1 Introduction

Lobbying is part of political life in the European Union (EU). It is particularly striking how much the political representation of interests is a normal part of what happens in Brussels. A large number of associations, companies, and federations maintain their own offices in Brussels so they can track and influence European policy at close quarters. The opportunities they seize to articulate their interests are equally abundant, since European legislative procedures provide for various forms of consultation; nevertheless, European lobby groups also seek to engage with members of the European institutions (Commission, Parliament, and Council of Ministers) even outside formal procedures. This forms the basis for lasting contacts that the actors involved consider to be an integral part of political consultations and legislative decision-making.

This profound insertion of European lobbying into the arena of European politics cannot conceal the considerable dynamism that has characterised the field of interest representation since its early days. The field has grown steadily since the founding of the European Communities in the 1950 and 1960s, and has experienced significant waves of expansion since the 1980s and 1990s. This has incited competition between lobbyists and stimulated the professionalisation of their work (Klüver and Saurugger 2013). What is particularly intriguing about this dynamism is the simultaneity of two different developments. On the one hand, research has provided ample evidence that the growth of the organisational field of interest groups has had considerable effects on the pluralisation of the represented interests, the fragmentation of organisational forms, the volatility of alliances and coalitions, and the competitiveness of interest representation (Greenwood 2017; Dür and Matteo 2016; Beyers and de Bruycker 2018; Kastner 2018; Keller 2018). One the other hand, there is agreement that European lobbying has a distinct approach that is specific to the EU and is persistently applied across interest group sectors (Woll 2006; Coen and Richardson 2009; Mazey and Richardson 2015; Coen et al. 2021).

This means that there is an apparent paradox between the heterogenisation of the field of interest groups and the homogenisation of the field of professional activity. Lobby groups do diverge considerably with regard to their interests, resources, missions, and orientations, but lobbyists tend to employ

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similar repertoires of action and develop similar professional skills. This homogenisation of practices and skills has been demonstrated with regard to interest groups moving into the arena of EU politics, such as in lobby groups from the US or Eastern European Member States (Coen 2004; Sallai 2013; Vargovčíková 2015; Coen et al. 2021). The same also applies to civic groups, grassroots initiatives, and social movement organisations, whose action repertoires focused on public campaigning, mass mobilisation, and street protests. More often than not, the scale shift of their activities towards the EU also implied a move from confrontational public protest mobilisation to conventional and institutionalised forms of interest representation (Bursens 1997; Lahusen 2004; Balme and Chabanet 2008; della Porta and Parks 2013).

This homogenisation of lobbying, which is described also as a process of professionalisation, has been attributed to the gradual accommodation of interest groups by the institutions of the EU (McLaughling and Greenwood 1995; Mazey and Richardson 1999; Greenwood 2007; Berkhout et al. 2015). The EU institutions have not only encouraged and supported a wide array of lobby and advocacy groups to engage in legislative processes, but were also able to accommodate them within the consultative bodies and processes of the various policy domains, exposing them to the regulatory approach and collaborative style of policy deliberation (Woll 2012; Michalowitz 2019). The homogenisation of European lobbying within an organisational field marked by fragmentation and competition thus seems to be demand-driven.

This interpretation has its merits, as it helps identify accommodative pressures firmly established within the institutional architecture of the EU. However, its explanatory power is limited because it downplays the institutional complexity of the EU. The EU Commission and the European Parliament are known to attract and tolerate different forms of advocacy (Bouwen 2007; Dionigi 2017), and the European Council also adds complexity to the field, even though it is less exposed to direct forms of lobbying (Hayes-Renshaw 2009). It builds on intergovernmental negotiations and many specialised working groups that provide access points for national lobby groups with their distinct interests and practices. Finally, the deepening of European integration has widened the range of policy domains, encouraging an increasing number of different groups to engage in European lobbying. This pluralisation has also increased the variety of advocacy approaches (Balme and Chabanet 2008; Imig and Tarrow 2001; della Porta and Parks 2013; della Porta 2022). All in all, scholars conclude that the EU might be able to accommodate a wide array of interests, but its ability to manage and streamline the highly populated and fragmented field of interest groups is rather limited. The relations between the organisational field and the EU institutions are deeply shaped by uncertainty, flexibility, and dynamism (Mazey and Richardson 2006a and 2015), which means that the institutional architecture of the EU can only have a limited impact on the homogenisation of the professional field of lobbying practices.

1.1 European lobbyists: a fruitful object of study

Against this background, it is therefore necessary to be more attentive to those forces and actors that play an active role in the formation and homogenisation of European lobbying. This book wishes to direct the attention to a collective actor that is receiving more attention lately (e.g. Michel 2005a and 2013; Laurens 2018; Coen et al. 2021; Beauvallet et al. 2002), because it can help to better understand the paradox outlined so far: European lobbyists. A stronger commitment to the study of lobbying professionals seems overdue, because sociological research has convincingly and recurrently testified that professions are a decisive factor in patterning, integrating, and streamlining occupational and organisational fields. Microsociological and interactionist studies have shown that occupational groups engage in defining shared practices, norms, and identities across their different employees (Hughes 1958), neo-institutionalist studies have insisted on the role of professions in driving isomorphism within organisational fields (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Scott, 2008; Saks 2016), and research about epistemic communities, communities of practices, and instrument constituencies have confirmed this observation for the field of policy domains (Bicchi 2011; Zito 2018; Howlett and Saguin 2021).

A study about European lobbyists can rely only on limited knowledge. Previous research about European interest representation has addressed the staff of interest groups repeatedly, but there is a lack of comprehensive data and systematic analysis. Investigations in the realm of political science relegate this actor to the backstage, because these studies privilege institutional and organisational actors. They have taken professionalisation processes more seriously lately, but they are interested in professionals only indirectly, because they treat them as an organisational option or resource that might have an impact on internal functioning, government relations or lobbying success (Klüver 2012; Rudy et al., 2019; Albareda 2020; Heylen et al. 2020; Coen et al. 2021: 162–167). The staff has also made its appearance in studies inquiring into the relations between interest groups and EU institutions, particularly with regard to the recruitment of personnel and the revolving doors between the private and public sector (Coen and Vannon 2016). Professionals were furthermore targeted by research that was interested in strategies and practices of lobbying (Woll 2007; Barron and Trouille 2015). The focus has been primarily on business interests and corporate political action, presumably because these actors are more actively involved in professionalising lobbying (Rudy et al. 2019; Coen and Vannoni 2020), even though separate analyses have corroborated similar processes among civic groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Brusens 1997; Eberwein and Saurugger 2013; Lindellee and Scaramuzzino 2020; Heylen et al. 2020).

Recent research, however, is recognising that lobbyists merit more direct attention and a closer and comprehensive analysis (Michel 2005a; Beauvallet et al. 2022). Previous research treated them as mere representatives and

executors strictly tied to the mandates of the interest groups (Heinz et al. 1997; Healy 2016). However, there is growing evidence that lobbyists are policy intermediaries or brokers that adapt and shape their groups' agendas (Stephenson and Jackson 2010; Lowery and Marchetti 2012; Tyllström and Murray 2021), strive to defend and even expand their work-related autonomy within their organisations (Vargovčíková 2015; Avril 2018; Cloteau 2018; Kerduel 2022), and also pressure their headquarters, clients, or members to step up professionalisation processes. Research devoted to the sociological dimension of European lobbying has added that lobbyists are not only individually an active player in the formation of the field, but also collectively, because they share similar social backgrounds (Laurens 2018: 86–97; Michon 2022), are professionally mobile across employers, and engage in forming a set of skills and practices (Courty and Michel 2013; Avril 2018; Cheynis 2022). Hence, lobbyists are important actors in their own right. They translate the opportunities and constraints of their institutional and organisational environment into factual actions; they develop and establish shared practices, skills, and convictions of professional labour; and they engage in networking and professional socialisation, thus integrating, homogenising, and stabilising a field of activities across societal interests, policy domains and countries.

These studies thus provide sufficient indications that lobbying professionals are a homogenising force within an organisational field marked by diversity, fragmentation, and contentiousness. Previous research, however, does not allow to assess this assumption critically, due to two limitations. First, studies addressing professionals are limited to individual sectors (Albareda 2020; Heylen et al. 2020; Coen et al. 2021; Beauvallet et al. 2022), thus obscuring the view on the professional field itself. A critical assessment of the professionalisation of lobbying has to take into consideration that the professional field of European lobbyists is differentiated and fragmented (Courty and Michel 2013). Lobbyists are rarely trained lobbying professionals; they have different educational backgrounds; they work for different interest groups and thus have diverse work descriptions; they do not speak about themselves as lobbyists; and they do not necessarily agree on ethical standards and policies (Michel 2005b; Offerlé 2005; Michel 2013; Bunea and Gross 2019; Lindellee and Scaramuzzino 2020). The analysis not only has to validate whether and to what extent professionalisation has affected the field, but it also needs to provide a more precise understanding of the main manifestations and driving forces.

In this regard, this book is confronted with a second limitation of previous research. Due to the marginal role of lobbying professionals within scholarly writing, the concept of professionalism or professionalisation has been used in an undifferentiated and ambiguous manner. It has been employed to address aspects as diverse as employment patterns, organisational structures, professional activities, and attitudes (Bursens 1997; McGrath 2005; van Deth and Maloney 2011; Klüver and Saurugger 2013; Coen and Vannoni 2016; Heylen et al. 2020). Additionally, this research strand assumes that

professionalisation is about increasing organisational capacities and improving the effectiveness of lobbying (Eberwein and Saurugger 2013; Albareda 2020; Coen et al. 2021: 15f.), even though this process might have side effects for the organisations (Bursens 1997; Heylen et al. 2020). Ultimately, there is a functional understanding of professionalisation and professionalism.

A systematic analysis of European lobbying as a professional field needs to work with a more precise and nuanced approach that makes research assumptions explicit and paves the way for a comprehensive and systematic analysis. Following sociological research on professions, the book proposes to understand professionalisation as a multilayered process driven by institutional, organisational and professional forces. In empirical terms, it proposes a conceptualisation that distinguishes between three different components – professionalism as an occupation, as a knowledge and as a value – in order to systematically map the field of European lobbying.

First, the aim is to empirically assess the extent to which European lobbying has become a full-fledged occupation, and in this regard, the aim will be to measure the degree of occupationalisation. For this purpose, the analyses will make use of data about the employment status of lobbying staff (e.g. contractual relations, remuneration, staff positions, job satisfaction, and aspirations); the sectoral permeability of the field (e.g. work experiences in different sectors and within the EU institutions); and occupational paths (e.g. points of access to the field, career histories, occupational requirements). This will make it possible to ascertain the degree to which forms of full-time, remunerated, and long-term (career-oriented) employment have replaced voluntary or part-time activities, thus establishing clear boundaries and access points to the professional field, and homogenising it internally.

The formation of a specialised labour market, however, does not necessarily imply that European lobbyists form an occupational group. The analysis will thus centre on the second and additional dimension of analysis – the professional knowledge – by looking at the educational background of European lobbyists (e.g. educational attainment, disciplinary background), their professional know-how (e.g. exclusivity claims, required skills), and professional capitals (e.g. networks, expertise, reputation, belonging). It will be necessary to determine the extent to which lobbyists share common skills and knowledge-based practices, and thus contribute to the constitution of the occupation as a professional group both internally and vis-à-vis the broader field of actors who populate the public affairs arena.

Third, the analysis will focus on the importance of professionalism as a value in order to assess the extent to which European lobbyists are engaged in a shared discourse of professional legitimacy. This aspect is particularly important in the professionalisation process, because professions are known to depend on the public recognition of their societal mission and commitment to general welfare. The analysis will need to identify whether lobbying professionals support similar ideas of public acceptance and political legitimacy across interest sectors, academic, and national backgrounds. Particular

emphasis will be placed on the value of professionalism in general, and the political legitimacy of professional interest representation in particular.

Based on the empirical mapping of the professional field, the analyses will also be devoted to the identification of those social forces that are responsible for stimulating and/or limiting the professional formation and homogenisation of the field in its three dimensions. In this respect, two analytical approaches and methods will be combined. On the one hand, the aim will be to uncover the driving forces behind the professionalisation of the field on the basis of standardised survey data, and thus also to name the relevant actors that are actively engaged as drivers of professionalisation. In this regard, the analyses will review the competing assumptions that professionalisation depends on the organisations for which lobbyists work, varies according to the proximity to the EU institutions and/or is conditioned by the social profile and class affiliation of EU affairs professionals. On the other hand, the examination will take a closer look at the European lobbyists' perceptions, practices, and experiences on the basis of qualitative interviews, because they help reconstruct the structures and dynamics of the professional field from the inside. Through their accounts it will be possible to reconstruct the ways in which the institutional and organisational arenas pattern professional work, and to show how lobbyists participate in reproducing the practices, skills, networks, and convictions that prevail within the field.

1.2 European Lobbying: a challenging research phenomenon

The research objectives of this book are not without challenges, because European lobbying is a field of activity with internal diversities and blurred boundaries. With regard to organisations, it is not immediately apparent which are part of European lobbying, as, depending on their mandate and objectives, associations, corporate representations, NGOs, non-profit foundations, public bodies, professional associations, think tanks, PR agencies, or law firms may carry out activities that could be described as direct or indirect lobbying. The same applies to the staff, since not all people who work for lobby groups are involved in interest representation. In some cases, they perform routine tasks within the organisation, in others they work on specific aspects that may or may not be related to interest representation (such as research and monitoring, public relations (PR), legal review, contact maintenance). At the same time, the spectrum of individuals involved can be very broad. Interest groups can not only draw on their own lobbyists but also on other people around them: members of the company's board of directors, employees in a specialist department with specific expertise, PR staff, the members or support base of their individual associations, national member associations and their constituencies, external lawyers, scientific experts or representatives of professional associations.

The empirical and conceptual demarcation of the field of European lobbying is challenging, but seems feasible when focusing on activities and

practices. This approach promises to solve problems related to the complexity and fuzziness of the field because it helps to centre on the core mission, around which the professional field is organised. But it is also required for an analysis that focuses on professionalisation and thus assumes that a specific set of tasks and activities has been delimited, standardised and monopolised in terms of a specialised labour market and occupational group. In this regard, a strict definition of European lobbying referring to specific activities is the most plausible option to conceptualise and demarcate the field. According to this definition, European lobbying comprises all active efforts to influence the voting preferences and behaviours of office holders and decision makers related to policy issues processed within the institutions of the EU. These efforts include a wide range of activities such as mobilising one's own membership base, conducting public campaigns, participating in hearings or committee meetings and presenting drafting proposals for upcoming legislative procedures.

This approach helps identify the core of the field with reference to the ultimate mission of interest representation, but requires further clarification when it comes to the boundaries of the field. In fact, influencing political decisions within the European Commission and Parliament requires collecting a great deal of information and facts, preparing reports and analyses, commissioning scientific studies, or consulting experts. These activities can be described as lobbying whenever they are carried out by groups with the aim of influencing the legislative process politically. Lobby groups are likely to use the information, analyses, and studies for specific purposes, and it can therefore be assumed that they represent selective perspectives and opinions. The picture is less clear when it comes to defining the role of experts, think tanks or scientific institutes in general. Although they do not necessarily pursue policy objectives that can be explicitly described as interest representation, their reports, analyses or opinions may have this effect or be used by interested circles accordingly. Similar observations apply to other areas of work, as they are related to European lobbying, but do not necessarily comprise explicit efforts to influence office holders and policymakers in regard to pending policymaking decisions. This is true for PR and image campaigning, policy monitoring and legal counselling, and association and event management, among others. Depending on job titles and work descriptions, these tasks can belong to the portfolio of European lobbyists. They might also be externalised and delegated to specialised groups or companies, but they might also have other purposes than influencing political legislation.

Any attempt to demarcate the field of European lobbying is thus confronted with the problem of fluid boundaries. A practice-related approach, however, allows this fluidity to be addressed and grasped adequately. In fact, lobbying in its strict sense is a professional practice that is often interrelated with a broader sphere of public affairs activities, which are not necessarily related to political interest representation, but are either required, functional or helpful in reaching its goal. European lobbyists might thus diverge in their position

within the field, depending on whether their tasks are more or less centred on exerting legislative political influence and/or other, complementary or supplementary public affairs activities. But the focus on complex activity portfolios makes it possible to reconstruct the structure and shape of the professional field, and the place of strict lobbying practices therein. This approach implies that initiatives and organisations not necessarily distinguishable as lobby groups might be part of the professional field, as long as their staff is involved in lobbying activities in the strict sense.

This practice-related conceptualisation of European lobbying will prove its merits also because the field is institutionally formed and regulated in this manner (European Parliament 2003; Holman and Luneburg 2012). The European Commission and the European Parliament are themselves confronted with the problem of determining exactly which groups, persons, and activities can be considered to be part of European lobbying. The main objective, however, is to keep institutional barriers to entry low in order to ensure broad participation. Their measures aim essentially at regulating working relations between the European institutions and civic, expert, and interest groups. Transparency obligations are imposed on both sides, without regulating the field of European lobbying itself. According to the European Commission, it is important to avoid discouraging sections of society from putting forward their expertise, concerns, and demands, irrespective of the issues, groups, and interests involved (Commission of the European Communities 1992; European Commission 2016). At the same time, the EU institutions show considerable willingness to provide non-material, logistical, and financial support for societal interests that are weak or difficult to organise (Persson and Edholm 2018; Sanchez Salgado 2019), in order to enable them to establish themselves as a European association and to participate in political decision-making.

The inclusiveness of this regulatory approach has encouraged the growth and diversification of the field of European lobbying, without diminishing its openness and fluidity. This development is responsible for the conceptional problems indicated before, but also implies considerable troubles in empirically mapping the field. In fact, the EU institutions, watchdog NGOs, and scientific studies all struggle with the difficulty of providing precise data on the number of European lobby groups (Berkhout and Lowery 2008; Courty 2010; Beyers et al. 2014; and 2020; Hanegraaff and Poletti 2021). In addition to the aforementioned fuzziness of lobbying, there are also the challenges of drawing clear boundaries between European and national interest groups and lobbying activities. It can furthermore be assumed that the number of active interest groups is subject to considerable fluctuations over time, depending on which policy measures are discussed within the EU and how broad the circle of groups affected by regulation is. The available data are even less precise when it comes to determining the number of active lobbyists. It is not possible to determine exactly how many people in the respective organisations are entrusted with lobbying tasks and to what extent.

For the reasons mentioned above, most studies use estimates, some of which, however, diverge considerably (Berkhout and Lowery 2008; Wonka et al. 2010; Hanegraaff and Poletti 2021). The greatest increase was recorded in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1992, the number of active interest groups was stated as 3,000, which is significantly below what is known for the USA, where the field grew to over 16,000 groups by 1998 (Woll 2005). The European field continued to grow in the following years: In 2013, over 5,500 interest groups were listed in the EU Transparency Register (Greenwood and Dreger 2013); in 2016, over 9,700 organisations were counted (Greenwood 2017: 13). However, the EU does not come close to the US situation. As expected, the number of active lobbyists exceeds the number of interest groups. In 2010, this was estimated at over 15,000 individuals (Alter-EU 2010: 23), but there are also estimates that suggest between 30,000 and 50,000 full-time workers (Corporate Europe Observatory 2011: 6; European Parliament 2018).

These estimates illustrate how limited our knowledge about the field of European lobbying is. It is difficult to ascertain how many lobby groups and lobbyists are engaged in representing their interests towards the European institutions. Beyond this, there is a lack of systematic and comprehensive data about the professional field of lobbying with its internal structures and external boundaries. It is thus challenging to ascertain how and why the field is able to reproduce itself within an arena with open boundaries and a fluctuating number of interests, and how and why it is able to accommodate the many different societal interests from the many different countries. The data collected for this book will allow a differentiated analysis of this open and inclusive field. As will be shown in detail, a distinction between EU affairs and European lobbying will be necessary in order to show that the professional field is structured in concentric circles. European lobbying will be identified as a highly professionalised, integrated and homogenised field of activity, which expands into a wider area of European public affairs-related work. As will be explained in more detail, the estimate proposed here assumes more than 18,000 EU affairs professionals, while the total population in the field of EU lobbying is probably around 13,000 individuals (see Section 4.1). Against this background, the analyses of this book will show that European lobbying has been formed as an integrated field of professional labour that has accommodated a highly diversified number of groups in terms of societal sectors and national provenances. However, they will also highlight internal divisions and conflicts, thus indicating that the professionalisation and professionalism is contested within the field itself.

1.3 The focus on lobbyists: research approach and structure of the book

Since the 1970s, research in the social sciences has dealt extensively with European lobbying. So far, most studies have been interested in the organisational field of European interest groups and have explored a variety of topics,

dimensions, and developments in this respect (e.g. Pedler and van Schendelen 1994; Greenwood 2002; Kohler-Koch and Quittkat 2013; Bitonti and Harris 2017). The focus was, and still is, on the scope and structure of the organisational field (Berkhout and Lowery 2010; Berkhout et al. 2015; Beyers et al. 2020), the strategies of organised lobbying (Green Cowles et al. 2001; Dür and Mateo 2016; Keller 2018), and effects and conditions of successful lobbying (Dür 2008; Dionigi 2017; de Bruycker and Beyer 2019) as well as communication forms and framing strategies (Klüver et al. 2015b; Eising et al. 2015; Rasch 2018).

In contrast, European lobbyists have received muss less attention. Previous research has collected evidence, as described above, showing that an occupational field and a professional group with distinct tasks, skills, and identities has been established (for example, McGrath 2005; Michel 2005b; Klüver 2010; Kohler-Koch and Buth 2013; Coen and Vannoni 2016; Heylen et al. 2020; Coen et al. 2021; Beauvallet et al. 2022). This evidence suggests that a specialised labour market and workforce is in place, thus contributing to the formation of European lobbying as a field of activity. However, findings are inconclusive, and it is questionable whether case- or sector-specific observations can be generalised to the entire professional field. Hence, there is need for a comprehensive analysis that critically assesses whether European lobbying is a professional field characterised by its own entry requirements, activity profiles, knowledge base, contact structures, and professional identities. Additionally, there is need for an analysis of those forces and actors that are influential in patterning the internal structure of the field and establishing boundaries between insiders and outsiders.

In order to meet these empirical and analytic objectives, the present book draws on a frame of reference that is based in the sociology of professions (such as Larson 1977; Freidson 1986; Abbott 1988; Burrage and Torstendahl 1990; Evetts 2013; Georgakakis and Rowell 2013; Saks 2016; Noordegraaf 2020). Essentially, the aim is to investigate whether processes of professionalisation have taken place which constitute, organise, and regulate the field of activity on the basis of employment, knowledge and values. The theoretical frame of reference provided by the sociology of professions promises new insights to the study of European lobbying, because professions are regarded in sociology as important collective actors in structuring fields of action and homogenising organisational fields (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Scott, 2008; Georgakakis 2002; Kauppi and Madsen 2013).

To this end, the results of many years of research work in the field will be presented. Findings stem from fieldwork that used a mixed-methods approach and gathered a unique set of data: a standardised survey of almost 700 European lobbyists, and a series of in-depth qualitative interviews with almost 50 European lobbyists and other relevant actors. The study concentrates solely on the European arena and considers lobbyists from individual Member States only insofar as they are involved in lobbying the European institutions. The analyses of these data sets are committed to two objectives: a descriptive

and an analytic one. On the one hand, this book pursues descriptive aims, because it wishes to empirically map the field of European lobbying in its internal structures and external boundaries across societal sectors, national provenances, and policy domains. At the same time, the development of the field will be reconstructed by contrasting interviews conducted during the late 1990s and mid-2010s, and by identifying cohort effects within the sample of the standardised survey. These empirical analyses are explorative, because previous research has only provided partial and segmented insights that do not allow to paint a systematic and comprehensive picture of the field at large.

On the other hand, the mixed-methods approach of data-gathering is complemented by a research design that makes use of structuralist and constructivist approaches of data analysis. Data from the standardised survey will be used to validate the impact of different structural determinants of professionalisation, which makes it possible to ascertain core drivers of this process. In particular, it is intended to identify the impact of the organisations for which lobbyists work, the proximity to the institutional field of European politics, and the social profiles and class hierarchies within the occupational field. The qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews will be devoted to ascertain the ways in which European lobbyists perceive and seize contextual opportunities and constraints, and how they participate in the formation and reproduction of the professional field. This inductive analysis is indebted to an interpretative and constructivist approach (Saks 2016), because it aims to identify the practices, skills, and capitals that European lobbyists consider to be integral part of their work, and because it strives to ascertain the shared professional rules, norms, and values that pattern the field. Both analytic approaches will take inspiration in the conflict-theoretical frame of reference that views professionalisation as an ongoing contention between different actors with different ideas of professional practice, expertise, and legitimacy (Larson 1977; Freidson 1986; Collins 1987; Schinkel and Noordegraaf 2011; Georgakakis and Rowell 2013; Beauvallet et al. 2022). The triangulation of both approaches will help identify the internal dynamics patterning the professional field of European lobbying and the competing collective actors engaged therein.

The book presents the findings step by step. The *second chapter* looks back at available evidence and presents the research design of the study. It starts by reviewing three strands of research that are particularly significant for the aims of this book: available studies about European lobbying, scholarly writing about the sociology of occupational work and professions, and research about transnational expert groups. Against this background, it presents and discusses the research design by specifying research questions, core assumptions, and conceptual operationalisations. Moreover, it describes the methods and data on which the empirical findings of this book are based. Given the mixed-methods approach of the research design, it will elaborate on the two legs of the study: the standardised survey amongst a large sample of EU lobbyists, and two interview series among various EU actors and

lobbyists. Particular emphasis will be placed on the challenges of the field-work, the specificities of the gathered data and the methods of data analysis employed.

The following two chapters provide an introductory account of the field of European lobbying. The *third chapter* looks at the origins and development of the field, with the focus here being on the internal view of the interviewed actors. It is based on two series of qualitative interviews with EU lobbyists, experts, and stakeholders conducted in the late 1990s and mid-2010s. This dual data set makes it possible to describe and analyse the developments within the field. The findings not only show remarkable continuity in terms of activity profiles, but also highlight important changes, particularly in terms of occupationalisation and professionalisation. In the *fourth chapter*, a first attempt is made to reconstruct the occupational field in its internal structure. For this purpose, it makes use of the survey data and interviews with lobbying staff. The focus is on the personnel's socio-demographic characteristics, activity profiles, and professional self-image. The observations show that the occupational field is characterised by a marked heterogeneity clearly visible with regard to national and professional backgrounds. On closer inspection, however, the findings paint a picture of an occupational field that is homogeneous at its core area but increasingly blurred towards the edges. Lobbying activities in the strict sense and a set of complementary tasks are clearly a unifying element within this field of professional labour.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 look at the three dimensions of the professionalisation of European lobbying. The *fifth chapter* focuses on occupationalisation and illustrates that political representation of interests at EU level is an occupation in its own right in terms of full-time, paid employment, with a strong concentration of jobs at the senior or executive levels. Additionally, the analysis of career patterns helps identify mobility across sectors, which testifies to sectoral permeability and a considerable integration of the labour market. The labour market thus tends to streamline forms of employment across the various sectors. Career moves from the European institutions into the interest representation sector are common but not pervasive, indicating that the labour market is relatively autonomous from the EU itself. Income patterns are the only factor that introduce significant social inequalities into the field of European lobbying. Against this background, entry barriers, and career paths are reconstructed on the basis of the in-depth interviews, showing that European lobbying has become a competitive labour market supporting career advancement ambitions.

With regard to professionalisation, the *sixth chapter* provides empirical evidence that confirms the formation of a professional group on the basis of shared professional knowledge. Findings underline that European lobbying is an increasingly streamlined professional group when considering its academic background, body of knowledge, and set of practices. EU lobbyists tend to vary with regard to the combination of skills they find essential to do their job, and they are not likely to support the idea of a joint corporate

mission, when asked about the relevance of a professional associations. These indications do not speak for an explicit professionalisation project among EU affairs professionals, but the data show that the occupational field is subject to latent processes of integration and closure. Particularly those who want to belong to the circle of professionally recognised and successful lobbyists would appear to be dependent on acquiring professionally relevant capital and the appropriate professional habitus.

The *seventh chapter* examines the assumption, intensively discussed in the sociology of professions, that professional work inevitably raises questions of legitimacy, as professional groups claim areas of responsibility and work for themselves. The arguments will demonstrate that European lobbying needs to be legitimised on two levels: as an activity and as an occupation. Most professionals share a common belief in legitimacy in both respects, which manifests itself in a fundamentally affirmative attitude to lobbying and an ethos of professionalism. Such a belief in legitimacy is particularly widespread in the core area of the profession. However, the question of legitimacy is a source of schisms and conflicts. It will become apparent that not all those actively involved in the profession believe that lobbying is a politically legitimate activity that is respected by society. Rather, conflicts between different groups with diverging interests and values erupt, as employees of different interest groups (business and trade versus NGOs and social movement organisations) have internalised divergent, sometimes incompatible, ideas of legitimacy and patterns of justification. The occupational field is therefore shaped by a conflict of legitimacy, which implies reciprocal attempts to justify own work and delegitimise political opponents.

The results paint the picture of an occupational field that is characterised by common and opposing forces. The *final chapter* aims to reflect the findings in the light of research to date. Lobbying is a politically divided but professionally highly homogenised field of activity. It can therefore only be grasped if European lobbying is seen simultaneously as both an organisational and an occupational field. In this respect, it is argued that more attention should be paid to research into staff in order to better understand the driving forces, forms, and consequences of a professionalisation of European lobbying. Additionally, this chapter reflects on the implications and consequences of a professionalisation of European lobbying for European politics and the EU. It argues that European lobbying will remain a highly normal but at the same time highly contentious field of professional labour. This is not only due to the raised attention of the general public, amongst them watchdog NGOs and the mass media, but also to the internal dynamism and latent conflicts within the field of European lobbying.