# Which audience to target and what goal to achieve? Nonprofit politics looking beyond advocacy within a Flemish neo-corporatist context.

**Abstract**

Advocacy and its direct and indirect advocacy tactics have been heavily researched within nonprofit studies. However, next to influencing institutional elites, nonprofits could strive toward other political goals as well. Based on our current understanding of advocacy, we have uncovered another form of nonprofit politics: 'politicization' of the public sphere. In this study, we include both politicization and advocacy, and analyze the extent to which advocacy and politicization can be considered as two separate forms. Moreover, we examine the explanatory value of organizational size and age, public and market income and institutional field of activity, within the neo-corporatist context of Flanders, the northern region of Belgium. Making use of a large-N survey database of Flemish nonprofits, our findings show that: (a) advocacy is present to a larger degree than politicization, (b) advocacy and politicization are significantly correlated and (c) institutional field of activity and public income are important explanatory variables.

**Keywords**

Nonprofit organizations, advocacy, politicization of the public sphere, neo-corporatism, tactical repertoire

## 1. Introduction

In the last two decades, a growing body of scholarship has been devoted to nonprofits and their advocacy efforts (Grønbjerg & Prakash, 2017). Although several definitions of nonprofit advocacy can be found in the literature (for alternative definitions, see Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014), the following one is most frequently cited in recent work: *"any attempt to influence the decisions of any institutional elite on behalf of a collective interest"* (Jenkins, 2006, p. 267). Related to this definition and in order to fully grasp the meaning of *"any attempt to influence the decisions of any institutional elite"*, the advocacy tactics that are possibly available to nonprofits are heavily discussed within the research community (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Mosley, 2013). However, most scholars seem to agree on the conceptual distinction that is often made between two types: direct and indirect advocacy tactics. First, nonprofits can interact directly with institutional elites such as policy makers, corporate leaders and other nonprofit managers by, for example, contacting them by phone or by joining an advisory committee. Second, and possibly at the same time, these organizations can aim to transform public opinion by, for example, a demonstration, voter mobilization or letter writing campaigns with the intention of indirectly influencing institutional elites (Clear, Paull, & Holloway, 2018; Pekkanen & Smith, 2014; Verschuere & De Corte, 2015). Notwithstanding its relevance, it is from this particular distinction between direct and indirect advocacy tactics that we believe to have uncovered a significant limitation in nonprofit research to date: the exclusive focus on advocacy, as if nonprofit politics can be reduced to this political form alone (Busso, 2018; Fung, 2003; Fyall & Allard, 2017; Lichterman, 2006). Therefore, in light of this limitation, we argue that it is about time for nonprofit scholars to recognize and elaborate on a broader understanding of nonprofit politics looking beyond advocacy. Hence, the best way forward in this attempt, is to start from our current understanding of advocacy.

To make our arguments clear, we focus on the goal to be achieved and the audience to be targeted in relation to nonprofit politics (Halpin, Fraussen, & Ackland, 2021). While the goal of advocacy

is clearly stated as ultimately influencing the decisions of institutional elites, the audience to be targeted can be very divers ranging from a government official to the general public. However, taking all of the above into account, we assume that the audiences targeted by indirect advocacy tactics (e.g., the general public or social media users) can also be targeted by quiet similar tactics but with a different political goal in mind than influencing the decisions of institutional elites. In other words, if these audiences can be targeted indirectly for advocacy purposes, the question arises whether they can also be targeted for another political goal but in a more direct way. Take for instance 'nonprofit X' organizing a demonstration to rally for bold climate actions that should be taken by the national government and 'nonprofit Y' demonstrating for a change in views of the general public surrounding same sex marriage, without the goal of policy change in mind because same sex marriage is already legal. These two rather straightforward examples make clear that, even though both are similar in the chosen audience and political tactic, the latter one does not fit within the conceptual distinction of direct and indirect advocacy tactics nor within the – most common – definition of advocacy (i.e., influencing institutional elites and their policy decisions). The following remark by Garrow and Hasenfeld (2014, p. 92) perfectly summarizes our reasoning: *"… nonprofits may engage in similar tactics, or means, to pursue very different ends"*.

In this regard, based on communication, sociological and political theory as well as the broader field of civil society research, we can relate the latter example to the concept of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989). In short, the public sphere can be defined as the public arena where all kinds of actors discuss and debate on issues of collective concern, without necessarily trying to influence the decisions of institutional elites. As part of this public sphere, nonprofits are believed to contribute to its vitality by providing information, enabling debate and opinion formation or even by trying to change the dominant discourse in society (Amnå, 2006; Armony, 2004; Cantor, 2008; Lechterman & Reich, 2020; Stenling & Sam, 2020; Warren, 2003). Nonprofits can do this by targeting the same audiences and by using most of the same political tactics as indirect

advocacy, but with a different political goal in mind and thus with a more direct effect. In this study, we will refer to this form of nonprofit politics as 'politicization of the public sphere' (Busso, 2018; Fung, 2003; Warren, 2001). In order to summarize all of the above, we developed a conceptual framework that is based on the original work of Lang (2013) (see appendix 1 for the original framework). As can be seen in the figure below (Figure 1.1), she makes a distinction between (a) the communication modes of associations (the audience to be targeted) and (b) their targets (the goal to be achieved). However, for the purpose of our study, we also included which form of nonprofit politics corresponds to which combination of communication modes and targets.

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

In this paper, we will thus analyze (a) whether such a distinction in political goals and forms also exists empirically, and (b) a set of theories and hypotheses, based on previous studies, that can help us to explain why nonprofits are more or less involved in advocacy and/or politicization efforts. This research will be conducted within the nonprofit context of Flanders, the northern region of Belgium, which is characterized by a neo-corporatist tradition. Focusing on this particular context and history will enable us to contribute to nonprofit studies to date, as most research is predominantly conducted within a liberal nonprofit regime (e.g., United States or United Kingdom) (Guo & Zhang, 2014; Uhlin, 2009). Although both liberal and neo-corporatist nonprofit regimes are types of welfare states characterized by (a) a large nonprofit sector compared to, for example, social democratic nonprofit regimes and (b) a higher level of advocacy and politicization compared to, for example, more authoritarian nonprofit regimes (e.g., China) (Anheier, Lang, & Toepler, 2020; Guo & Zhang, 2014), there are some differences as well. Within liberal nonprofit regimes, there are indications that nonprofit politics has come under pressure due to several trends: regulations limiting nonprofit politicization and advocacy (Berry,

2005), mission drift due to an increase in the extent of service delivery (Garrow & Hasenfeld, 2014), growing marketization and competition for resources such as public funding (with a related fear of being too critical*: "afraid to bite the hand that feeds you"*) (Alexander & Fernandez, 2020; Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014). Based on available research, we know that all of these trends are not or to a lesser extent applicable to neo-corporatist nonprofit regimes (Anonymous, Anonymous, Bode, 2011; De Corte, Arys, & Roose, 2021). As a particular system of interest representation, not to be confused with earlier anti-democratic corporatist systems, neo-corporatism is typified by its strong intertwinement between the government and nonprofit sector (i.e., a higher level of public funding and co-financing compared to liberal nonprofit regimes, with some parts of the nonprofit sector even included in the state structure) (Streeck & Schmitter, 1985). Agreements with government are negotiated through institutionalized channels in order to reach broadly supported social compromises (e.g. direct contact with politicians) (Salamon & Anheier, 1998). Eventually, this neo-corporatist path dependency lead to a very stable and cooperative relationship between nonprofits and other societal actors such as the government. Some studies even describe this particular context as *"a culture of advocacy"*, which stresses the societal importance that is attributed to nonprofit politics (Arvidson, Johansson, Meeuwisse, & Scaramuzzino, 2018). Moreover, we assume that some privileged nonprofits have historically strong relationships with the government, and are thus more involved in advocacy, while part of the nonprofits do not have strong relationships with and access to institutional elites, and are therefore more involved in politicization efforts. In sum, within this neo-corporatist context, nonprofits are expected to be more actively involved in both advocacy and politicization efforts compared to nonprofits within liberal nonprofit regimes. Based on these considerations, we can formulate the following research question:

*To what extent do Flemish nonprofits engage in efforts of advocacy and politicization of the public sphere, and how can we explain this based on organizational age and size, level of public*

*and market income and the institutional field of activity?*

In the following sections of this paper, we will first discuss advocacy and politicization and formulate several hypotheses. Next, we will address the methods that have been used. We conclude by discussing the overall findings and the possible impact for nonprofit managers and scholars.

## 2. Conceptual and theoretical framework

### 2.1. Nonprofit politics: looking beyond advocacy?

First, nonprofit advocacy can involve many different audiences, venues and tactics (Grønbjerg & Prakash, 2017). Nonprofits can target governments but also corporations and other nonprofits at a local, subnational, national or international level, as long as it involves collective interests. Nonprofits also have a wide range of advocacy tactics available (Kimberlin, 2010; Mosley, 2010). Pekkanen and Smith (2014) distinguish direct and indirect attempts to influence institutional elites (see also, Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014). Nonprofits can work directly together with policymakers, politicians and administrators within governments, lobby political parties, join advisory councils and attend private meetings with corporate leaders. On the other hand and possibly at the same time, these organizations can transform public opinion by appealing to voter mobilization, organize a demonstration or letter writing campaigns, setting up a lawsuit against a policy decision, public awareness raising and public education with the intention of indirectly influencing institutional elites (Andrews & Edwards, 2004; Guo & Saxton, 2010). To conclude, the aforementioned definition of advocacy is hence broad enough to include both direct and indirect advocacy tactics: *"any attempt to influence the decisions of any institutional elite on behalf of a collective interest."* (Jenkins, 2006, p. 267).

Second, our conceptualization of politicization is heavily based on literature interested in the public sphere, hence 'politicization of the public sphere'. However, for the sake of simplicity, hereafter referred to as 'politicization' (Cantor, 2008; Pepermans & Maeseele, 2014). Most work is of theoretical nature and predominantly situated within communication, political and sociological theory (Calhoun, 1993; Chambers, 2009; Cohen & Arato, 1994; Dekker, 2009; Rogers & Cohen, 1993; Warren, 2001). However, there is also empirical research available, both qualitative (e.g. Van Dyke & Taylor, 2019) and quantitative (e.g. Uhlin, 2009). At first, the public sphere was idealized as a rational public arena where citizens and nonprofits discuss issues as equals, eventually leading to consensus (Habermas, 1989). However, throughout the years and

due to criticism, these ideas became more refined (Stewart & Hartmann, 2020). The state was introduced as an important actor, potentially getting influenced by politicization, and the existence of different public spheres, power struggles and conflict was recognized (Dryzek, 2010; Fraser, 1990; Hendriks, 2012; Mansbridge et al., 2009; Mouffe, 2005). Taking all of this into account, nonprofits can help to articulate, expand and refine preferences, ideas, opinions, interests and dominant discourses in the public sphere by facilitating public deliberation and influencing public opinion (Benhabib, 1996; Elstub, 2010; Mendonça, 2008). Moreover, by bringing collective concerns to the public sphere, they are put up for discussion and possible solutions (Dryzek, 1990, 2002; Habermas, 1996). Although a full and encompassing overview of politicization tactics is lacking, a distinction is often made between cooperative and confrontational politicization tactics (Mansbridge et al., 2009). When we think of confrontational tactics, we mean for example protests or demonstrations, boycotts and even radical activism, while cooperative tactics can entail social media campaigns, information brochures, broader news coverage and public awareness raising via street art (Bebbington, 2007; Bernstein & Taylor, 2013; Dodge, 2015; Gaby, 2016). Addressing all these issues, politicization of the public sphere can be defined as: *"developing and communicating information to the public, providing groups in society with a public voice, and, more generally, providing representations of difference and commonality in ways that underwrite and focus public deliberation."* (public sphere effects, see Warren, 2003, p. 46).

## 2.2. A conceptual overlap?

We already stressed the difference between advocacy and politicization: i.e. the ultimate goal (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Warren, 2003). However, there seems to be some overlap between both political forms. First, although it is not the goal of politicization to influence the decisions of an institutional elite, this can happen indirectly and unintendedly. When the public understanding changes because of politicization efforts, consequently, the policy directions of

those with political power may unintendedly – but not necessarily have to – change as well (Pousadela, 2016; Urbinati & Warren, 2008). All of this relates to the distinction being made between 'weak' and 'strong' publics. 'Weak' publics are characterized by politicization alone, while 'strong' publics can be defined by both politicization efforts and possibly influencing institutional elites, either intendedly (i.e. with a clear goal and thus indirect advocacy) or unintendedly (i.e. no clear goal and thus no advocacy and still politicization) (Fraser, 1990). Second, following the same reasoning, it can be noticed that the indirect advocacy tactics we referred to above (Onyx et al., 2010; Shier & Handy, 2015), are similar to the tactics used for facilitating politicization, but than from the angle of stimulating public deliberation and not ultimately influencing institutional elites. For example, a protest campaign can both serve as a confrontational politicization tactic as well as an indirect advocacy tactic in order to address a certain issue. In sum, there are differences (e.g., goals) as well as similarities (e.g., tactics and possible outcomes) between nonprofit politicization and advocacy that should be recognized for a clear and good understanding of our conceptual framework.

## 2.3. Theoretical framework

In this section, we identify those characteristics that potentially determine the extent to which nonprofits engage in advocacy and politicization.

### *2.3.1. Institutional field of activity*

First, based on new institutional theory, we discuss the institutional field of activity. New institutional theory is all about the organizational need to conform to the predominant rules, values and norms within the institutional environment in order to be perceived as legitimate (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Thus, we argue that all nonprofits belong to a certain institutional field of activity, within which they tend to show similar or isomorphic behavior, like advocacy and politicization efforts, in order to be perceived as legitimate actors in their field (Rowan &

Meyer, 1977). Van Dyke, Soule, and Taylor (2004) found that environmental, peace, international human rights, single-policy and ethnic movements were more likely to strive for advocacy goals, while civil rights, LGBTQ and women's movements were more likely to focus on public deliberation and thus politicization. Moreover, institutional fields of activity more strongly embedded within a neo-corporatist logic, will possibly be more involved in advocacy efforts (e.g. fields of activity concerned with social security and work-related issues, see Lijphart, 2012). Hence, we hypothesize that the level of advocacy and politicization will vary depending on the institutional field of activity in which the organization is active ***(H1)***.

#### *2.3.2. Organizational size*

Second, we have a look at organizational size. Based on resource mobilization theory, we expect that only those nonprofits with sufficient internal capacity – in terms of professional staff with the necessary skills – will be more involved in advocacy (Child & Grønbjerg, 2007; Lu, 2018) and politicization (Christiano, 1996). Therefore, we believe that organizational size is positively related to both advocacy and politicization ***(H2a)***. However, a growing body of scholars argues that size could be negatively related with politicization. In line with the reasoning of Skocpol (2003), the more paid staff or professionals an organization has, the more it risks to get alienated from society, thus pressuring public deliberation and eventually politicization ***(H2b)***.

#### *2.3.3. Organizational age*

Third, and also based on new institutional theory (Singh, Tucker, & House, 1986), we examine organizational age. Older and established organizations are supposed to have more legitimacy to be involved in advocacy (Donaldson, 2007) and politicization (Deephouse, 1996). Moreover, it is argued that older organizations develop stronger relationships and are endorsed by more powerful actors in the field. Thus, we expect organizational age to be positively related with both advocacy and politicization ***(H3a)***. However, this reasoning is being questioned for

politicization, as these older nonprofits risk a lack of innovation to maintain their politicization efforts (Ramírez De La Piscina, 2007), especially in a context of neo-corporatism (i.e., older nonprofits which are more institutionalized within a neo-corporatist context are possibly more interested in a stable partnership with governmental actors than in politicization efforts) ***(H3b)***.

#### *2.3.4. Organizational income*

Last, we discuss the organizational income – i.e. public and market income. Based on resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), we expect to find a negative relationship between public income and both advocacy and politicization ***(H4a)***. Nonprofits 'do not want to bite the hand that feeds them' and therefore decide to lower their advocacy and politicization efforts (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Guo & Saxton, 2010). However, more scholars start to argue that a positive relationship exists between public income and both advocacy and politicization ***(H4b)***. Nonprofits build relations with decision makers, leading to advocacy opportunities (Mosley, 2010; Neumayr, Schneider, & Meyer, 2015), especially in a context of neo-corporatism. Also for politicization, a positive relationship is possible when the government attaches importance to a rich and varied public debate (Chaves, Stephens, & Galaskiewicz, 2004).

When examining market income, and also based on resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), we expect to find a negative relationship with both political forms (Zhang & Guo, 2020). There is a risk that advocacy efforts will be lowered because market actors prefer activities that can be commercialized and measured, which is much easier for service delivery compared to advocacy (Alexander, Nank, & Stivers, 1999; Fyall & Allard, 2017). Eikenberry and Kluver (2004) also warn for the dangers of market income related to the potential democratic contributions of nonprofit organizations (i.e. also a varied public debate or politicization efforts). They risk alienating their public sphere position in order to focus on the commercialization of services. Thus, we hypothesize a negative relationship between market income and advocacy and politicization ***(H5)***.

# 3. Method

## 3.1. Data collection

In this paper, we focus on nonprofits in Flanders, the northern region of Belgium. As a comprehensive database was lacking, we conducted a systematic mapping effort by analyzing different (membership) databases of both public institutions and umbrella associations. At the Flemish regional level, there are three broad sectors to which nonprofits could belong: i.e. the human wellbeing, sociocultural or social economy sector. The human wellbeing sector is composed of organizations involved in care for minors (i.e., youth welfare), people with a disability (i.e. services for people with disabilities) and underprivileged people (i.e. poverty reduction). The sociocultural sector is more diverse than the other two sectors and consist of professional associations, patient associations, social rights movements, political organizations, sociocultural associations, youth associations, ethnic-cultural associations and faith-based associations. Last, the organizations in the social economy are internationally better recognized under the label of 'work integration social enterprises' (WISEs). These organizations offer vocational training and job opportunities to disadvantaged workers (e.g., people with a disability or living in poverty) by producing goods and services for the market (Anonymous).

We were eventually able to identify 2475 nonprofits. Paying attention to the distribution of the three sectors within the mapped population, a disproportional stratified sample was extracted (N=747). These organizations have been contacted and invited to participate in our study. A two wave-survey was developed aimed at NPO managers. Considering methodological prescriptions, the survey was pre-tested and respondents were incentivized by the promise of information about the results. After sending introductory letters, the first wave included a face-to-face interview conducted by trained interviewers. For the second wave, the respondents could opt for a second personal interview or a questionnaire via email or an online web-tool. The first wave included questions about the different political forms and tactics of nonprofits, while the second wave included questions about the organization's age, size and types of income. Several reminders

have been send and eventually 496 organizations responded to the first wave and 403 organizations to the second one. Thus, the response rates are respectively 66.4% and 53.9% (see appendix 1). We used a Chi-squared test to check whether the survey respondents reflected the composition of the sample framework. We can report that no significant difference is found between the sample framework and the final sample for the three sectors under scrutiny.

## 3.2. Measures

### *3.2.1. Dependent variables*

Concerning the dependent variables, there is no need to say that it is hard to measure the self-perceived extent of advocacy and politicization. Therefore, we first developed a 5-item scale, with each item related to the goal of advocacy and/or politicization, i.e. respectively influencing the decisions of an institutional elite and enabling debate in the public sphere (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Warren, 2003). For each of these items, nonprofit managers had to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale the extent to which their organizations pursued these political goals ranging from 'none' to 'utmost important'. Second, with the aim of strengthening the validity of our research, we constructed indices for both political forms. As can be seen in table 2, we conducted a principal component analysis. All items loaded on the respective factor that we beforehand expected too. However, one item could belong to both advocacy and politicization: i.e. 'putting a theme on the public or political agenda'. Although this item has a relatively high loading on the politicization factor (.381), it is nevertheless categorized under advocacy with a sufficient loading (.766). We could explain this by the fact that nonprofit managers intuitively relate agenda-setting more to an advocacy than a politicization goal (i.e. direct and indirect advocacy tactics for agenda-setting, see Andrews & Edwards, 2004). However, to make sure that both factors are valid measures, we performed an additional statistical analysis[1] Subsequently, we constructed an index for both factors by calculating the sum scores in order to get a measure of the extent of advocacy and politicization.

[INSERT TABLE 1]

Last, looking from a methodological perspective, all the criteria are met (Finch, 2019): sufficient item loadings (≥ .40), no item loadings on more than one single factor and factors that are internally consistent or reliable, as determined by the Cronbach's α (≥ .70). Moreover, researchers agree that a valid factor solution should include three or more items (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009). Although this criteria is not met for the politicization factor, a 2-item factor solution is considered valid when the correlation between both items is higher than .70 and the factor explanation is clear (Yong & Pearce, 2013), which is the case for this factor solution.

### *3.2.2. Independent variables*

As outlined in the theoretical framework above, we selected five independent variables that are considered important for explaining the extent of advocacy and politicization: i.e. organizational size and age, public and market income and the institutional field of activity. For our operationalization, we made use of the literature review of Lu (2018). This author gives an overview of how scholars, throughout the years, have measured these independent variables in advocacy research. First, organizational size is measured by the number of paid full-time equivalents of the organization. This measure is more frequently used than other size measures (e.g. total organizational income). Secondly and rather straightforward, age is measured as the years of existence after its formal foundation. Third, public income is measured as the relative share of public income in the total nonprofits' income. Public income can vary from structural subsidies to project funding by all kinds of governmental actors. Fourth, market income is similarly measured, but here we look at the relative share of market income in the total income. Although market income is trickier to define, it is in general about selling goods and services

with a profit motive as well as revenues generated from partnerships with corporations. In the survey, we made clear to the respondents what can be considered public or market income by giving some examples. Last, for the institutional field of activity, we distinguish eleven categories that are reflecting the diversity of the Flemish nonprofit sector (Anonymous). Each case of the sample belongs to one of these categories (see table 4).

### 3.3. Statistical analysis

Our statistical analysis has been performed by making use of the software program SPSS. Firstly, we engaged in a descriptive analysis of our sample by calculating median, mean and standard deviation scores for both political forms. Moreover, we looked whether a correlation exists between advocacy and politicization. Secondly, we performed multiple linear regression analyses in which advocacy and politicization are the dependent variables. Since our dependent variables are composite indices, these variables can be considered continuous and thus applicable for linear regression analyses. However, we need to test the underlying assumptions beforehand (Feldman, Stanley, & Berry, 1985). The assumptions concerning normality (i.e. based on the normal P-P plot) and homoscedasticity (i.e. based on the scatterplot with standardized predicted values and standardized residuals) are met for both models. Moreover, there are no issues with the autocorrelation of unstandardized residuals (i.e. based on a Durbin-Watson test $1.5 < d < 2.5$), multicollinearity (i.e. based on a VIF < 10) and significant outliers (i.e. based on a Cooks distance < 1). Last, we also controlled for common method bias through separating the dependent and independent variables in either a proximal (i.e. buffer items) or temporal (i.e. different waves) way. Also ex post, no evidence of this bias could be found (i.e. based on a Harman one-factor test < 50%) (Eichhorn, 2014).

## 4. Findings

In this part, we discuss the results of our statistical analyses. Firstly, we will descriptively analyze both advocacy and politicization and their relationship to each other. Secondly, and by making use of a correlation table and multiple linear regression analyses, we explore a possible causal mechanism between both indices on the one hand and some organizational and environmental characteristics on the other hand.

### 4.1. Advocacy and politicization in Flanders

The construction of both indices allows us to analyze whether nonprofits in Flanders are involved in advocacy and/or politicization, as identified by nonprofit managers themselves. As one can see in table 2, for our descriptive analysis, we make a distinction between the full sample (N=438) and the three sectors the sample consists of, i.e. sociocultural (N=265), human wellbeing (N=138) and social economy (N=35). Firstly, we analyze the entire sample and it becomes evident that nonprofit managers indicate that their organizations are involved in both political forms. Nonetheless, advocacy (.72 corresponding with 'rather important') is on average a more important activity than politicization (.58 corresponding with 'between not important and important'). Moreover, as can be seen from both standard deviations, the extent of politicization (std. deviation .27) is much more dispersed than the extent of advocacy (std. deviation .22). In other words, these findings show us that politicization is less institutionalized in the nonprofit sector in comparison with advocacy, and that there are greater differences in the extent of politicization in comparison with the extent of advocacy.

Secondly, we aim our analysis at the three different sectors. We can see for all three sectors that the self-identified extent of advocacy is higher than the extent of politicization. Moreover, we noticed that the extent of advocacy is more or less the same across the sociocultural (.72), human wellbeing (.72) and social economy sector (.67), all corresponding with 'rather important'. However, when looking at politicization, we can see some clear differences between sectors. The

extent of politicization scores on average around .67 for the sociocultural sector (corresponding with 'rather important'), while the scores for both the human wellbeing and social economy center around .50 (corresponding with 'between important and not important'). When looking at the standard deviations, we can see that for all three sectors the scores are more dispersed for politicization than for advocacy.

Thirdly, we analyzed whether a correlation exists between both political forms. When looking at the total sample in table 2, a significant correlation could be found between politicization and advocacy. This result can be transposed to the correlation analyses for all three sectors. However, we can see that the correlations are stronger for the human wellbeing (.542***) and, to a lesser extent, the social economy sector (.351*) compared to the sociocultural sector (.233***).

[INSERT TABLE 2]

### 4.2. Explaining the level of advocacy and politicization in Flanders

Here, we analyze whether the level of advocacy and politicization can be explained based on five independent variables that are considered important in the research traditions of both political forms. In other words, we test whether we can confirm our pre-defined hypotheses in the beginning of this paper. In table 3, we first look whether significant correlations could be found between our independent and dependent variables. Considering politicization, the independent variables size, age and market income are negatively and public income positively correlated. However, for these variables, no significant correlations could be found. If we compare this with advocacy, the results are different. The independent variables size, age and public income are positively and market income negatively correlated. Moreover, the negative correlation with market income (-.123*) and the positive correlation with public income (.166**) are statistically significant. Nonetheless, linear regression analyses offer a more elaborate overview of the explanatory value of both models.

[INSERT TABLE 3]

Thus, we performed linear regression analyses for both advocacy and politicization as can be seen in table 4. Our model for advocacy is statistically significant ($p < .000$) and explains 10.3% of the variance. In this model, only the hypotheses for public income and institutional field of activity are supported. In other words, a significant positive association can be found for both public income (.261**) and the 'work, profession and economy' institutional field of activity (.222** with social economy as reference category). The model for politicization is also statistically significant ($p < .000$) and explains 11.3% of the variance. For this dependent variable, only the institutional field of activity is significantly associated. More precisely, it is about 'adult social work' (.212*), 'new social movements' (.191*), 'ethnic cultural organizations' (.210**) and 'political organizations' (.181*). We should notice however, when interpreting these results, that the 'social economy' institutional field of activity is again the reference category.

[INSERT TABLE 4]

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

With this paper, we contribute to literature interested in nonprofit politics by (a) our encompassing conceptualization of nonprofits' political role by looking beyond advocacy and including politicization of the public sphere as a different political form, which cannot be equated with indirect advocacy, and (b) the choice of research context by looking at a neo-corporatist instead of a liberal nonprofit context. Taking all of this into account, three conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, self-perceived advocacy is more important than politicization, especially in the human wellbeing and social economy sector. Nonetheless, a great deal of nonprofits consider both advocacy and politicization to be important political forms. This finding is on the one hand in line with what we would expect in a neo-corporatist context, because advocacy is inherent to neo-corporatism (Anonymous). On the other hand, it ties in with indications showing that nonprofits in Flanders are also willing to look beyond advocacy and invest time and resources in politicization efforts (Anonymous), especially in the socio-cultural sector. Additionally, the standard deviations clearly show that the extent of politicization is much more dispersed compared to advocacy. This finding also relates to a neo-corporatist context in which advocacy (i.e. predominantly direct contact and dialogue with governmental actors) follows strict procedures and routines and is valued by most nonprofits to the same extent compared to politicization (i.e. some nonprofits are highly involved in politicization while for others politicization efforts are completely absent). In sum, in a neo-corporatist context, politicization is less institutionalized in comparison with advocacy.

Secondly, we looked at the correlation between advocacy and politicization. It seems that both political forms are significantly correlated. This could mean that nonprofits are interested in pursuing both advocacy and politicization simultaneously (i.e. related to the distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' publics, see Fraser, 1990). Nonetheless, there are also nonprofits that are only interested in either advocacy or politicization, further corroborating our understanding that both political forms are different from each other in their ultimate goal – i.e. influencing decisions of

institutional elites or stimulating public deliberation (Jenkins, 2006; Warren, 2001).

Thirdly, although we cannot confirm most of our hypotheses, public income and institutional field of activity seem to be important explanatory variables to take into account when looking at advocacy (Child & Grønbjerg, 2007; Neumayr et al., 2015). Moreover, the institutional field of activity is also an important variable to explain the extent of politicization (Van Dyke et al., 2004). When looking more closely, these findings clearly show that our research was conducted within a neo-corporatist context. The positive relationship between public income and advocacy can be explained by the strong neo-corporatist intertwinement between nonprofits and the government. Due to this, nonprofits build relationships with decision-makers which can offer them several advocacy opportunities, especially through institutionalized channels and contacts. Next, when looking at the institutional field of activity, it does not have to surprise that advocacy is positively and significantly related to the 'work, profession and economy' institutional field of activity because, strictly speaking, neo-corporatism is predominantly concerned with the interest representation and negotiation of economic and labor-market related issues (Lijphart, 2012; Streeck & Schmitter, 1985). For politicization, there is a significant and positive relationship with the following fields of activity: 'adult social work', 'new social movement', 'ethnic cultural organization' and 'political organization'. We can explain this based on the fact that these fields are less institutionalized within an advocacy-driven and thus neo-corporatist context. For example, within the 'ethnic cultural organization' field of activity, it is argued that there is a weak relationship with governmental actors, possibly explaining why these nonprofits predominantly invest in politicization instead of advocacy efforts (Anonymous). Thus, the above confirms the assumption that advocacy within a neo-corporatist welfare state is reserved for those nonprofit fields that have a historically strong relationship with the government (Streeck & Schmitter, 1985). Therefore, it is only logical that nonprofits which have not – yet – developed such a strong relationship, are more interested in politicization. In sum, we have shown that for either form of nonprofit politics, different explanatory factors can be found, thus advancing nonprofit theory.

Future research could build on our findings. By making use of a mixed-methods or qualitative design (Sandfort, 2014), scholars could look at other variables possibly explaining the extent of advocacy and politicization (e.g. mission statement and organizational culture) (Kim & Mason, 2018). It could also be interesting to quantitatively investigate whether there is an overlap in the political tactics being used for both advocacy and politicization efforts. Moreover, scholars could join the academic debate concerning nonprofit legitimacy and effectiveness, and look how this resonates with both advocacy and politicization (Bass, Abramson, & Dewey, 2014).

Last, this paper also has some practical relevance. Nonprofit managers should know that the political role of their organizations is very broad, not necessarily limited to advocacy. This broad conceptualization can shed another light on ongoing discussions. For example, scholars claim that there is a qualitative thinning out of advocacy tactics. This means that nonprofits rely more on direct advocacy tactics alone instead of indirect ones as well, leading to a qualitative impoverishment of the tactical repertoire (Fyall & McGuire, 2015). However, based on our conceptual framework, we know that most tactics used for indirect advocacy are also used for politicization purposes. In this paper, we can see that politicization is rather important for a great deal of nonprofits, possibly – but not necessarily – and unintendedly influencing institutional elites with these efforts. Thus, we contribute to the discussion on qualitative thinning out, showing that things are not necessarily as bad as they seem when looking at the bigger picture and the broad political role of nonprofits.

# Appendices

***Appendix 1: Presence of the three sectors in both survey waves***

| | **Human wellbeing** | **Sociocultural** | **Social economy** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Population (N = 2475)** | 603 (24.36%) | 1713 (69.21%) | 159 (6.42%) |
| **Sample framework (N = 747)** | 210 (28.11%) | 468 (62.65%) | 69 (9.24%) |
| **Survey wave 1 (N = 496)** | 158 (31.85%) | 289 (58.27%) | 49 (9.88%) |
| **Survey wave 2 (N = 403)** | 130 (32.26%) | 239 (59.31%) | 34 (8.44%) |

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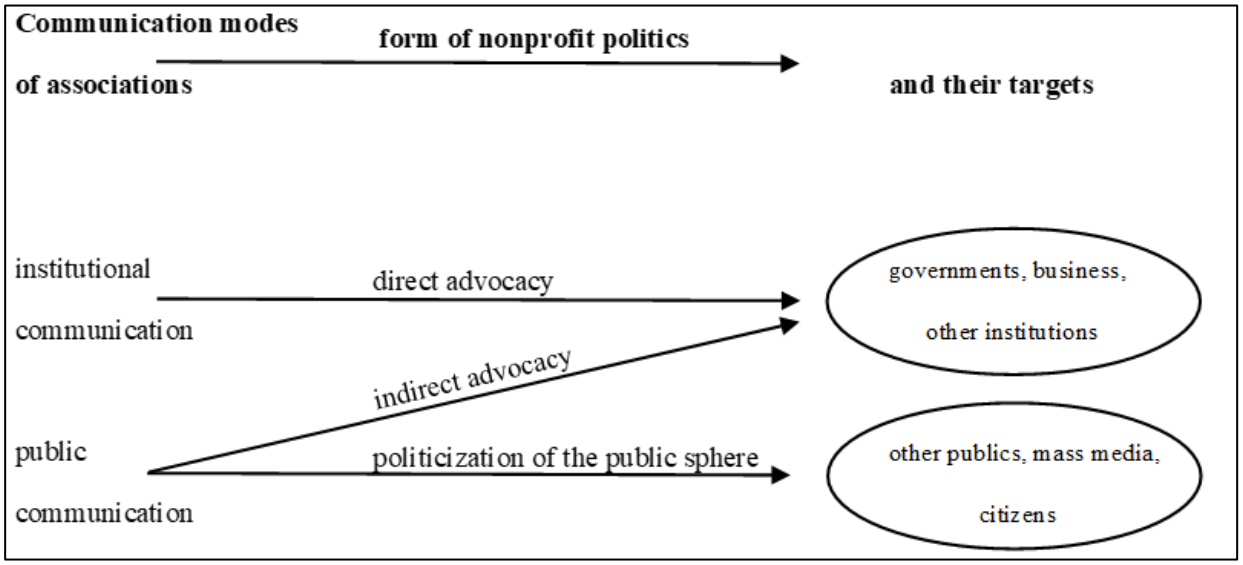
## Figures

***Figure 1. Communication modes of associations, forms of nonprofit politics and their targets***



## Tables

***Table 1: Principal component analysis***

| **Items** | **Factors and loadings** | | **Communality** | **Reliability** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1** | **2** | | |
| **Factor 1 - Advocacy** | | | | **.794** |
| Influencing the policy of governments and/or corporations on specific themes | **.894** | *.091* | **.807** | |
| Representing the social interests of your target group(s) or your constituencies to governments and/or corporations | **.818** | *.016* | **.669** | |
| Putting a theme on the public or political agenda | **.766** | *.381* | **.732** | |
| **Factor 2 - Politicization** | | | | **.814** |
| Focusing on a dialogue with citizens about their concerns and enable to organize themselves | *.097* | **.906** | **.830** | |
| Awareness raising and mobilizing citizens | *.148* | **.903** | **.837** | |

***Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlation between advocacy and politicization***

| | | N | Median | Mean | Std. deviation | Advocacy | Politicization |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Advocacy** | Full sample | 438 | .69 | .72 | .22 | | .322*** |
| | Per sector | | | | | | |
| | Sociocultural | 265 | .69 | .72 | .23 | | .233*** |
| | Human wellbeing | 138 | .69 | .72 | .21 | | .542*** |
| | Social economy | 35 | .66 | .67 | .16 | | .351* |
| **Politicization** | Full sample | 440 | .57 | .58 | .27 | .322*** | |
| | Per sector | | | | | | |
| | Sociocultural | 267 | .61 | .67 | .28 | .233*** | |
| | Human wellbeing | 138 | .53 | .50 | .26 | .542*** | |
| | Social economy | 35 | .45 | .50 | .19 | .351* | |

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

*Table 3: Correlation matrix independent and dependent variables*

| | **Advocacy** | **Politicization** |
|---|---|---|
| **Size** | .043 | -.022 |
| **Age** | .045 | -.049 |
| **Public income** | .166** | .032 |
| **Market income** | -.123* | -.097 |

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

***Table 4: Linear regression results***

| | **Advocacy** (standardized) | **Politicization** (standardized) |
|---|---|---|
| **Size** | .028 | .027 |
| **Age** | .121 | -.045 |
| **Public income** | .261** | .109 |
| **Market income** | -.065 | -.068 |
| **Institutional field of activity** | | |
| *FOA: Work, profession and economy* | .222** | -.020 |
| *FOA: Adult social work* | -.095 | .212* |
| *FOA: New social movement* | .018 | .191* |
| *FOA: Ethnic cultural organization* | .067 | .210** |
| *FOA: Youth social work* | -.087 | .084 |
| *FOA: Religious organization* | -.106 | .082 |
| *FOA: Human wellbeing association* | -.068 | .147 |
| *FOA: Political organization* | .065 | .181* |
| *FOA: Human wellbeing institution* | -.156 | -.085 |
| *FOA: Health, illness and disability* | .029 | .169 |
| *FOA: Social economy* | Reference | Reference |
| | | |
| **Adjusted $R^2$** | .103 | .113 |
| **F** | 3.371 ($p < .000$) | 3.642 ($p < .000$) |
| **N** | 291 | 292 |

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

# Endnotes

[1] We have looked at the association between (a) the indices of advocacy and politicization and (b) the self-perceived attainment of five goals (dichotomous variable – yes/no) concerning the most important issue the organization is working on. The goals are the following: behavior or attitude change of citizens, debate on a theme in the public sphere, change in government policy, change in the views of politicians and change in a corporation's policy. We opted for a partial correlation analysis because we wanted to control for the possible correlation between advocacy and politicization. While the attainment of the first two goals (i.e. behavior or attitude change of citizens and debate on a theme in the public sphere) was significantly associated with politicization, the attainment of the last three goals (i.e. change in government policy, change in the views of politicians and change in a corporation's policy) was significantly associated with advocacy. Thus, we can see that the self-perceived extent of both advocacy and politicization efforts are significantly associated with the self-perceived attainment of their respective goals (i.e. influencing the decisions of an institutional elite and enabling debate in the public sphere). This additional statistical analysis further corroborates that our measures of advocacy and politicization are valid.