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## Lobbying of Mobility and Transport Business Associations in Spain: Key Variables Influencing Public Decision-Making

### Lobby de las asociaciones empresariales de movilidad y transporte en España: las principales variables para influir en las decisiones públicas

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#### Abstract

Lobbying is among the most controversial activities within public relations. Traditionally, interest groups in the mobility and transport sectors have been actively engaged in policymaking due to their significant impact on environmental issues. This research aims to assess the influence of this sector throughout the first half of 2022, comparing its lobbying power to that of other Spanish industries. Furthermore, it examines the relative influence capacity across subsectors, including manufacturers and dealers, component suppliers and repair agents, passenger transport, and freight transport. Each organization's influence is quantified based on various criteria, including its representation on committees, membership size, employee count, longevity, transparency, and economic significance. Collectively, mobility and transport associations rank below the digital transition and agri-food industries in terms of influence. High-ranking organizations within the mobility sector owe their scores primarily to strong representation in public committees and large membership bases; notably, motor vehicle manufacturers and dealers hold the leading positions within the mobility sector rankings.

#### Keywords

Public affairs; Lobbying; mobility; ranking; transparency; transport

#### Resumen

*El lobby es una de las actividades de relaciones públicas más controvertidas. Tradicionalmente, los grupos de interés del sector de la movilidad y el transporte han participado en la elaboración de políticas por su papel en cuestiones medioambientales. Esta investigación pretende averiguar la influencia de este sector a lo largo del primer semestre de 2022, en comparación con otras industrias de España. También profundiza en la capacidad comparativa de influencia entre subsectores: fabricantes y concesionarios; componentes y agentes de reparación; transporte de personas, y transporte de mercancías. Cada organización recibe una puntuación en función de su número de puestos en comités, número de integrantes, cifra de personal, antigüedad, transparencia y relevancia económica. En conjunto, las asociaciones de movilidad y transporte se sitúan por detrás de las industrias de transición digital y agroalimentaria en el ranking de influencia. Las puntuaciones de las organizaciones mejor posicionadas se basan principalmente en su número de puestos en comités públicos y de integrantes; las compañías fabricantes y concesionarios de vehículos de motor encabezan la clasificación de movilidad.*

#### Palabras clave

Asuntos Públicos; lobby; movilidad; ranking; transparencia; transporte

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Conceptual approach to lobbying and Public Affairs

According to Davidson (2015: 617-618), Public Affairs, understood as a branch of public relations, is the discipline of building relationships between organisations that focus on policy making, including reputation management, and that of hot topics or issues that concern a certain entity. This means that, in addition to lobbying, Public Affairs encompasses institutional relations and corporate activism (Labarca. 2020: 1).

Lobbying, on the other hand, is defined as the communicative act aimed at influencing governmental decisions; it is, therefore, a specific action within the practice of Public Affairs. Thus, a lobbying strategy is determined both by the type of audience that receives the message, and by the goal of such message, which in this case is to influence the executive or legislative powers, on behalf of legitimate interests (Sadi and Ramos- Meneghetti, 2020: 1).

The concept of Public Affairs is therefore comparable to that of political public relations, and can be defined as the management process by which an organisation undertakes politically motivated communicative actions to try to influence, build and maintain beneficial relationships with its stakeholders and thus achieve its mission and goals (Stromback and Kioussis, 2019).

In this equation between Public Affairs and political public relations it should be considered that, whenever public relations are applied to the communication of political activity for persuasive purposes, these efforts meet all the requirements to be considered propaganda (Arceo, 1988): 55). In fact, propaganda shares with Public Affairs the central role played of the priorities and approaches advocated by the organisation (O'Shaughnessy, 2020).

At the same time, although there is no unanimity among specialists on the conceptual differences between interest groups and lobbies (Crespo - Val, 2020: 110), the latter term is considered to be closely linked to the concept of power. Thus, what sets a lobby apart from an interest group is its capacity to exert a certain degree of coercion over political power beyond the communicative techniques of lobbying, threatening to exercise any measures that the lobby has recourse to (Pineda-Cachero, 2002).

### 1.2. Lobbying regulation in Spain and Europe

In Spain, there is still no common regulation for lobbying activities throughout the territory (Ridao, 2018: 73-74). The Spanish Constitution establishes that the law must regulate the means through which citizens, associations and organisations are heard when drafting provisions that impact them.

The most recent attempt at national regulation is the draft Law on Transparency and Integrity in the Activities of Interest Groups, which foresees the creation of a State Register of Interest Groups. However, since its approval by the Government on 8 November 2022, the initiative has remained on hold (Vargas - Martín, 2023). The draft understands the concept of influence as any communication with representatives of the public administrations and its public sector, which has the goal to participate in the decision-making process, the design of policies or new laws and regulations. However, it excludes from the concept of lobbying the intervention in already regulated participation processes (such as Popular Legislative Initiatives or PLI), and the activities of individuals without an economic interest on the matter.

While awaiting the final processing of this new regulation, Law 19/2014, of 19 December, on Transparency, Access to Public Information and Good Governance, and its developments at the regional level, remains in force (Ridao, 2018): 12-16). This text contains obligations that directly affect the practice of lobbying, such as active publicity of the activities of the different public administrations; the right of access to public information, and the establishment of a Transparency Portal to comply with these principles, publishing budgetary information, draft laws, public contracts, etc. All of this is controlled by a Council for Transparency and Good Governance (Bermúdez-Sánchez, 2020: 64).

To understand the practice of lobbying in Spain, Rubio-Núñez (2018: 408-409) proposes the concept of parliamentary lobbying, understood as a union of people who, autonomously and using self-organization, try to influence the legislative power for the benefit of their shared interests. Such practice is currently regulated by the Code of Conduct of the General Parliament, the latest update of which in October 2020 requires Members to make their agenda of meetings public on a transparency website; it also establishes a range of sanctions for those who do not comply with this practice. However, the procedures for enforcing compliance have been criticised for their ambiguity (Nieto-Jiménez, 2020: 43).

At EU level, the Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2012) states in Article 11.2 that the EU institutions must engage in dialogue with citizens, associations and civil society in general, in order to consider their contributions. In this regard, in 2011 the European Commission and the European Parliament launched a Transparency Register for stakeholder relations. The current

Interinstitutional Agreement between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on this Transparency Register dates from 20 May 2021, and it was made compulsory for organisations and self-employed persons who participate in EU policy-making, or hold meetings with members of any of the three aforementioned institutions - thus becoming compulsory also for access to Council positions (Bunea, 2020).

### **1.3. Why is lobbying for mobility and transport groups so important?**

The mobility sector has been heavily challenged for its role in causing climate change. For this reason, the main purpose of this research is to estimate its practical influence capacity, identifying beforehand the variables that determine it.

The European Union's commitment to decarbonisation has led to measures such as the target to reduce the average carbon emissions of vehicles in the car fleet by 37.5% between 2021 and 2030 (Haas & Sander, 2020: 11), in line with the new emission performance standards imposed through Directive 443/2019. However, the current existing link between economic growth, traffic growth and car industry activity would hinder the transition to a decarbonised transport system (Schweddes, 2011). Meanwhile, with regard to the freight sector, the work of Dyrhaug (2014) shows how the national interests of certain Member States lead to vetoing new initiatives, creating further obstacles to policy integration.

In this regard, those countries with a large automotive industry tend to have stronger associations in the mobility and transport sectors, and have faced greater industrial opposition to decarbonisation measures and the adoption of electric vehicles (Rietmann & Lieven, 2019). In 2021, Spain was the second largest motor vehicle manufacturer in the European Union, second only to Germany (ANFAC, 2022: 3). In the same vein, Haas and Sander (2020: 12) point to the need to link European legislative processes with national and regional policy debates, so that a more positive and effective dynamic in European policies can be enhanced.

### **1.4. The problems of influence and survival of interest groups**

#### **1.4.1. Approach to key variables**

Assessments provided by stakeholders are frequently used by public officials to be informed about hot topics during the law-making process (Varone et al, 2020). Interest groups tend to be better informed about their particular fields than political decision-makers, transferring knowledge to them through informational lobbying (Awad, 2024). Information can thus be a political tool in its own right.

The work of Rasmussen and Otjes (2024) shows that political office holders respond very differently to public opinion than to interest groups: while the former has a direct effect on their voting behaviour, the latter has a weaker impact except when there is a clear ideological alignment. For this reason, Lowery (2007) and Nownes (2015) have identified as their key resources the number of participants, or the people and entities that follow them. For Lowery (2007), what these people need first and foremost are people willing to work for their causes.

Regarding group age as a variable, Hanegraaf, Van-der-Ploeg and Berkhout (2020: 4) conclude that organisations that have been in existence longer have had more time to forge good relations with those in political decision-making positions. Almansa-Martínez, Moreno-Cabanillas and Castillo-Esparcia (2021: 239) highlight the different factors conditioning the capacity of interest groups to participate in policy-making processes. These include: their potential to mobilise participants or supporters, as a show of social support; their financial capacity; their direct access to and communication with public authorities; as well as their good social image, strategic place in society and the economy, and alignment with the social demands and values that public officials address.

However, Fisker (2015) provides the most comprehensive research to look at the variables that enable a stakeholder to perform optimally. This work assessed at the criteria that determine the survival of these groups, analysing a sample from 1976 to 2010; and explained why some manage to stay relevant over time. Their study confirmed that the number of members, the number of staff and the number of seats in public committees increase both a lobby's chances of survival and its representativeness in society.

#### **1.4.2. The links between survival, influence and impact on public opinion**

Due to the link between this capacity for survival and the reputation of each interest group, the variables described by Fisker (2015) are particularly relevant for assessing a lobby's capacity for influence. It should not be forgotten that reputation is the set of attributes that result from the public's perception of the organisation's past actions, which set it apart from others and even allow predicting its future conduct (Bitektine et al. 2020); therefore, reputation is an intangible asset built over time. Having a good reputation implies having obtained legitimacy in the opinion of target audiences, as the lobby has behaved in accordance with social expectations (Miotto et al. 2020): 345).

Consequently, in order to obtain the legitimacy that guarantees its influencing capacity, it will ensure that its behaviour is in line with the set of norms accepted by its stakeholders (Göcke *et al.* 2022). Ihlen and Raknes (2020) recall that an organisation's licence to operate depends on its performance according to social standards, and its capacity to convey that it brings positive financial, democratic, health and environmental consequences. Precisely those organisations with less power will make a greater effort to detect social norms and abide by them in order to be seen as advancing legitimate goals (Levine, 1999), and thus increasing the capacity to influence the public opinion that sees it in this light.

In sum, the long-term survival of an organisation, with the corresponding variables described by Fisker (2015) for stakeholder recognition will be the result of the social influence achieved through the strategy of compliance. Precisely for this reason, indirect lobbying is a key element of such a strategy, since interest groups will need to carry out communication actions aimed at those groups of public opinion with whom they need to legitimise themselves.

Indirect lobbying encompasses all activities without face-to-face contact with the political decision-maker, such as producing communicative opinion pieces in an attempt to shape public discourse (Dinan, 2021: 239), relying for this purpose on the use of political communication and propaganda. One of the most relevant tools is grassroots actions, which involve getting the target public to mobilise on the issue that concerns the lobby and, thus, collaborate in exerting pressure on public institutions; and astroturfing, whereby the lobby gives specific instructions on how to carry out these "citizen participation" actions (Crespo - Val, 2020). The interest group will also have at its disposal social networks, the support of opinion leaders, the dissemination of mobilising ideas through the media, demonstrations, letters to public officials and party representatives, etc.

Grassroots actions have proven to be particularly effective in getting policy decision-makers to publicly support a measure, but less so in their ultimate voting behaviour, so their effectiveness lies in the first phase of the process (Olejnik, 2021). Other indirect lobbying tools are seminars and conferences (Fredheim, 2024), allowing proposals to be disseminated in a controlled communicative environment, and to establish networks with other stakeholders in the long term.

Ultimately, only a lobby supported by public opinion will have a good enough reputation to deploy the various key variables described above (Fisker, 2015), survive and thus exert effective influence. This is why it is fundamental to generate communicative spaces to participate in the processes of public discussion, regardless of people's access to political office. Lobbying strategies should be aimed at proposing issues with which to frame the terms, limits and contents of such a discussion (Almansa-Martínez *et al.*, 2021): 246). A recent study by Castillo - Esparcia *et al.* (2023) revealed that 88% of people engaged in professional lobbying in Spain focused on traditional direct techniques (meetings with representatives of public institutions, participation in working groups...); and only 12% practised grassroots or indirect lobbying.

#### **1.4.3. Economic weight for leverage**

Similarly, more powerful lobbies would rely on greater economic power to gain the attention of policymakers and lawmakers (Lowery & Gray, 2004): 165), and Fisker (2015: 712) acknowledges that monitoring political processes and regular contact with the architects of those political processes requires financial resources. A serious assessment of the power of a lobby in relational terms must look at how it controls its own resources, rather than merely observing its behaviour (Mikkonen, 2024): 67). However, it should not be forgotten that the legitimacy of each agent's power will come from its conformity to recognised and accepted social norms (Weber, 1971, in Revaz, 2024), so that such power will be accepted as a matter of course.

In parallel, the average size of producers belonging to an interest group, as well as their percentage of income derived from asset ownership, are also conceptualised as variables that may entail the greatest impact of a lobby on public policy (Potters & Sloof, 1996). In addition, financial resources are essential to strengthen the capacity of the interest group to provide information to the ultimate policy decision-makers (Flöthe, 2019). In the same vein, Koch and Schulz-Knappe (2021), along with ethical considerations, highlight what they call "informational sovereignty": the ability of an interest group to provide information that no one else can offer to the public office. As it has been exposed here, there is a wide range of economic variables as factors to be taken into account when assessing a lobby's capacity to influence.

#### **1.5. Hypotheses and goals**

Based on Fisker's (2015) variables, several hypotheses have been outlined and refined through the exploratory phase of the research.

Hypothesis 1 states that the mobility and transport industry is the most influential industry on public policy. If an industry intends to maximise its benefits from *Next Generation* funds, it must show that its efforts are focused on digital and energy transformation. These funds are granted to accelerate the EU's economic recovery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Spanish timetable for the *Next Generation* funds included incentives for the purchase of electric vehicles, together with the Technological Plan for a Sustainable Automotive Industry (Baena *et al.*, 2023: 7-8).

Hypothesis 2 suggests that participation in institutional commissions and public committees is the most important factor for a transport interest group to be influential, while the number of members of each organisation will be the second most relevant factor. Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace (2006: 50) estimated that approximately 85% of the EU institutions' decisions come from these formal deliberative spaces.

Finally, the third hypothesis states that those organisations in the vehicle manufacturing and sales sector will have the greatest capacity to influence the entire mobility sector, followed by the freight transport sub-sectors, the passenger transport sub-sector and the car repair shop stakeholders. The work of Baehrt, Bare and Heddesheimer (2024) already stated the greater likelihood of those organisations most exposed to measures intended to mitigate climate change to resort to lobbying. Baehr *et al.* (2024: 30) report how Ford went so far as to publicly release an official statement of support for the Paris Climate Accords, and against the Trump administration's relaxation of penalties for less fuel-efficient models. At the European level, Germany also reflects the power that these companies are able to exert over public institutions. For example, in 2009, the automotive industry succeeded in negotiating with the German government for lower emission limits (Haas & Sander, 2020: 2).

Furthermore, in recent years, there has been a debate among EU stakeholders and decision-makers on regulations for the transport of goods by land, sea or air; the debate in question has revolved around the role of ethanol and biodiesel production and consumption (Drabik & Venus, 2019). The implications of the 2011 Eurovignette Directive are still being discussed both at institutional level and in the public sphere by freight transport organisations. The Eurovignette requires lorries to pay a fee for the use of European motorways (Dyrhaage, 2014: 985-986), based on their carbon dioxide emissions.

In passenger transport, new mobility-as-a-service (MaaS) platforms are lobbying for further deregulation (Dubal *et al.*, 2018), and are facing opposition from taxi associations. MaaS platforms have developed different indirect lobbying practices: from the temporary mobilisation of some of their users, to the selection of their personal stories to generate content in favour of deregulation; the creation of groups to carry the initiative, and alliances between grassroots movement with existing associations (Yates, 2023: 1918).

Therefore, the hypotheses defined have been derived from the following goals:

- G1: to quantitatively compare the influence potential of stakeholders in the Spanish mobility and transport sector with the influence of stakeholders in other industries.
- G2: detecting which influencing variables set apart those organisations in the mobility and transport sector that stand out for their capacity to influence Spanish public policies.
- G3: to prioritise the different sub-sectors within the mobility and transport sector in terms of their capacity to influence Spanish public policies.

## **2. Materials and methods**

### **2.1. Exploratory phase**

The methodology used follows that of a recent analysis of the influence capacity of Spanish civil society organisations (Arceo-Vacas and Álvarez-Sánchez, 2023). Thus, the exploratory analysis assessed the relative importance of the main elements observed in the theoretical review as key to the influence of an interest group.

First, a descriptive analysis of the main stakeholder registers in Spain was carried out: the only voluntary, state-level register is that of the National Commission for Markets and Competition (CNMC, as per its Spanish acronym). However, the most complete is the EU Transparency Register, even for studying Spanish lobbies, because it is compulsory to register to access the offices of the European Parliament and the European Commission (Ridao, 2018: 76). Meanwhile, some Spanish regions have already started to require mandatory registration for anyone who wants to meet with regional public officials, such as the Transparency Register of the Autonomous Region of Madrid and the Stakeholder Consultation Registry of Catalonia. There are also local registries in cities such as Madrid and Barcelona.

In this phase, the communication activity of a critical sample of 52 organisations (both interest groups and consultancy firms), chosen on the basis of their relevance, representativeness and contribution

to the Spanish economy, was also reviewed. Given the observed role of indirect lobbying actions on the groups that a lobby aims to legitimise in order to gain influence, their social media statistics were recorded between 1 May and 13 June 2021.

## **2.2. Surveys to opinion leaders**

Between 5 July and 24 October 2021, a quantitative questionnaire was distributed to a critical sample of 19 experts from Spanish lobbying organisations. The aim of this technique was to clarify the specific weights of the various factors identified in the lobbying literature, with a view to creating a quantitative ranking based on the influence capacity of each professional organisation.

A selection was made from among the organisations whose social media activity had been reviewed, based on those organisational differentiating factors formulated by Boyne (2002) that were applicable. Thus, the sample was evenly distributed in terms of the size of the organisations by number of people employed; their declared budgets; the diversity of their goals; and the sectors to which they belong. As indicated by Mbaka and Monday Isiramen (2021: 32) for exploratory research, their samples are usually small and respond to certain quotas of representation. The sufficiency of these small samples is due to the fact that, in an exploratory phase, the main goal is to gain new insights into the object of study (Swedberg, 2020). Indeed, the most common sample size range for qualitative interviews starts at 20 people (Bekele and Aho, 2022).

The parallels between Lock and Jacobs' (2023) sample for their survey of perceptions in the Public Affairs profession about the framing technique, and that of the present exploratory phase, are significant: Lock and Jacobs interviewed experts from seven stakeholder groups; six consultancies; five companies; four governments; and two civil society organisations. The main caveat was the agreement that, for the present research, professionals from the business associations themselves should prevail; while the views of two leading academics would be brought in to enrich the formers' perspectives. Thus, the sample for this exploratory questionnaire consisted of: ten people from stakeholder associations; four from consulting firms; three from companies in the industry; and two from the Academia. Their socio-demographic and professional profiles can be consulted in the sheet "Interviews with specialists" in the database annexed to this text.

The questionnaire asked them to rate the importance of the following aspects from 0 to 10:

- number of members/followers of the interest group.
- Its participation in working groups and public commissions.
- Seniority.
- Number of stakeholder staff engaged in Public Affairs.

In addition, they were asked to rate from 0 to 10 the importance of being present in the following transparency registers:

- EU Transparency Register
- Register of the National Commission of Markets and Competition
- Register of the Regional Government of Catalonia.
- Professional Association of Institutions Relations Managers (APRI, as per its Spanish acronym)
- Transparency Register of the Autonomous Region of Madrid.
- Madrid City Council Registry.
- Other registers.

## **2.3. Measures taken for field work**

After the exploratory phase, a sample of 186 associations from all Spanish economic sectors was generated; 24 of them belong to the mobility and transport sector. It resulted from examining the transparency records provided by the National Commission of Markets and Competition, and the Madrid and Catalonia administrations, as of December 2021. The presence of an organisation (or one of its regional affiliates) in at least one of them made it necessary to include it in the sample of this study. Table 1 shows the distribution of the 186 organisations across sectors.

**Table 1: Sample of professional associations by sector of the Spanish economy**

Position	Sector	Number of organizations
1	Transport and mobility	n = 24
2	Energy	n = 21
3	Agricultural and food	n = 17
4	Multi-sectoral associations	n = 16
5	Healthcare	n = 14
(6)	Digital transition	n = 10
(6)	Financial services	n = 10
8	Tourism and hospitality	n = 7
-	Other sectors	n = 84
-	Total sample	n = 186

Source: Prepared by the authors based on a review of the business and professional associations with records in the National Commission of Markets and Competition, and the interest group registers of the Madrid and Catalonia administrations, as of December 2021

In order to establish the weights applied to ranking on the influence capacity of Spanish stakeholders, the following process was carried out.

From the responses of the sample of specialists to the questionnaire, the mean scores for each variable consulted were extracted. Then, taking as a reference the data available in open sources on the critical sample of 52 organisations whose indirect lobbying activity on social media was analysed in the exploratory phase, four ranks were estimated for each aspect to be evaluated, and were scored from 1 to 4.

To determine these brackets 1 to 4, the number of 52 organisations was divided by four, forming groups of 13. For each variable, the cut-off between one bracket and the next was the nearest whole number to the best data among these 13 institutions. For example, of the 13 organisations with the least participation in public committees, none exceeded a presence on a single committee, so the cut-off between the first and second brackets was at that point; of the next 13 with the least institutional presence, none exceeded three committees, so the cut-off between the second and third brackets was there... and the same process for the cut-off between the third and fourth. This use of brackets, for the purpose of balance between the number of units located in each one, is for example common for distributing samples by age (Beltrán-Bueno and Parra-Meroño, 2017: 47-48). The final weights applied are described in Table 2.

**Table 2: Method of assessing lobbying power (without multipliers)**

Variable	Average grade granted by the sample of experts	The scores of the groups shall be multiplied by the average score of the sample of experts
Number of committees and working groups	8,86 (n=18)	- 4: more than five - 3: four or five - 2: two or three - 1: one or none
Number of members	6,68 (n=17)	- 4: more than 100 members - 3: 51 to 100 members - 2: 16 to 50 members - 1: up to 15 members
Seniority	6,35 (n=17)	- 4: over 50 years - 3: 35 to 50 years - 2: 20 to 35 years - 1: under 20 years



Variable	Average grade granted by the sample of experts	The scores of the groups shall be multiplied by the average score of the sample of experts
Number of employees	5,53 (n=16)	- 4: more than 10 full-time employees - 3: 5 to 10 - 2: 2 to 5 - 1: less than 2

Source: Author's own.

With regard to the number of members of an interest group, methodologically, it could be questioned whether the adjustment of the brackets should be made for the total population of each particular sub-sector that an organisation intends to represent. However, several reasons suggest otherwise: first, the literature supporting the introduction of the number of components as a variable refers to it in absolute terms (Fisker, 2015; Almansa-Martínez *et al.*, 2021), without any reference to the relative size of each industry. In fact, Fisker (2015: 712) stresses the total number of units in the population from which an interest group emerges, stating that a high number of members is key precisely because "it can provide political legitimacy by demonstrating that its group represents a large constituency and enjoys social support". Thus, if the total number of companies in the sector that an association represents is in itself smaller than in other branches, this would already reflect a lower capacity for influence (a very important assessment when several sectors are fighting to defend conflicting interests vis-à-vis political decision-makers); regardless of whether virtually all of these companies are grouped together in such an association.

In addition, two further correction factors were applied. On the one hand, a multiplier factor was introduced depending on the economic weight of the sector(s) represented by the organisation. This was measured through the contribution of these sectors to the Gross Value Added (GVA) of the Spanish economy in 2020 and 2021. This methodological decision is supported by how the literature (Potters & Sloof, 1996; Klüver 2013; Rietmann & Lieven, 2019) emphasises the importance of the economic weight of stakeholders. Also, by incorporating the specific weight of each sub-sector as a methodological criterion, this multiplier helps to balance the common brackets used for the number of members variable. GVA was chosen because, statistically, it reflects the total value created by a sector, while discounting intermediate consumption; thus avoiding the duplications often associated with the measurement of Gross Domestic Product. GVA by sector can be found in the Eurostat database. Furthermore, the sample of specialists tended to give the highest scores to those registers that are mandatory in their respective fields of application. Consequently, the enrolment of an organisation in one or more of them gave rise to another multiplier rule. The application of the multipliers for both presence in registers and contribution to GVA is described in Table 3.

**Table 3: Coefficients applicable to the scoring of a business interest group**

Contribution of the sector(s) represented by the organisation to the total Spanish GVA	Multiplication of the overall score by:	Number of compulsory registers in which it is included (EU, Autonomous Region of Madrid, Autonomous Government of Catalonia and Madrid City Council)	Multiplication of the overall score by:
Over 20%	1.7	Four	1.4
15-20%	1.6	Three	1.3
10-15%	1.5	Two	1.2
7-10%	1.4	One	1.1
5-7%	1.3		
3-5%	1.2		
1-3%	1.1		
Under 1%	1		

Source: Author's own.



Determining the total number of committees in which the organisation sits was sometimes a challenge, depending on how it was reflected in the various registers. Public committees or commissions are understood to be the bodies referred to under the following headings:

- UE Register "Participation in EU structures and platforms"; "Non-official intergroups and groupings (European Parliament)"; "Commission expert groups and other similar entities (European Commission)"; and "Participation in other EU-supported fora and platforms".
- Transparency Register of the Community of Madrid: sub-heading "Group-table-body".
- Consultative Interest Groups of Catalonia: "Activities within the scope of the register".

When a business association declared its membership in another federation, the latter's data were added in order to calculate the score for participation in committees and for staff, if there was a clear similarity between the fields of interest of the national association and those of the federation in question. The number of members of the confederations was taken as the sum of the members of the different member associations. The only use of data from the regional organisations was to replace the national statistics when no more open source information was available, and data from the sectoral organisations within the federation analysed were not taken into account (except for membership figures, which were aggregated).

Finally, the only data taken into account for the staff figure is the one reflected by default in the EU Transparency Register records as "Full Time Equivalents (FTE)". The FTE figures of the national or European federations in which the analysed organisation participates were also aggregated. Only when the data was not on the EU register, spokespersons of the associations concerned were asked directly.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Mobility and transport, the third most influential economic sector

The average score of the mobility and transport industry associations (98.894 pt.) is the third highest of all those assessed. Only organisations in the digital transition (101.805 pt. on average) and food and agriculture (99,978 pt.) sectors are significantly above. Established sectors such as health, energy and tourism do not achieve robust results following the calculations applied. Overall, only the multi-sectoral associations score significantly above the 100-point milestone, but this is not surprising when, of course, each member is engaged in a wide range of economic activities. In other words: they benefit from a unique relevance because they represent the interests of many more industries.

The average scores for all economic sectors analysed can be found in Table 4.

**Table 4: Ranking of the potential influence of each sector on institutional decision-makers**

Position	Sector	Sample of professional associations	Average grade
1	Multi-sectoral associations	n = 16	116.414 pt
2	Digital transition	n = 10	101.805 pt
3	Agricultural and food	n = 17	99.978 pt
4	Transport and mobility	n = 24	98.894 pt
5	Healthcare	n = 13	95.415 pt
6	Other sectors	n = 68	88.109 pt
7	Tourism and Hospitality Industry	n = 7	86.774 pt
8	Energy	n = 21	85.734 pt
9	Financial services	n = 10	85.302 pt
	Total sample	n = 186	93.901 pt

Source: author's own based on data from the files of each organisation included in the sample, from the registers of interest groups of the EU, and the Madrid and Catalonia administrators.

Ten mobility clusters score more than 100 points out of a total of 24 business associations. In contrast, the results in the digital world are much more mixed, with only three organisations scoring more than 100

points, even though the industry average exceeds this mark. For the full table with the scores of the 186 organisations analysed, see the database annexed to this text.

In the meantime, how does the food and agriculture sector manage to stay ahead of the transport sector? In fact, it is the reverse of the phenomenon we have just discussed: agri-food shows little variation between its associations. In fact, the best positioned is the National Association of Pork Producers (ANPROGA POR, as per its Spanish acronym) in 17th place (136,395 pt.). This additional fact reflects a practical tie between the two industries' capacity to influence.

### **3.2. The number of members is as important as the participation in the working groups**

According to the data collected, participation in committees and working groups is a key factor: seven of the top 10 mobility and transport stakeholders score highest for their participation in public committees and working groups, while the same is true for the number of members in eight of them. The general trend is the same: of the 20 most influential stakeholders in the global ranking, 16 obtain the highest score for their participation in committees, and 17 for their number of members. Approximately 40% of the 186 professional associations are involved in more than five commissions. The complete ranking with all partial scores of the mobility and transport sector associations is presented in the "Transport and Mobility" sheet of the database annexed to this paper.

This result illustrates the importance for interest groups of both participating in institutional meetings and having as many constituents as possible. Among the top 10 mobility associations, only three of them have less than 100 members.

Although seniority is generally relegated to a secondary role (only eight associations out of the top 20 obtain the highest score), in the transport sector the 10 most influential are organisations that go way back: only the Spanish Confederation of Bus Transport (CONFEBUS, as per its Spanish acronym) is noticeably more recent than the rest, as it was founded in 2014 (making it 37 years younger than the second most recent one). In terms of the relevance of the number of Public Affairs staff, only five transport stakeholders score top marks in this area; and only 10 of the 20 most influential organisations in the global ranking.

Meanwhile, despite the usual portrayal of the Spanish automotive industry, the results show how the introduction of the GVA multiplier plays against the leverage of most transport organisations. Following Eurostat data, in 2019 the manufacture of motor vehicles accounted for only 1.10% of Spanish Gross Value Added; the sale and repair of motor vehicles accounted for only 1.60% of GVA, and that of land transport was 2.14%.

### **3.3. Automotive industry is the most influential sub-sector**

Vehicle manufacturers and dealers occupy four of the top six positions in the mobility and transport ranking. The Spanish National Two-Wheel Companies Association (ANESDOR, as per its Spanish acronym) is recognised as the most influential organisation in the mobility industry in Spain, with maximum points for participation in public committees, number of members and seniority.

The remaining estimates of influence were not confirmed in the fieldwork. On average, the four passenger transport stakeholders are considerably more influential (114.786 pts.) than the six freight transport stakeholders (95.378 pts.). The latter rank fourth and last, behind even the eight lobbies of the spare parts and repair industry (99.403 pt.).

Looking at the results for the spare parts and repairs sub-sector, it is clear that the spare parts distributors and fuel retailers are more influential than garages: they occupy the top three positions out of a total of eight organisations in this sub-field. The Spanish Association of Garages and Car Repair Shops (CETRAA as per its Spanish acronym) is the best positioned of the repair lobby, but it is only 13th in the entire sector ranking. In terms of the various types of transport, the Spanish Confederation of Freight Transport (CETM as per its Spanish acronym) is the third most influential organisation in the mobility sector, with 147.761 points. Meanwhile, two of the organisations in this sub-sector occupy the last positions in the ranking: the Spanish Business Association for Logistics and Transport (UNO, 52.311 pt.) and the Spanish Association for the Promotion of Short Distance Sea Shipping (SPC Spain, 44.495 pt.).

In order to provide accurate comparisons, in this final analysis, two organisations have been excluded from the sample, as they could not be classified in any of the four sub-sectors identified: the Spanish Road Association (AEC, as per its Spanish acronym) and the rail transport association MAFEX. The scope of their objectives is too broad, and they present too many different profiles among their membership.

#### 4. Discussion

Previous studies on lobbies have focused on the key factors that ensure their chances of long-term survival (Fisker, 2015); or on their economic power (Potters & Sloof, 1996; Klüver 2013). However, little has been done to implement a method to assess how influential a given professional association is. Through this study, a practical observation is provided on the factors to be considered for a formula to assess the influence of interest groups on public office; a formula that arises from the importance for the interest group to legitimise itself in the eyes of its stakeholders if it wants to leverage on the issues affecting it.

Contrary to the results obtained in the fieldwork, the first hypothesis formulated theorised that mobility would be at the top of the ranking by economic sector. It was based on the relevance of the automotive industry and transport activities in the distribution of *Next Generation* funds (Baena *et al.*, 2023) and how both have been successful in the past in influencing European institutions (Haas & Sanders, 2020). However, the results show that this path does not necessarily mean more power for stakeholders in this sector.

With regard to participation in public committees, national associations tend to delegate activity in them to the federations to which they are affiliated. The practice of participation in commissions is basically a European habit, which falls within the spectrum of political public relations as described by Strömback and Kiousis (2019), involving direct communicative actions in pursuit of beneficial relationships to achieve public policy goals. Along these lines, coalition building and the degree of cooperation between lobbies is an element whose potential impact on influence has been formulated by Junk (2020).

In terms of membership numbers, the fieldwork results confirm the desirability of membership strategies if the group is to improve its capacity to influence; such strategies will in turn reflect the success of the lobby in its legitimisation efforts. The result is in line with Dwidar's (2022) finding that larger coalitions are able to achieve more influence over public policy because institutional decision-makers value their internal diversity; indeed, a large number of members may be an attribute with which each target audience builds the reputation they recognise for the interest group.

The leadership of the vehicle sales and manufacturing sub-sector as the most influential branch of transport is consistent with other research. Without going any further, the automotive industry lobby has succeeded in getting US institutions to reduce car recalls (Singh & Grewal, 2022); and the implementation of more relaxed CO<sub>2</sub> emission standards in the USA (Galvin, 2020). However, Haas and Sanders (2020: 6-12) warn about its evolution in Europe: in 2009, for example, its strength made the emission limits imposed very unambitious. In contrast, the recent Directive 443/2019 reflects how its influence persists, but the standard is more demanding as climate change has gained prominence in public opinion.

Judging from the results of the specific ranking for mobility and transport associations, the road transport sub-sector should be of particular concern to their stakeholders due to the current international context, where rising freight and fuel prices make it of utmost importance for these organisations to make their voice heard. In the 1990s, the strategies of the road transport lobby had already been compared with those of the pharmaceutical sector in Great Britain (Bowen, 1996): in both cases, it became evident that the opportunities for influence depended on taking advantage of the most uncertain and complex situations, taking care of the support they could obtain among public opinion; and on having as much associated information as possible.

The results also show that passenger transport organisations have deployed more resources than freight delivery organisations, thus gaining more institutional leverage. However, in the future, more research is needed on the influence of each sub-sector on CO<sub>2</sub> emission targets. For example, within freight transport, Von-Malmborg (2023) describes two major blocks of shipping lobbies participating in EU working groups, advocating different degrees of implementation of these limits; but the ECSA (European Community Shipowners' Association) position prevailed, so that the alternative fuels stimulus package was not finally implemented. All these results (especially when some ship-owning companies were in the group in favour of more drastic emission limits), would reflect a case of external conflict visible to decision-making institutions, when agreement between similar organisations has proven to be vital for their influence on public policy (Truijens & Hanegraaf, 2024).

With regard to the limitations of the research, the accuracy and veracity of the data officially reflected in the transparency registers has been assumed, as this is the best available public information. Similarly, despite the commitment of many institutions to the implementation of these registers, much work remains to be done in terms of centralisation and harmonisation. For 32 of the 186 organisations in the total sample, it was necessary to contact them directly to check them on certain figures.

Moreover, the scores and ranges used will need to be updated periodically, in line with developments in the world of lobbying: the specific weight of each variable may change over time, reflecting the opinions of its practitioners; and changes in the four scoring ranges may become advisable. This could

change the validation of the hypotheses and thus the order of the rankings. Likewise, the criteria used for the selection of specialists in the exploratory phase (Boyne, 2002; Lock and Jacobs, 2023) will always condition the mean scores for each variable.

Several recommendations for the practice of lobbying arise. Firstly, Brussels remains the best place to influence the regulations that will be applied in Spain. Moreover, given that the data collected show how each interest group chooses the most convenient registers for its purpose, Spain should move towards a single, mandatory state register (Ridao, 2018), with the final approval of the current draft bill on the issue. In this vein, Labouřková and Vymetal's (2019) research on the practice of Public Affairs in Central and Eastern Europe showed that those countries with less democratic traditions were the most eager to introduce such measures.

Future research should address whether the strength of indirect *lobbying* by car manufacturers weakened after the Dieselgate scandal, which revealed major cheating in emissions testing (Dyrhaug, 2021); and delve into how the type of institutional committee in which the association is involved would impact on its ability to influence; depending on whether they are scientific, social dialogue or advisory committees - the most attractive of all to interest groups (Trofymentko & Lubinets, 2020): 50)-.

## 5. Conclusions

This research portrays the capacity of influence of the different business organisations in the mobility and transport sector, quantifying the power that each of them can exert through political and propagandistic communication actions on the rules and decisions that impact them. The variables scored are symptomatic of the success of the strategy of compliance with the social groups to which the lobby appeals, and have made it possible to carry out an analysis of the situation of the world of mobility and transport in the Spanish stakeholder ecosystem.

The results place this industry as the third most influential in the Spanish economy, behind only the digital and food and agricultural industries, with car manufacturing at the forefront. However, the distribution of influencing power among its various associations is less uneven than that of the digital transition sector, which achieves a higher average score. Consequently, a greater concentration in a few strong organisations (reflecting greater unity within them) would have contributed to confirming the hypothesis that it was the most influential sector on public decision-makers. Since this is not the case, the first hypothesis has been refuted.

Regarding the second goal, the scores for each variable have confirmed how the number of members of each organisation is almost as important as the number of public committees in which it participates. Transport associations in particular channel their influence through the working committees in Brussels, often through their membership of European federations. On the other hand, its Public Affairs staff numbers are much less decisive in terms of influence. The prominence of the number of association members in order for associations to be truly influential on public policy and regulation coincides with the advantage that the digital transition sector gains through its concentration in a few high-scoring organisations.

Finally, the third hypothesis of this research established that, of all the transport sub-sectors surveyed, the associations of vehicle manufacturers and sellers would have the greatest capacity to influence. The methodology applied has confirmed how large car manufacturers maintain their traditional power. But this is the only part of the hypothesis that is confirmed, since the last position of the freight transport groups shows their weakness in terms of power and influence, especially in comparison with passenger transport, a sub-sector that comes second in this internal comparison.

By developing a comprehensive methodology for assessing stakeholder capacity for influence, this article provides a methodological reference for future research in various sectoral, cultural or political contexts. In the future, further studies can be designed to find out how to include among the variables of influence the degree of specialisation of lobbies; the specific role they give to indirect lobbying in influencing public opinion; and the distribution of their internal structures.

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