators and policy experts, whose roles had become less prominent in the organization because of the increasing premium put on communication.

In particular, the experts on policy issues feared that their competence would not be heard when strategic decisions were being made, and they had trouble, in relation to communication experts, in invoking their capital in the interest of gaining influence over strategic policy decisions. Thus, when media logic creeps in as a decisive factor in policy work, tensions appear in the field among its contenders, and the policy professionals without capital connected to media and communication lose their position in the field.

In the interviews, an often-articulated argument was that this tension is part of a struggle between commercialism and intellectual work. The argument was made by policy experts who described this as a negative trend based on examples of how intervening in a policy issue had devolved into brand-building. Here, those working in knowledge production complained of strategies such as being present in social media debates, writing debate articles, direct lobbying, and brand-building at the expense of doing their own knowledge production at the organization. This group of professionals described a situation in which well-researched social analysis had been exchanged for what they described as “gut feeling.” A policy professional dedicated to research at a trade union described communicators’ increasing influence as follows: “You start by asking if there are any good headings or one-liners, instead of doing an analysis and looking at what the social problem is. It has become an inverse relationship, starting with the slogan, the one-liner, the heading, and then the analysis becomes the consequence of it” (J-6 Swedish trade union).

Professionals oriented toward policy expertise identified this conflict in statements such as the above, perceiving both the organization’s and their own personal positions as threatened. Some of the informants thought that their role as investigators or experts was being pushed back by communicators, brand-builders, and lobbyists who were not that interested in in-depth knowledge and were strategically turning the organization toward what could be easily communicated. The above quotation also highlights a struggle over what type of capital should be recognized as the most important in the field. Forms of symbolic capital related to having knowledge, longstanding experience of civil society and its organizations, and academic capital were here subordinated to capital related to experience of communication. Hence, in the subfield of policy professionals in civil society, a conflict has emerged over what should be recognized as symbolic capital in the field. The informant speaking in the above quotation argued that complex social analysis was being downplayed and that policy issues that were easy to communicate had become the important issues in policy work. In this way, media logics could cause depoliticization by focusing on catchy phrases and “marginalizing substantial issue discussion since it is considered a turnoff in [the] race for ratings” (Esser, 2013, p. 172).

MEDIATIZATION AS A MECHANISM FOR TENSION IN THE FIELD

The professional strategies found in policy teams are constituted by both insider and outsider strategies entailing both framing tactics and the production of in-depth knowledge (Beyers, 2004; Trapp & Laursen, 2017). The question of expert knowledge versus framed messages was, among the informants, never a question of having or not having communication as an important tool in policy work, but rather a question of the balance between these strategies. In the empirical fieldwork, it was evident how the policy strategies were intertwined, in that access, media strategies, and expert knowledge were used simultaneously, and in that policy professionals working with access strategies and in direct contact with policy makers needed media and communication strategies to communicate their work. In these examples, capital connected to strategic media and communication skills becomes celebrated and recognized as important in order to gain influence over policy. This indicates that policy professionals’ understandings of how to gain influ-
ence over internal and public policy making are influenced by mediatization processes, by which strategic communication draws on but often trumps policy analysis. In turn, this establishes a basis for certain strategic choices over others, also causing conflicts between the players in the field. Thus, the struggle over whose type of capital is the strongest has the potential to affect the balance between the policy professionals and the symbolic capital in the field.

The struggle between policy professionals reveals a situation in which organizations put more resources into communication and less into policy analysis, at least partly letting communication strategies and media logics govern them. This may not only lessen CSOs' knowledge production but also risks creating a situation in which the logics of reputation and influence outweigh the logic of membership and the role of members. Just as Mechanic (1962, p. 350) noted, in relation to the power of low-ranking personnel, the influence that policy professionals wield is not primarily a result of their unique characteristics, but rather of their position and location within their organizations. While Mechanic (1962, p. 356) found that the professionals he studied were able to exercise power due to “access to persons, information, and instrumentalities,” this study found that communicators exercise their influence both because they have capital related to media and strategy and because they have access to their organizations' strategic decision-making units and management.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has elaborated on the matters of cooperation and tensions among professionals conducting strategic advocacy work in CSOs. Specifically, by analyzing tensions in policy work, this article makes three contributions. First, it traces the somewhat empowered position of communicators in policy teams to the ongoing process of mediatization. Second, it describes how mediatization in relation to policy work in CSOs promotes internal conflicts in strategic policy work, contrasting the production of in-depth knowledge to that of framing. Third, exposing these tensions as conflicts within the field of policy professionals has allowed for an analysis revealing how professionals with capital related to strategic media work have a better capacity to set agendas for their employing organizations' policy work. The study thus demonstrates that the process of mediatization entails the elevation of communicators and their skills and strategies in organizations' policy work when the media logic becomes an accepted “rule of the game” (Esser, 2013, p. 161). Communicators' central position within policy teams, at the expense of policy analysis expertise, affects the power balance between the policy professionals active in the field, possibly also altering what is recognized as symbolic capital in the field. With ample control over CSO communication as well as policy production, these particular policy professionals become the story tellers and news makers of civil society (cf. Strömbäck & Esser, 2009).

The conflicts between the policy professionals described here could, on one hand, be understood as productive for the organizations, advancing their media strategies in competition with more technical and academic input from analysts and investigators. One could argue that without the increasing employment of communicators, CSOs may lose strength and consequence in public policy making and public debate. However, there is also the risk that mediatization may push CSOs to specifically advance their work by means of branding, framing, and strategic communication, while losing strength in knowledge production and communication regarding more complex material. Although CSOs might succeed in gaining media influence, “they may end up losing the war, as standards of newsworthiness begin to become prime criteria to evaluate issues, policies, and politics” (Cook, 2005, p. 163). In the long run, these changes may risk alienating both policy professionals and members of CSOs from “the cause,” with the policy produced becoming detached from the members whom CSOs are supposed to represent.

The national case selection limits generalizability across civil society contexts. Although this study has identified a trend for organizations to put more resources and influence into communication and media management, more research is necessary to further validate the influence of media-
tization and the importance of mediatization as a concept in different organizational and empirical contexts. A suggestion for further research would be to study the division of labor within CSOs, in the interest of analyzing in what organizations these tensions arise and also which professional roles are more prominent within the organization, and how this affects advocacy work. Further research would benefit from research across organizations, both smaller and larger CSOs from a comparative perspective, and likewise from in-depth case research analyzing entire organizations and the historical development of their different policy and communication departments.

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