Giving voice to the people: towards a representative civil society

Investigating Perspectives on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Environmental European Civil Society Organisations

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Introduction

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are increasingly playing a key role in political systems, including transnational ones – such as in the European Union (EU) (Steffek and Hahn, 2010). CSOs set to represent groups of citizens, often marginalised ones, at the political level, making their voices heard in decision-making, and influencing societal norms (Johansson and Lee, 2014). CSOs thus have soft power in the political sphere (Urbinati and Warren, 2008). The inclusion of CSOs in EU governance was spearheaded in the early 2000s, by European Commission President Prodi who acted on his belief that "People want much more participatory, hands-on democracy. They will not support the European project unless they are fully involved in setting goals, making policy, and evaluating goals" (Prodi, 2000). In the decades since, CSOs operating at EU level (EU CSOs) have become an important interlocutor of the EU institutions. They often enjoy privileged relations, especially with the European Commission, and are actively engaged in the European policy processes through EU governance systems (Cullen 2003; Greenwood 2007). EU CSOs are expected to contribute to European democracy, because they are seen as intermediary actors between citizens and the European institutions (European Commission, 2001). It is believed that through this role they contribute towards a broader European citizenry; they nurture the weak democratic legitimacy of the EU and reduce the criticism of it being an elitist project (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2007). Thus, EU CSOs are seen as bringing democratic legitimacy to the EU, by representing the voice of the people in EU policy and decision making.

Representation is most generally understood as referring to one person standing for another (Pitkin, 1967). It is an authentic element of democracy, for it is seen to safeguard citizens' equality, freedom, as well as minority rights (Kohler-Koch, 2008). On this basis, much attention to representation has been related to electoral processes and state actors (Katyaini et al., 2021) and therefore usually applied to questions of state power and government (Greenwood, 2010:214). Only more recently has the spotlight been placed on non-electoral processes, informal representation, and soft power (Urbinati and Warren, 2008). In a political context, representation is conceptualised as making citizens' voices, opinions, and perspectives present in public policymaking (Pitkin, 1967). In this vein, the debate on representation has widened to include international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), which fall under the category of CSOs (Katyaini et al., 2021). Whether recognised as such from external or internal stakeholders, CSOs de facto engage in representation when they act on behalf of others and define and voice others' interests – often of social groups that tend to be disadvantaged (Katyaini et al., 2021). This has given rise to discussions on the legitimate representativity of these organisations (Jordan and van Tuijl, 2012:2053).

Most EU CSOs claim to be representative, because they count the majority of EU Member States in their membership, and have a large number of affiliated individual members (Greenwood, 2010). However, scholars have criticised this as a narrow and conventional understanding of representation, which gives inadequate consideration to the social group identities of the representatives (Greenwoord, 2010). Such conception is argued to potentially disregard the structural injustices faced by disadvantaged groups (on gender, see for example Phillips, 1998). Thus, the issue of legitimacy of representation has been questioned in terms of whose interests are being represented and who is doing the representing (Kohler-Koch, 2008). Notions such as 'revolving doors' or the 'EU Bubble'– which

refers to a homogenous group of individuals who share a similar social, educational, and professional background (Dialer & Richter, 2019) – show an exclusion of many social groups in EU CSOs and other EU-level actors. The exclusion scholars mention, can be viewed through Young's eyes: EU CSOs fail to include different social perspectives in their organisations when they omit the issues, experiences, and assumptions of different social groups (Young, 2000).

Given that CSOs are meant to play a vital role in ensuring that a different range of social perspectives is included in public discourse, particularly those of marginalised groups (Young, 2002), another form of representation is required. One such form is descriptive representation, which postulates that representatives who resemble those being represented are better able to mirror their common experiences (Young, 2002). According to Young (2002), by adopting descriptive representation, CSOs gain the capacity to provide equal opportunities and political equality, because they would include different perspectives and valorise situated knowledge which is gained through different social positioning. Activists of the Burning Case Podcast established a link between descriptive representation and diversity and inclusion in the workforce (Mikolajczak and Tuokkola, 2021b). They showed how individuals from racialised communities are excluded from the workforce of environmental EU CSOs, even though these communities are the most impacted by the climate crisis (IPCC, 2018). In their campaign #GreenBrusselsSoWhite, they claimed that racialised communities "should not only be at the forefront of climate action but also leading it. Yet, in Brussels, these spaces are predominantly occupied by white individuals." (Mikolajczak and Tuokkola, 2021b). Through a petition, they asked environmental EU CSOs to commit to diversity and inclusion actions (Mikolajczak and Tuokkola, 2021b). In brief, it has been argued that when EU CSOs fail to embrace diversity and inclusion, their legtimacy in effectively advocating for the general interest is undermined. The lack of diversity and inclusion in the workforce of these organisations is seen as limiting their understanding of the challenges and concerns faced by different communities, thereby hindering EU CSOs' representativeness (Young, 2002). Diversity and inclusion in environmental EU CSOs' workforce is an important issue because it is above all a political and social issue, given that they play a crucial role in shaping EU policies, especially in a time when the climate crisis ranks among the EU's top priorities (Mikolajczak and Tuokkola, 2021a).

Since the #GreenBrusselsSoWhite campaign in 2021, some environmental EU CSOs have become aware of their questioned legitimacy and have recently started implementing diversity and inclusion strategies (European Environmental Bureau, 2021; Transport & Environment, 2023). EU CSOs are only just beginning to make efforts towards diversity and inclusion. So, the approach they choose to take can, from the onset, either help them achieve legitimate representation or lead them to tokenism – which means including individuals from marginalised groups in a superficial or symbolic manner, without giving them genuine power or influence in the organisation (Kanter, 1997). Research has shown that, in non-profit settings, the business case and the social justice case elicit different interpretations compared to for-profit settings (Jurcevic and Fyall, 2019). However, there is little knowledge on how diversity and inclusion is conceptualised by non-profit actors (Mason, 2020; Weisinger et al., 2016). To date, there is a significant research gap on diversity and inclusion in CSOs, as well as on understanding how organisations with a democratic role perceive diversity and inclusion. This critical knowledge gap calls for a further understanding of these perspectives, which shape organisations' problem definitions and solutions (van Hulst and Yanow, 2014).

In this research paper, the phrase equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) has been chosen because, as scholars have recognised, using the individual concepts is limiting (Wolbring and Nguyen 2023). Diversity is commonly understood as the "demographic composition of organisations"; while inclusion refers to "employee involvement and the integration of diversity into organisational systems and processes" (Roberson, 2006:228). Equity instead, is understood as "the guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups" (Equity in the Center, 2019). Grouping these concepts under the umbrella term of EDI can offer a more holistic framework (Wolbring and Nguyen, 2023).

Research question

This research investigates how employees of environmental EU CSOs perceive equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). It will do so by focusing on how the framing of the role of civil society influences EU CSO employees' understanding of EDI. The research question guiding this study is**:** How do EU CSO employees frame their role as civil society and what is the relation between these framings and their understanding of EDI? Employing a qualitative research design within a constructivist research paradigm, this study adopts a case study approach with environmental EU CSO employees as the unit of analysis. The aim of this research is to investigate whether there is a relationship between the framing of the role of civil society organisations and the understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and to discover how EU CSOs understand EDI. The contribution adds to theory of EDI in non-profit settings, and more specifically (European) civil society organisations, which is socially relevant in light of the issue of underrepresentation in the political space (EU) CSOs occupy.

Outline of the thesis

The thesis has been organised as follows. Firstly, in the theoretical background I review relevant literature on EDI, present the institutional discourse on EU CSOs, and identify established diversity paradigms which I use as sensitising concepts. I then provide an explanation of the concept of framing analysis. Secondly, in the methodology, I discuss the research paradigm adopted, explain the case study context, and I describe and justify methodological choices, data collection and data analysis processes, including the Gioia method and framing analysis. This is followed by a section on research ethics. Thirdly, I present the findings of the research in the results section. Finally, I discuss the results, followed by the implications; I then outline the limitations, propose directions for future research, and draw a conclusion. Lastly, I engage in reflexivity regarding the research process.

Theoretical Background

Review of relevant literature

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in the workplace is a prominent topic of discussion in academic literature, business, and at a broader societal level (Garg, 2020). Academic literature recognises EDI (or diversity and inclusion, or diversity management, and the other names this concept has had throughout

the years) as having evolved in the United States from Equal Employment Opportunities which focused on achieving fairness through affirmative action (Kirton and Greene, 2015). EDI is said to have then taken a turn away from compliance, toward voluntary action, when the Workforce 2000 Report was launched (Johnston and Parker, 1987). This gave birth to managing diversity, where heterogeneity of work teams was acknowledged as positive, and diversity was celebrated (Kirton and Greene, 2015).

Since then, the focus of research has primarily revolved around two paradigms: the business case and the social justice case. The business case paradigm views diversity as beneficial for achieving business objectives (Benschop and Verloo, 2011), while the social justice case paradigm emphasises the moral responsibility to provide equal opportunities (Köllen, et al., 2018). Additionally, diversity is often regarded as a 'social good' (Fogelman and Antonsich, 2015), and a means of ensuring representation (Andrews and Ashworth, 2015). In the public sector, EDI approaches assume that a diverse workforce is more representative of the population, and so, it fosters inclusion. According to the literature, in order to be more responsive to public interests and better support democratic principles, public organisations seek to have a diverse workforce, matching their workforce to the diverse social groups within the general population (Selden and Selden, 2001:308).

Researchers have found that these streams of conceptualisation, both in the public and private sector, have been adapted to the general non-profit sector (Weisinger, et al., 2016). In addition, scholars argue that both the business and social justice cases are viewed as complementary in the non-profit sector (Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010). A small number of studies have explored the extent to which non-profit organisations engage in equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts (Mason, 2020). Research which looks at this topic is predominantly from the United States or the United Kingdom, and mostly concentrates on board governance (Bernstein, et al., 2019), leadership (Mumford, 2022), how diversity increases collaboration (Gazley, et al., 2010), and diversity and inclusion practices (Mason, 2020).

Role of EU Civil Society Organisations

European civil society organisations (EU CSOs) distinguish themselves from other non-profits, mainly due to their contact with policymaking and decision makers in the European Union (Schoenefeld, 2021). The EU institutions have created the space for Brussels-based CSOs to engage in policy making through consultation and participation mechanisms, as well as funding programmes (European Commission, 2014). Clearly, these institutions then influence the environment in which these organisations operate to a great extent (Smismans, 2003; Kohler-Koch 2008). The dynamic political nature of the European Union also influences the role attributed to EU CSOs.

Academics have claimed that EU CSOs play various distinct and important roles rooted in the EU democratic vision (Kohler-Koch, 2009; Smismans, 2008). These roles have been conceptualised along three broad lines, also termed 'three worlds' by Kohler-Koch (2009:50). They reflect the political and academic discourse on the EU political order. According to Kohler-Koch, these worlds are: (1) the 'democratic legitimacy' world, where civil society acts as a remedy for political legitimacy issues by representing various interests and bringing new ideas to enhance the EU's democratic legitimacy; (2) the 'stakeholder' world, where EU CSOs are stakeholders in public-private partnerships and their quality and resources are considered crucial for their participation; and (3) the 'activated European citizenry'

world, where civil society plays a role in creating a European political community for public communication and deliberative democracy, voicing the people's interest and demanding inclusion in European policy making (2009). An additional role worth considering is the functional role which, as Smismans (2003) explains, seeks to expand the inclusive representation within EU policymaking. These are the functions attributed to EU CSOs in EU discourse; however, research has not yet conceptualised how EU CSOs view themselves and their role in the framework of EU democratic governance.

Diversity paradigms

Thomas and Ely theorised on diversity paradigms, claiming that these "channel organisational thinking in powerful ways", in that they can foster or limit the expression of diversity in an organisation as well as the organisational learning and change (1996:82). They define workplace diversity as "the varied perspective and approaches to work that members of different identity groups bring" (1996:80). In their work, they identify three distinct but complementary diversity paradigms which shape an organisation's approach to diversity management: (1) Discrimination-and-Fairness, (2) Access-and-Legitimacy, and (3) Learning-and-Effectiveness. These paradigms have been chosen as sensitising concepts because they offer a well-established framework for understanding diversity management. They draw on existing knowledge in the field while providing a holistic view of diversity perspectives and approaches, which allow for a nuanced understanding of EDI complexities. Moreover, their broader applicability enables adaptation to the specific context of EU CSOs, offering insights into their perceptions.

The Discrimination-and-Fairness paradigm is philosophically oriented towards equal treatment and fairness. Its view of diversity follows the rhetoric of 'happy diversity' (Hoobler, 2005), a perspective where differences are put aside in favour of the 'we are all the same, difference does not matter' belief. In this sense, the goal is to establish a workforce that is representative of different demographics, where all members treat each other the same. Diversity management focuses on recruitment and retention, compliance with anti-discrimination laws, mentoring and career coaching. The outcome of viewing diversity through this lens is that although the organisation might be capable of diversifying its staff, its work remains unaltered by the differences brought about by group heterogeneity. It is argued that this paradigm leads to gender and colour-blind conformism, i.e., assimilation – while the staff might be diverse, the work remains unaltered by this diversity (Thomas and Ely, 1996:81-83).

The Access-and-Legitimacy paradigm celebrates diversity as a means to tap into new markets. It views diversity as an asset that makes business sense. It finds its value in how a diversity of identity groups can be a source of knowledge of 'their own people' (Thomas and Ely, 1996). The aim is to position individuals in roles where their demographic traits align with those of significant constituents and target markets. It fails to address how organisations can learn from difference and embed these learnings into the organisational culture, as well as its processes and outputs. Thomas and Ely reflect on how this paradigm creates a climate of differentiation, whereby heterogenous groups are pigeon-holed into a specialised position in the organisation, thereby side-lining them from the organisation's mainstream work (1996:83-85).

The Learning-and-Effectiveness paradigm stems from organisations which have included employees' perspectives into every aspect of the organisation – from structure to culture. The paradigm combines equal opportunities for all (Fairness paradigm) and acknowledges and finds value in difference (Access paradigm). However, this paradigm transcends both because it encourages the organisation to internalise differences, to learn and grow from them. The philosophical underpinning of this paradigm rests on what Thomas and Ely call the concept of integration (1996).

Framing analysis

Frames guide the ways in which situational participants perceive their social realities and (re)present these to themselves as well as to others (van Hulst and Yanow, 2014:3). The framing processes produce a model of the world by reflecting on prior sense-making as well as a model for subsequent action in that world (van Hulst and Yanow, 2014). Framing analysis is considered valuable in organisation studies as it enables a deeper understanding of how individuals and groups perceive and communicate social realities within organisational contexts, shedding light on the subjective interpretations and meaning-making processes that influence behaviour and decision-making (Cornelissen and Werner, 2014). By examining the framing processes, researchers can uncover the underlying models and perspectives that shape organisational actions and guide subsequent behaviours and actions in the organisational environment (Goffman, 1974). So, framing analysis can serve to understand both how EU CSOs understand EDI and what the reasons behind prioritising and valuing it in their organisation are, in relation to their role as CSOs at European level.

Methodology

Research paradigm

Every research is guided by a basic belief system or worldview, known as a research paradigm, based on ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), which underpin the research and the methodology employed. This thesis uses a constructivist research paradigm because it seeks to prioritise the exploration of the subjective experiences and perspectives of individuals, seeking to understand how these are shaped by cultural, social, and historical contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Such an approach provides insights to the perceptions, interpretations and meaning-making processes which affect organisational members' actions (Hosking and McNamee, 2006).

Case study context

In qualitative research, case studies are a suitable research method for investigating complex social phenomena in their natural context (Eisenhart, 2001). Case studies allow for in-depth examination of a single case, where details and nuances are investigated, so as to better understand the social phenomenon subject of the study (Eisenhart, 2001). What's more, case studies allow the researcher to analyse relationships between different factors and identify patterns and themes (Yin, 2009). The case study used in this research was environmental EU CSOs, because EDI is part of their organisational

consciousness. In fact, their employees are likely aware of EDI concepts, thanks to the #GreenBrusselsSoWhite petition launched in February 2021, since which they have started a cross-organisational working group on EDI (Burning Case, 2021). The selection of this case is thus justified, in that it is representative of the phenomenon under investigation; it emerged from opportunity; and it is an outlier case (Yin, 2009).

Data collection

A range of professionals working in environmental EU CSOs were invited to participate in the research. Interviews were conducted with 13 environmental EU CSO professionals between April and June 2023. Initially, the focus was on those employees from organisations which are part of the Green 10 Coalition - the main environmental EU CSOs. The sampling strategy focused on hearing the voices of different people, in terms of their positions, jobs, and backgrounds. This was to support the exposure of the polyphonic, polysemic nature of organisations: the 'many voices and many meanings' (Buchanan, 2012). To address the limited response rate encountered, a strategic decision was taken during the data collection process to broaden the criteria for selecting research participants. This expansion included organisations working on environmental sustainability, outside the Green 10 Coalition.

Interviews were conducted both in person and online using Zoom; they each lasted between 35 and 45 minutes. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and a paid software (sonix.ai) was used to support the transcribing process. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow participants to express their views in their own words, which provided a rich source of qualitative data and enabled the elicitation of nuanced and detailed responses (Myers, 2012). I made use of an interview guide (see Appendix 2) which I applied, with few phrasing edits, to each interview in order to address issues of control and quality (Flick, 2007). Given the time gaps between the sets of interviews, and the fact that I used the Gioia method for data analysis, I took an iterative approach: going from data collection to data analysis recursively (Langley and Abdallah, 2011).

Data analysis

The topic of EU CSOs and EDI appears to be under-explored and under-researched. Given the apparent gap in literature and knowledge, this piece of research has the potential to find novelties and to start scratching at the surface of possible theory development on the topic. For this, the Gioia method was used in the data analysis, as it is a data-driven approach with the purpose of capturing and modelling informant meanings, searching for their understandings of organisational events (Langley and Abdallah, 2011).

The Gioia method is suitable for a case study, as it is appreciated for its revelatory potential and richness of data (Langley and Abdallah, 2011). The method builds a 'data structure' (see Appendix 3) through progressive abstraction. I started by identifying informant first-order codes, going on to building second-order themes and ending with aggregate dimensions (Langley and Abdallah, 2011). Initially I included many first-order codes. However, once the second order themes became more apparent I honed in on the most relevant first-order codes in relation to my research question. The Gioia method proved useful in so far as it provided a systematic process for identifying themes and patterns in the

data, which supported me in drawing meaningful conclusions about the case study (Langley and Abdallah, 2011). Different meanings emerged when I engaged with the data, so I had to be flexible and revise the initial codes and themes throughout the process. Additionally, having taken an inductive approach in this thesis, I adapted the theoretical framework as I engaged with data analysis. This iterative approach helped identify the adequate sensitising concepts to guide me through the research.

The choice to focus on the framing of EU CSOs roles comes from the understanding that frames shape the definition of policies, measures, as well as discourse and debate on an issue (van Hulst and Yanow, 2014). Through framing analysis, implicit theories EU CSOs have of their role as CSOs was brought to the surface. The method enabled a deeper understanding of EDI as conceived in relation to EU CSOs' role; what diagnosis is made; and what value judgements are involved (Entman, 1993:52).

Ethical considerations

As a researcher, I am bound by research ethics as well as professional behaviour in every step of the trajectory. Equity, diversity, and inclusion can be sensitive topics, especially when involving critical reflections on privilege. These topics can arouse strong emotions, inside and outside the organisation. Attention to privacy and anonymity is paramount, since participants could experience backlash. I kept all personal and organisational information confidential by anonymising the coding. I endeavoured to give equal opportunities to all organisations and organisational employees to participate in the research project and to ensure there were no discriminatory practices in place.

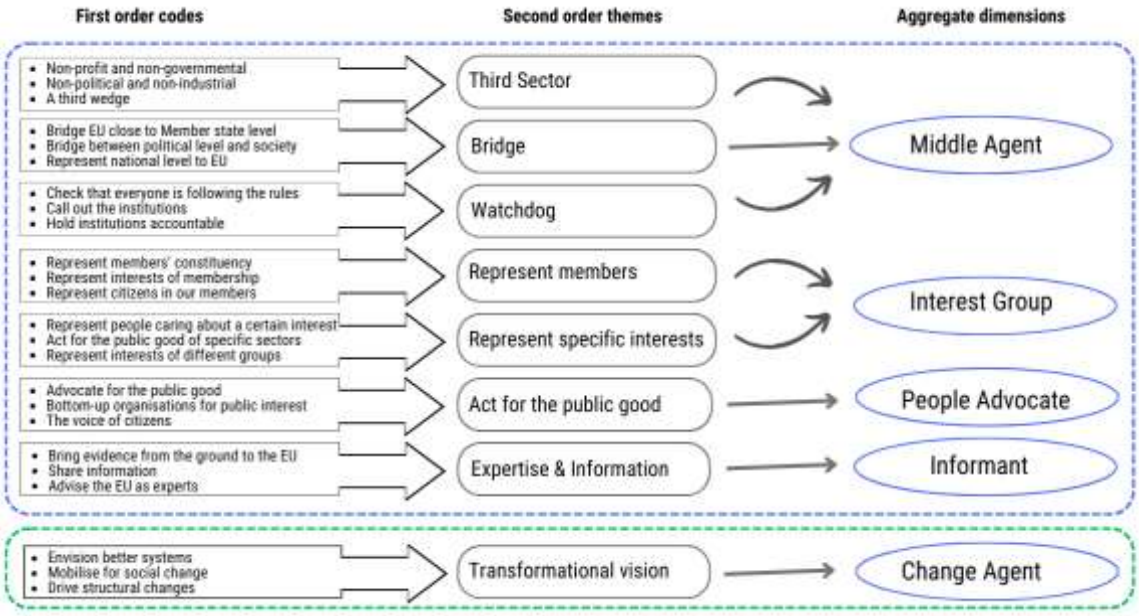
Every interviewee voluntarily participated in the research. I strove to make them fully aware of the research process and format of the outcome (i.e. a thesis available to the public online), as well as how I would handle their data. I treated every informant's personal information and views as confidential and did not share them with other members of the organisations or any other persons. This was done for the respect and protection of the participants. To ensure clarity about the expectations and implications of participation, as well as to guarantee a proper consent process, each interviewee received a one-page explainer. This document outlined who I am, what the research is about broadly, the practicalities, expectations, and their entitlements as participants of this study – such as being free to stop the interview at any given moment or withdraw consent, their right to privacy and anonymity. This information was repeated at the start of every interview, where consent was asked again. To ensure anonymity, in this thesis pseudonyms are used for all respondents (additional data can be found in Appendix 1). I made use of academic guidelines to support me in ensuring I adopted a sound ethical approach through my research (Smith, 2003).

Results

In this section, the emergent topics identified in the coding process are presented, and exemplified by interview segments. Firstly, the framing of roles within civil society organisations at European level (EU CSOs) are explored, followed by an investigation of the diversity paradigms articulated by participants based on their understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

Framing of CSO roles

Figure 1: Data structure on the framing of CSO roles



EU CSO workers frame the role of civil society in different and often complementing ways, as illustrated by the selected segments in this section. All the informants conceptualised CSOs' role in society as being multifaceted, often extensive. A number of them reported either not having thought much about what makes an organisation a CSO or found it difficult to explain. As the quotation below suggests, Fiona, a senior adviser, struggled to pinpoint what a CSO is, illustrating how she had not thought deeply about the role of the broader sector her organisation works in, possibly because it is not necessary in her job.

"What does civil society mean to me? I kind of see it as the general public […] I don't know. I mean, civil society is everybody no? I've never really reflected on it that much." (Fiona, Interview 6)

Five themes emerged from the data in relation to the framing of CSO roles. I have termed the first role as the 'Middle Agent' frame. This frame encompasses notions of CSOs being non-profit and non-governmental. They act as a bridge between citizens and institutions, and as a watchdog – an oversight body. Freya, a senior communications and media officer, adopted this frame when she explained that CSOs are about bringing a 'third voice' to decision-making, one that is neither politically nor economically based, but rather people centred, or 'human' as she expressed it.

"I think the role of civil society is to ensure that not all decision making is based on, let's say, industrial or political considerations […] quite often the agenda is led by other types of entities that are maybe less human in some ways" (Freya, Interview 1)

The second is the 'Interest Group' frame, where CSOs advocate on behalf of their member organisations, thus representing their interests. In this frame, representing the people is about representing those in their organisations' structure, rather than wider society. Many EU CSOs tend to

be structured as networks, or umbrella organisations, which have member organisations that are frequently part of their governance. They thus engage in a "long chain of representation" (Kröger, 2008:35).

"Going up the ladder: so, we represent the people in our member organisation. We represent those that they represent. So, for me, being a civil society organisation is basically being, you know, the voice and the advocate of these people." (Matteo, Interview 7).

As Matteo, a policy officer, put it, the role of CSOs in his view is to advocate for the interests represented in their member organisations, rather than the interests of the wider public. This can be interpreted as an indirect representation of citizens.

The third is the 'People Advocate' frame, where the role of CSOs is seen as representing the public good and common interest. Julie, a senior communications officer, explained how the role of CSOs to her is to voice the needs and concerns of citizens.

"To me, a civil society organisation is any organisation that represents the voice of citizens" (Julie, Interview 3).

Julie uses the term citizens, rather than people, perhaps referring to the representation of a narrower population, i.e., EU citizens.

The fourth is the 'Informant' frame, where CSOs are seen as responsible for providing information and expertise to European institutions as well as supporting the implementation of EU policies.

"For experts as well to have a say, to bring expertise and where people would not necessarily go and find you, but you go and find them" (Pierre, Interview 9).

Pierre, a policy trainee, explained how experts in EU CSOs initiate contact with policymakers to provide them with their specialised knowledge and expertise. Here the role of CSOs is understood as gathering evidence and applying expertise to support the proposals made to influence government policy.

These four frames have been recognised in the literature as shaped by institutional interests of the European Union, which respond to the so-called 'legitimacy crisis of Brussels' bureaucracy' (Smismans, 2003:484). Informants who framed their roles in line with the institutional perspective have been grouped together, and are collectively referred to as the Institutional Group. A second group was discerned, comprising those informants who in addition to following the institutional line, framed their role as the 'Change Agent', where CSOs are tasked with proposing alternative views and values to EU bureaucrats, with the aim of making change through EU public policy.

"I think I see also our role a bit to have a more ambitious and transformative vision […] It's quite a narrow understanding the Commission has with this just transition fund, so I see our role as "okay, but what about a wider understanding of a just transition and what does it mean in a global context? What does

it mean from a feminist perspective?" Kind of reimagining how we do things now as well and give them also new ideas that they might not have." (Heidi, Interview 5)

According to Heidi, a senior policy officer, the European Commission, which is responsible for drawing up proposals for new European legislation (European Commission, n.d.), usually has a limited understanding of certain policies such as the Just Transition. In her view, the role of CSOs is to challenge these conceptions by bringing a broader and more nuanced perspective to the discussion. EU CSOs in this sense, need to come up with new ideas and different viewpoints to expand Commission proposals. The approach must not only be new, but also have a transformative nature – being concerned with reimagining how things are done. Olivier, a programme director, highlighted how by working within the framework of the EU institutions, CSOs are able to advocate for policies and ideas which are transformative, or even revolutionary. The Change Agent frame also encompasses the notion that CSOs are part of the democratic system because they bring alternative views to the establishment.

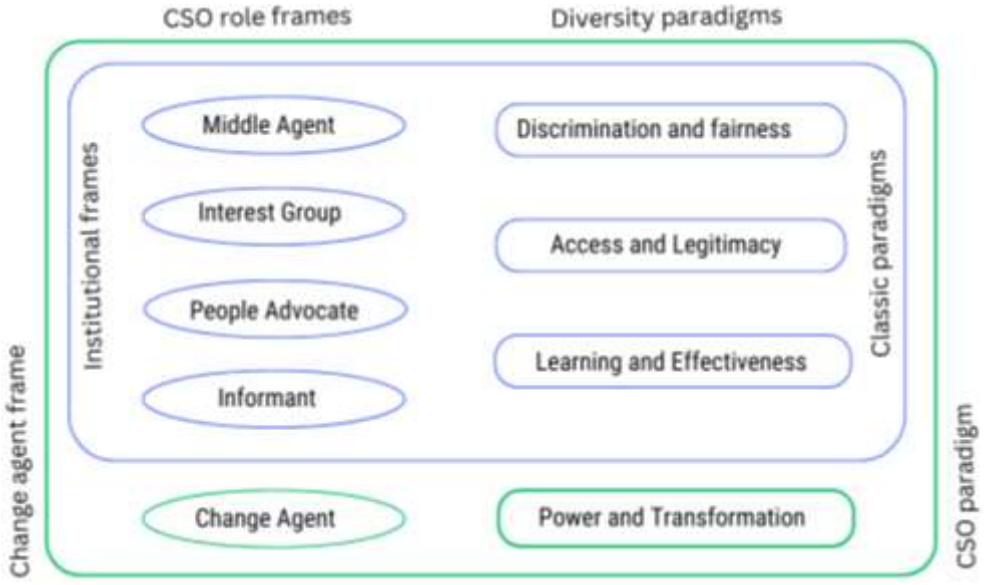
"What we do in practice is rather try to play the rules of the games, but to push for our specific things which are disruptive within those established institutional processes." (Olivier, Interview 13).

Seen in this way, CSOs contribute to shaping policies that can help create a different, better world– for Heidi that world includes an economic system which is people- and nature-centred:

"Our role is that we would like to create a better economic system or we try to envision an economic system works better for people and nature" (Heidi, Interview 5).

Effects of framing on EDI:

Figure 2. Relationship Between CSO Role Framing and Understanding of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion



EU CSO members understand EDI in line with four diversity paradigms. Interviewees referred to characteristics of the Discrimination-and-Fairness paradigm, by highlighting equal treatment at work,

balanced demographic of the workforce, ensuring rights are respected, and safety at the workplace (Thomas and Ely, 1996). Senior policy officer Zoya, made a comment that shows the importance of the workforce being proportionally representative of the gender demographics at managerial level:

"I would definitely think that the management is not made up of men only because we are, let's say 50/50 at least, if not more women" (Zoya, Interview 10).

Respondents also referred to elements of the Access-and-Legitimacy paradigm, where the focus of diversity is to bring on board people with different backgrounds so they are able to reach different segments of society they would not otherwise be able to reach (Thomas and Ely, 1996). Value is found in difference, as described by senior communications and media officer Freya:

"just not neglecting any talent. I think it helps smoothen operations, it helps external operations, it helps people communicate internally and externally and just will result in a nicer atmosphere and better work, all in all" (Freya, Interview 1).

In this quotation, Freya suggested how EDI can, not only enable an organisation to utilise all skills and talents, but also support internal and external communication and foster a positive work environment.

In explaining their understanding of EDI, interviewees also mentioned components of the Learning-and-Effectiveness paradigm (Thomas and Ely, 1996). For instance, senior communications officer Julie showed how, in her understanding, EDI is about internalising differences into the organisation, integrating them to learn and grow.

"I think the way that we write certain texts would be done with a bit more sensitivity on some things. And I think again, it comes from a place of ignorance. We don't know what we don't know now but having those other voices and points of view and experiences included, I think would deeply enrich our work." (Julie, Interview 3).

Julie reflected on how an organisation's lack of sensitivity towards certain issues is the result of lack of awareness and knowledge, which could be remedied with EDI. Some interviewees went beyond the Learning-and-Effectiveness paradigm, talking about how they understand EDI as a tool for structural change which includes notions of justice, redress, and balance. Power emerged as a common thread in these narratives. I have named this paradigm Power-and-Transformation. Jose, a people and culture manager, explained how he sees EDI as a system with the capacity to help rebalance inherited power relations between groups.

"It's a clear mechanism to somehow address the mistakes that were committed in the past as a society and it's something that we owe to our history as human beings […] this is the way that actually we can design a new way of living […] We are trying to change the mindsets and the power dynamics that have been imposed by societies across history" (Jose Interview 2).

Jose expressed his belief that through EDI societies can imagine a new way of living together, which can only be done by changing our ways of thinking and power dynamics, both of which he sees as imposed

upon us. There is an understanding that power imbalances have historically marginalised certain individuals and groups, perpetuating systemic inequalities – which are also present in our mindsets. This thought is expanded upon by Carmen, a campaigns officer, who asserted that we need to think outside the boundaries of our own minds, embodying a transformational vision so as to achieve the change sought.

"In my organisation, it's not about the environment only, but it's about the systemic change that we need to make our world a more just and fair place – and it needs to start with our office […] you cannot think about systemic change in your in your own bubble. So if we actually want to achieve our goals, we need to do it in a way that the minds that are thinking about this represent the change that we want to make […] It's the only way to make things right in a way" (Carmen, Interview 12).

Carmen emphasised how her organisation's mission, needs to be reached in the office, before it can be reached at societal level. While this statement is in a way expressing a 'practise what you preach' idea, it also articulates how systemic change cannot be borne out of a single mindset. Although indirectly, Carmen conveyed the idea that her organisation needs to represent diversity, so as to bring them closer to their envisioned just and fair world. Another aspect of the Power-and-Transformation paradigm is using EDI as a means for structural change, as John, a communications officer, explained:

"you got like people in the Global South who basically because of where they were born or their nationality they can't contribute to policy making within Europe on issues that directly affect them cause, ironically, they are from the place that is being affected not the place doing the affecting" (John, Interview 8).

John highlighted the structural barriers people from the Global South face, which keep them out of Brussels – out of working for EU CSOs and thus out of the influencing sphere. The irony he pointed out about how those impacted do not get to do any of the impacting, suggests a perceived imbalance of geopolitical power, as well as between the advocates and the beneficiaries. Another example of EDI as a means to achieve structural change is brought up by Isabelle, a director, who said:

"I wouldn't say that gender equality is totally achieved because you have, you know, almost 100% of women directors in civil society […] Are there women in these positions being able to fulfil their roles while still having, you know, a good private life as well? And I know that many, many, many, many struggle." (Isabelle, Interview 4).

Isabelle suggested that having a demographic representation of women is not enough. Even if we were to have women in leadership positions in every civil society organisation, we would still be far from gender equality, she explained. A woman director, Isabelle claimed, would not be able to fulfil her role and have a good private life at the same time.

Lastly, the Power-and-Transformation paradigm is about redress. Senior communications officer Julie reflected on the origins of many environmental organisations. She talked about power asymmetry, choosing an example of an organisation founded by royalty, which highlights the notion of privilege and subordination. Nobility telling 'common people' how to live and interact with their lands.

"That shadow will always loom over this group. The origins are very similar for many other groups, maybe not in the sense of, you know, founded by a Prince to preserve hunting grounds, but […] you see a lot of […] white people dictating to others what should be done to their lands to preserve them […] I think that's the legacy of the environmental movement and environmental NGOs" (Julie, Interview 3).

To this day environmental action, as Julie suggested, is seen as the West prescribing solutions to the Global South. In this context, EDI work is understood to be a path towards redress for this mentality and legacy, as Julie mentioned.

The interrelationship between the role of civil society organisations and EDI was only mentioned at times. It was never explained in relation to wanting to be representative organisations, but mainly in the context of the rhetoric of 'being the change you want to see in the world' as Carmen expressed, or feeling like EU CSOs are well-placed to integrate values into organisational structures and processes, because they are non-profits, as programme director Olivier highlighted.

"Yes, I see a connection between our role and diversity and inclusion. I mean, I think that if as civil society organisations we were not able to do that, I'm not sure anyone would be able to do it because we have the freedom to adapt our ways of working to our values because we are not-for-profit. We are not driven by making profit." (Olivier, Interview 13).

Olivier suggested that it is the non-profit nature of CSOs which allows them the flexibility to adapt their approaches and prioritise inclusivity in their work, and it is this that sets them apart from profit-driven entities. He expressed doubt that other organisations would be able to foster EDI if CSOs were not able to do so, perhaps reflecting the notion that the profit-driven nature of for-profit organisations may pose additional obstacles or constraints in promoting EDI, as their primary focus is on generating financial returns.

Discussion

In the face of the problem of decreased representation legitimacy, and a research gap on EU CSOs efforts for EDI, it was posited that EU CSO employees would understand EDI in relation to their role as civil society organisations. The fact that EU CSOs are value-driven entities operating within the democratic arena, would influence their employees' understanding of EDI. Consequently, this piece of research aimed to explore the potential relationship between EU CSOs' framing of their role and the way in which they understand EDI. This study makes a valuable contribution to the existing knowledge on the role of EU CSOs and theories on diversity paradigms and EDI in the context of CSOs in three key ways. Firstly, I reveal that EU CSOs frame themselves as having multiple roles in EU governance and society, which extend beyond those recognised in EU discourse to include a non-institutional frame, that of the Change Agent. Secondly, I identify a paradigm utilised by EU CSO employees – the Power-and-Transformation paradigm, which is concerned with structural inequalities, power, and a transformational vision. Thirdly, I show how framing CSOs' role as a Change Agent impacts the understanding of EDI. Lastly, this paper provides implications for EDI practices within EU CSOs, a critical

reflection on the limitations of the research, and offers directions for future research as well as researcher reflexivity.

With regards to the first contribution, a significant number of research participants encountered difficulty in articulating the role(s) of CSOs within society, expressing a lack of prior contemplation on the matter. They sometimes gave contradictory accounts of how they frame their role. One such clear instance is how they view their role as advocating for the common interests and then mention how they advocate only for the people who are represented in their membership. This initial observation appeared somewhat unexpected considering the participants' extensive experience working within CSOs, which led to the assumption that they would have already reflected upon the broader societal role of their sector. However, it became evident that these individuals primarily focused on the specific issues they addressed through their work and the distinctive role played by their respective organisations, rather than perceiving themselves as an integral part of a wider sector characterised by shared roles and responsibilities. EU CSO employees framed CSOs as having multiple roles; mostly roles present in EU discourse on CSOs and thus understood as institutional frames (Kohler-Koch, 2009; Smismans 2003). The first frame is the Middle Agent, where CSOs are seen as a remedy for EU democracy deficit, acting as an intermediary entity distinct from the state and the market – and is in line with the 'democratic legitimacy' world (Kohler-Koch, 2009). The second is the Interest Group frame, congruent with a functional representation role which aims to broaden the representative basis for EU policymaking (Smismans, 2003). The third is the People Advocate frame, which is aligned to the third world of an activated European citizenry (Kohler-Koch, 2008; Smismans 2003). The fourth is the Informant frame, consistent with the second world of stakeholders in the EU's public-private partnerships (Kohler-Koch, 2009). The reliance of EU CSO employees on institutional frames could be due to the fact that EU CSOs tend to be financially dependent on the EU, which is also their primary lobbying target – making them devote significant efforts towards being acknowledged as serving the purpose the EU has assigned them (Johansson and Lee, 2014). What's more, research has identified two fundamental factors which determine who gets access to EU policymaking, or who gets to 'play the game' (Middlemas, 1995). These concern the characteristics of the actors trying to gain influence and the perceptions of those whose interests are sought to be influenced (Middlemas, 1995). This might explain the focus placed by EU CSOs on their roles in line with institutional discourse. Several interviewees, however, ascribed CSOs another role outside the institutional framework, that of the Change Agent. Framed as such, the roles of CSOs are to expand the EU institutions' understanding of a given issue, bringing broader and more nuanced perspectives to it. This role entails EU CSOs bringing alternative ideas to the policy-making arena, *"*reimagining how we do things now*"* (Heidi, Interview 5), challenging systems and structures to create a better world – one that is socially and environmentally just.

With regards to the second contribution, the EU CSO employees interviewed understood EDI using multiple diversity paradigms, often building on them in a complementary fashion and incorporating aspects of the other paradigms. A mix of the business case and the social justice case can be observed in their understanding of EDI, showing a compatibility between the two (Weisinger, et al., 2016). When utilising the business case discourse, which sees workforce diversity as a means for enhancing organisational success (Kirton and Greene, 2015), EU CSO employees show their understanding of EDI as establishing equal opportunities, making use of untapped skills and talents, and improving outreach.

Whilst when utilising the social justice case, which justifies diversity and equality based on an ethical and/or moral justification (Kirton and Greene, 2015), EU CSO employees show their understanding of EDI as a means to integrate their values into the organisation's practices and structures. By making complementary recourse to the social justice case, EU CSO employees move beyond the business case, and its quantifiable organisational benefits, in favour of a structural approach to EDI which fosters an understanding and attention to structural discrimination (Kaler, 2001; Liff 1997). A new paradigm emerged in this research, that of Power-and-Transformation. This paradigm can be interpreted as a branch of the social justice case as the EU CSO employees used a moral frame when referring to it. However, it offers a more radical understanding of EDI, where it is seen as a mechanism to address historical power dynamics which have led to current structures and systems which perpetuate inequalities. The focus of this paradigm is structure, rather than numbers. Having a demographic representation of different social groups in the workforce is not deemed sufficient, if it is not accompanied by a rethinking of the norms which disadvantage these groups. When discussing women leaders in CSOs, for instance, Isabelle suggested that gender equality should go beyond having women in positions of power, to changing gendered norms such as those that result in designing high-level positions with the ideal worker in mind – he "who works longer hours, who is seen to denote a more committed and devoted employee" (Kirton and Greene, 2015: 220). EDI perceived in this manner offers the groups who are usually impacted by EU policies, an opportunity to play a role in impacting these – thus going from passive subjects of policies to active agents. EDI, in this paradigm, is just as much about giving access as it is about transforming the self and the organisations, that have been designed with power disparities guiding their mindsets. By placing emphasis on redistributing power, addressing historical injustices, and promoting genuine understanding and respect, EDI becomes an avenue through which societal transformation can occur, reshaping the structures and norms that have contributed to the marginalisation of different social groups and harm to the environment.

With regards to the third contribution, counter to assumptions which shaped expectations in this study, the data suggests that there is no linear, nor consequential correlation which stands out with regards to the relation between how EU CSO employees frame their role as CSOs and their understanding of EDI. The informants of this study generally do not draw an explicit connection between the role they have as part of organised civil society and EDI efforts. There is one exception where an interviewee mentioned how being non-profit guarantees a certain independence, enabling EU CSOs to align their modus operandi to their values (Olivier, Interview 13). Besides Olivier, other interviewees do not express a direct reason for CSOs to engage in EDI that is any different from what is expressed in other settings. However, there are instances where an indirect connection is made. The data shows how interviewees adopt an additional frame on top of the institutional ones, that of the Change Agent – they make reference to bursting their own bubble: reimagining, disrupting, transforming. When interviewees also see their role as Change Agents, they are more likely to understand EDI as a tool to achieve the change they strive for.

Implications

There are several theoretical and practical implications of this study. Firstly, it suggested that the way EU CSO employees frame their role as CSOs is related to their understanding of EDI. As shown, those who frame their role following only the institutional discourse are more likely to understand EDI in the

ways we see in the literature. On the other hand, those who frame their role as Change Agents are more likely to adopt a more radical understanding of EDI as being about power and societal transformation. Secondly, the strong juxtaposition of the for-profit and non-profit sectors suggests that adopting EDI practices used in the private sector may not be as attractive to EU CSO employees as practices from the public or non-profit sector. This is because EU CSOs see themselves as distinctly separate from companies, often claiming to be acting against private-sector interests. On the practical side, EU CSOs wishing to engage in EDI efforts, might consider having reflections within their organisation on the role they see themselves playing in society, as this will have implications for the diversity paradigm they adopt and therefore the EDI strategies they choose to use. Additionally, those EU CSOs who frame their role as being Change Agents could consider strategies which combine the structural dimension of change with the transformation scope, thus achieving a more wide-ranging scope (see Benschop and Verloo, 2011). These include the *Gender Mainstreaming* strategy and the *Post-Equity* strategy. Gender Mainstreaming seeks to eliminate bias from existing routines and mobilises many people, including regular organisational actors, experts, and policymakers, to identify routines and norms that (re)produce inequalities (Eisenstein, 1996). The Post-Equity strategy instead, challenges the ongoing social constructions of gender which shape everyday organisational routines and interactions in the workplace. It proposes a cycle of critical action research, experiments interrupting gendering processes while improving work effectiveness, and a narrative about these experiments and their success (Benschop and Verloo, 2011). Although these strategies refer to gender diversity and inclusion, they can be extended to other socially constructed groups, and used to work on intersectionality.

Limitations

The limitations of this research include possible dependability issues stemming from the interviewees' capacity (conscious or subconscious) and willingness to present their perspectives in an honest and transparent manner (Langley and Abdallah, 2011). This can result from the pressure felt by the interviewees, unease, fear of doing the organisation a disservice, or due to social desirability. Additionally, another issue related to dependability is how the interpretation of meaning could diverge from the intended meaning. Another limitation concerns a sample bias in the data collected, in that possibly only those who are engaged and passionate about EDI participated in the research. Although the sampling strategy set out took this into account and avoided it as far as possible, given the practicalities of the research settings, this bias could not be eliminated. A limitation of this study was the inability to employ triangulation due to restricted access to internal documents by the informants. Additionally, open access documents that could have provided valuable insights were unsuitable for use while maintaining the anonymity and privacy commitments made to the participants. As a result, the researcher was unable to cross-validate findings through multiple sources or perspectives, thus impeding the application of triangulation which would have granted this thesis a higher degree of credibility (Myers, 2012). Limitations also stem from employing the Gioia method: for instance, there is a challenge in convincing readers about the transferability as well as relevance of the findings from a single case study (Langley and Abdallah, 2011). I do not seek to generalise the findings from this case study to the general population or to all organisations, but rather to use this study to spark an interest in and start the building a theory: that is, to go from experience and observation to

theory. In addition, as a consequence of inductive research employing grounded theory, there is a certain level of de-contextualisation generated by the Gioia method (Langley and Abdallah, 2011).

Further Research

Based on the findings of this study, further research opportunities can be explored. There are specific areas that warrant investigation. As this research focused specifically on EU CSOs working on environmental sustainability, it would therefore be valuable to investigate other types of EU CSOs, particularly those which work on social issues, to determine whether there are differences in their understanding of EDI and the framing of their role as CSOs. Such a comparative analysis could provide insights into how EDI is addressed across different sectors and help identify best practices and challenges specific to each sector. While elements of power, privilege, and merit emerged during this research, a comprehensive analysis of these dynamics was beyond the scope of this study. Power is an important aspect of EU CSOs, which exert soft power by persuading and influencing others through compelling arguments and information (Nye, 2004), or by preventing certain issues from featuring on the political agenda, known as "non-decisions" (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970). Further research could delve deeper into the influence of power structures and the impact of privilege and meritocracy within EU CSOs, and its relation to representation. This examination would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how these factors shape EDI practices and outcomes.

Although not relevant to this particular thesis, an important concern was raised by interviewees about the prevalence of certain educational backgrounds within EU CSOs, in particular the dominance of specific elite universities. Investigating this issue further could provide insights into how educational elitism impacts the understanding of and discourse on EDI within EU CSOs. Understanding the implications of educational background and social class on organisational change agendas and the promotion of EDI, could help address these challenges and promote greater diversity in educational representation. As EDI strategies are starting to be designed or implemented by EU CSOs, it would be valuable to assess their impact and evaluate the difficulties encountered during the organisational change process. Examining changes in the framing of EDI and the perceived role of CSOs in light of these strategies would contribute to understanding the effectiveness of EDI initiatives and identifying areas for improvement. By exploring these research directions, a more comprehensive understanding of EDI within EU CSOs can be developed, leading to the identification of strategies, practices, and policies that foster greater representation within these organisations.

Conclusion

The Power-and-Transformation paradigm can have noteworthy implications because of its attention to power. There is a recognition, in understanding EDI through the lens of this paradigm, of how power asymmetries are responsible for the origins and structures of environmental EU CSOs, and how these have influenced their epistemologies, experiences, perceptions, governance frameworks, and the knowledge they promote – which is often Western-centric (Brühl, 2010). Thus, addressing EDI through this perspective can grant access to disadvantaged social groups so that they can participate in setting political priorities, shaping the terms of discussions, and broadening the accounts of social realities that

are heard in EU CSOs (Young, 2002). Furthermore, it is a paradigm which acknowledges and challenges the power relations between the people affected by EU CSOs' work and their advocates (Steffek and Hahn, 2010:222). The Power-and-Transformation paradigm has the potential to contribute to organisational change through EDI to achieve descriptive representation in EU CSOs, where different social perspectives are sought through diversity and incorporated through inclusion and equity – thus offering a possible solution to the issue of a lack of legitimate representation these organisations face. The soft power EU CSOs hold, comes under scrutiny in this paradigm, when the power dynamics between those doing the policy influencing (thus exerting soft power) and those affected by the policies are considered – similarly to the donor-beneficiary power relations (Brühl, 2010). Embracing EDI along the lines of the Power-and-Transformation paradigm positions EU CSOs to play an even more crucial role in EU policy-making, also in the eyes of the EU institutions, by providing a platform for otherwise unrepresented perspectives to enter the public debate (Johansson and Lee, 2014), with implications on the knowledge production of these organisations (Sugimoto, 2019; Nielsen and Bloch, 2018: in LERU 2019). Furthermore, by adopting such an approach to EDI, EU CSOs are better able to contribute towards a European citizenry, nurture the weak democracy of the EU and perhaps gain more support for the European project – like Prodi had envisioned (Prodi, 2000).

In conclusion, this research sheds light on the relation between the framing of the role of EU CSOs and the understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Findings reveal that individuals who frame their role as civil society differently from the institutional bureaucratic discourse, positioning themselves as Change Agents, exhibit a more coherent comprehension of EDI. For these individuals, EDI serves as a means to achieve their transformative aims and fulfil their societal role. This understanding of EDI has the potential to catalyse deep organisational change, enabling EU CSOs to embody descriptive representation. By incorporating diverse social perspectives into their organisational culture, practices, and outputs, they become more capable of addressing the issue of legitimate representation. The Power-and-Transformation paradigm emerged as a conceptual framework that emphasises the examination of power dynamics and structural inequalities through EDI. It goes beyond traditional approaches to EDI, which often focus on achieving representation and diversity without addressing underlying power imbalances. In this sense, the perceived goal of EDI is not just to achieve diversity and inclusivity but to create transformative change by challenging power disparities. By adopting the Power-and-Transformation paradigm, EU CSOs can become better equipped to contribute to a more inclusive and representative civil society within the political space they occupy.

Reflexivity

Throughout the research process, I prioritised reflexivity and transparency. Reflexivity entails critical self-reflection and questioning of my experiences and methodologies as a researcher. It involves acknowledging the "interpretation of the interpreted" (Flick, 2007). As a researcher, I acknowledge the significance of my personal history, lived experiences, and social identities in shaping this research. My positionality encompasses various aspects, including being white, Western, and highly educated, which affords me certain privileges. Simultaneously, I recognise the parts of my identity that hold less privilege, such as being a woman.

Adopting a constructivist perspective, I understand that complete objectivity is unattainable, and that researchers actively contribute to the construction of data. To address this, I made my assumptions explicit throughout the research process and maintained a research journal to document my reflections and thoughts. I also engaged in discussions with research participants to ensure interpretations were grounded in diverse perspectives and in the complex realities involved. To ensure openness to diverse interpretations, I maintained regular communication with my supervisor and employed rigorous analytical techniques. The Gioia method facilitated in-depth analysis, and I dedicated ample time to reviewing and re-reading transcripts and the data table, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the data.

It is important to note that my previous career in various EU CSOs influenced my interest in exploring EDI in this context, as I see the lack thereof as a challenge to legitimacy and representation. This background likely influenced my research question and aim, given my direct interest in the connection between the role of EU CSOs and EDI. Furthermore, my awareness of class and post-colonialism, derived from my studies and personal ideology, shapes the lens through which I perceive the world, and thus my research, too. During data collection, I encountered challenges due to time constraints and the busy schedules of the individuals I sought to interview. I relied on my social and professional network, leading to instances where interviewees knew of me, potentially impacting their responses, behaviours, and attitudes towards me.

I remained cognisant of the researcher-participant power dynamics and aimed to create a comfortable and informal environment during interviews. However, this informality occasionally blurred the boundaries between my researcher role and myself outside of this role, which I reflected upon during the process. During the interviews and transcription, I experienced a heightened self-awareness, such as when I noticed an instance where I attempted to provoke a reflection. This led me to remain conscious of my reactions during interviews and remain true to the role of the researcher. At times, frustration arose when interviewees did not provide the desired information, prompting me to refine my questioning techniques and adapt to the flow of the conversation. These challenges contributed to my learning and growth in conducting inductive research.

Overall, this reflexivity process allowed me to critically examine my biases, assumptions, and interactions throughout the research journey. By transparently acknowledging these factors, I strive to enhance the credibility and transparency of this study.

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Appendix 1 - Interviewees[1]

Interviewee	Position
1. Freya	Senior Communications and Media Officer
2. Jose	People and Culture Manager
3. Julie	Senior Communications Officer
4. Isabelle	Director
5. Heidi	Senior Policy Officer
6. Fiona	Technical Advisor
7. Matteo	Policy Officer
8. John	Communications Officer
9. Pierre	Trainee
10. Zoya	Senior Policy Officer
11. Maria	Projects and Policy Officer
12. Carmen	Campaigns Officer
13. Olivier	Programme Director

[1] The names given are pseudonyms. Further information on the characteristics of the interviewees is not provided in order to maintain the anonymity of the respondents as well as their privacy.

Appendix 2 – Interview Guide

Introduction:

Introduce myself, my course, and my thesis briefly. Thank interviewee for participating in research. Give information about how the interview will be conducted, the privacy safeguards, anonymity if requested, can stop the interview whenever, permission for recording for transcribing purposes. Ask if they have any questions at this point.

1. Interviewee Profile
    a. Gender, age, nationality + educational & professional background
        i. Years working experience before current role
    b. Years working for the organisation (always the same position?)
    c. Job position – description, requirements
2. Perception of their organisation – i.e. 'Civil Society role'
    a. What does your organisation do? Its aims and how it achieves them.
    b. Do you see your organisation as a civil society organisation? If so, why?
        i. What does that mean to you to be a civil society organisation – what role does it have in society?
3. Perception of equity, diversity, and inclusion – i.e. 'EDI'
    a. What is diversity and inclusion in the workforce to you?
    b. Do you think diversity and inclusion in general is important? If so, why?
        i. How is it important for your sector/organisation/topic of work?
    c. What is the status of EDI in your sector (i.e. environmental EU CSOs)?
        i. If negative: why do you think that's the case? What barriers/issues?
        ii. If positive: how so?
    d. What is the status of EDI in your organisation?
        i. If positive: what does your organisation do that you know which makes EDI good?
        ii. If negative: what does your organisation do that you know which makes EDI not good?
4. Perception of what needs to be done or not done – i.e. taking action for EDI
    a. What do you think your organisation/sector could do to improve EDI?
    b. What about other actors, such as the European Commission, other donors/funders, the Brussels/Belgian government?
5. Do you know the #BrusselsSoWhite and/or the #GreenBrusselsSoWhite?

Appendix 3 - Data Table (Code Book)[2]

Data supporting Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Paradigms and Framing of Civil Society Organisations

Second order themes	Representative Quotes – First order themes	Aggregates
EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION		
Equality Equal treatment at work	• *To make sure that there is no blatant open discrimination or hidden or just underlying to have a policy towards that as well (interview 1).* • *I can do my things as a citizen or as a person. So, in that way, I do feel that I'm treated with fairness or equality or so, in that regard, yes, that's inclusion (Interview 11)* • *XX's policy is that applicants for employment and internal candidates for career progression within XX are considered solely on the basis of their relevant qualifications and competencies (Value Statement 6)*	Discrimination-and-fairness
Rights *Respect everyone's rights*	• *Inclusion would be for everyone to have the same rights (Interview 9)* • *To me, that means making sure that everyone's rights yeah, I would say many rights are respected. (Interview 7)* • *You can be stellar in some aspects like gender or, you know, being very open to LGBTI+ and non-binary and have a great policy for that. But if you're not, then you might still be kind of discriminating disabled people without realizing or whatnot, so that's why it really is crucial to have a thorough EDI policy (Interview 1)*	

[2] Identifying characteristics have been removed and organisations and personal names have been substituted with 'XX' to protect anonymity and privacy

Safety *Safety at work*	• *That person needs to feel respected and safe, like feeling safe going to the world who you are, no matter who you are and no matter to whom you are speaking with (Interview 2)* • *You need to also make sure that your working spaces are safe spaces (Interview 5)* • *Also the same like with men and women at the office. I feel safe as a woman. (interview 11)*	
Demographics *Representing demographics*	• *If we are an umbrella of environmental organizations, we should also look at the demographics of the EU and see how we actually are represented. Like, do we have enough people from Eastern Europe or Northern Europe or people of colour, etcetera (Interview 5)* • *I would definitely think that the management is not made up of men only because we are, let's say 50/50 at least, if not more women (Interview 10)* • *I wouldn't say it [my organisation] does well in diversity because that would mean that there are quotas for the people (Interview 11)*	
Outreach *Improved outreach to different parts of society for support*	• *I think it's important as well in a public-facing sense, because if an NGO is made up of very similar people, then it will communicate to similar groups of people outside. It is not actually useful in terms of wider public mobilisation or changing social attitudes, because you're just preaching to the converted basically. (Interview 8)* • *I do have to say they [the EU institutions] do consult my current organization and they listen - at least some parts of this machinery - and I've had good experiences in the past with specific departments of the EU really wanting to reach the public or understand the public (Interview 1)* • *If you are able to reach like many different audiences, I think that you will have a message that that can be better shared. And probably that is what civil society is looking for (Interview 2)*	Access-and-legitimacy
Skills & talents *Acquirement of different skills & talents*	• *I think any and every organisation and private sector company could benefit from EDI. Yeah, just not neglecting any talent. (Interview 1)* • *We are failing to actually attract different talents except of like one specific group of people (Interview 5)* • *Extremely talented people in the global South who basically because of where they were born or their nationality they can't contribute to policy making within Europe (Interview 8)*	

Quality for impact *Improvement of output quality & impact effectiveness*	• *I don't think that you come to the most innovative conclusions when everybody is very similar. We have a lot of issues in the world, first of all, so to solve them, I think you need just more different opinions to get in there and solve it. (Interview 6)* • *And I think it [lack of EDI] also actually fails to gain social acceptance of environmental policies. (Interview 5)* • *If you are able to reach like many different audiences, I think that you will have a message that that can be better shared (Interview 2)*	
Learning and growth *Learning opportunities to progress as an organisation*	• *It kind of like shapes your way of thinking. And even if you want to think outside of the box, your experience and your background may also bring different insights and different ways of understanding, different ways of learning and different ways of creating the work (Interview 12)* • *I had the chance of working with many, many different people and, and it's like one of the particularity and the strength of the organization. I think that it's internally perceived as a strength that we can work together representing the different parts of the society, especially the ones that feel more left behind (Interview 2)* • *They did not think there were any problems because it was working for them, and if they've been working in the same role for 20 years, I mean, and everything for them is perceived as being functional (Interview 1)*	Learning-and-Effectiveness
Employee Perspective *Different perspectives integrated in the work. Equitable access to being heard. Staff feel like they can impact organisation*	• *I guess openness would have to be the first thing they got – the type of governance that is shared as well as, because obviously there will be points where be it will be top down, but it might be for specific tasks, but when it comes to the relationships within the workplace, it should be shared responsibility (Interview 11)* • *I think the way that we write certain texts would be done with a bit more sensitivity on some things. And I think again, it comes from a place of ignorance. We don't know what we don't know now but having those other voices and points of view and experiences included, I think would deeply enrich in our work. (Interview 3)* • *Then it's also the understanding and the respect of the different perspectives as well and how you incorporate those into your working practices and policies and then making sure that there are some that they are more specifically included and targeted. You're a bit more deliberate about this. (Interview 4)*	

Rebalancing power *Rebalancing inherited power dynamics and address unconscious bias to see systemic and structural barriers*	• *Also like bringing about some, some sort of balance. And if someone has been not able to speak for a while, well, make sure that the person has now like more advantage to share their opinions or their whatever they have to say (Interview 9)* • *Generally speaking, I think EDI is important, because we live in a world where the complete opposite frame of mind has led to a lot of harm to fellow human beings. (Interview 3)* • *And then there's also, of course, the external dimension, like in how far do we manage to include diversity aspects into our policies? Because I think especially in the past, I mean, environmental policies have been a bit considered as being neutral, but then they do have also an impact. For example, men and women differently or different groups (interview 5)*	Power-and-transformation
Transforming the way we think *Thinking outside the boundaries of our own minds, cultures, education*	• *Make sure there's like, genuine understanding of the issues that they are advocating on rather than more theoretical understanding (Interview 8)* • *If you don't address the EDI topic, you will probably fail your organisation's objective of change (Interview 2)* • *In my organisation, it's not about the environment only, but it's about the systemic change that we need to make our world a more just and fair place - and it needs to start with our office (Interview 12)*	
CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS		
Act as the third sector *Non-profit, non-governmental*	• *It is organizations that kind of lobby or advocate for certain goals that would not be represented in a pure…in a policymaking system and that basically prioritises the markets or political expediency, or an economic expediency, as the primary goal or primary method of making decisions (Interview 8)* • *it's non-profit organizations, certainly not only non-governmental organizations (Interview 4)* • *In terms of governance of the of the organisation, that it's not just somebody funnelling money to us for to do a specific job (Interview 11)*	Middle Agent

Act as a bridge *Connecting national to EU level and bridging private, governmental with citizens*	• *A bridge with governments, with the leaders, sometimes with private organisations as well (Interview 9)* • *Also to bridge a bit EU policies with member states policies (Interview 5)* • *We as an umbrella try to represent civil society in the Member States on an EU level (Interview 7)*	
Act as a watchdog *Ensuring EU institutions are following the rules*	• *That end goal of how do we influence the policies that come out of Brussels and not just, okay, we have a new law, the implementation of that law as well, you know, is everyone following the rules? And if they're not, are they being held accountable to that? (Interview 3)* • *Also a bit of a watchdog (Interview 5)* • *Checking what the institutions are doing [...] whenever we realize something is not happening right, we call on that or we call them out, I think that's as much important as telling them what we want. (Interview 11)*	
Act as a representative of organisational members *Represent the interests of the member organisations of the EU CSO*	• *I think we also have, by law, the mandate to kind of represent the interests of our members […] And then to a large extent of course also citizens because citizens may be interested in our members (Interview 5)* • *It means that we have the mandate and the legitimacy to speak on behalf of and to represent people who are organized in our members (Interview 7)* • *They represent the interest of their membership for sure. Like that is what we are supposed to do as well, to kind of combine these different interests from different sectors and put in a condensed way to bring those demands to the institution […] the general idea: it is their job to be in contact with the people they represent, otherwise they would be falling into the same trap as the institutions that don't get into contact with the general population. (Interview 11)*	Interest Group
Act as a representative of an interest group	• *I guess if I think of the word civil society, I probably think of more active citizens in a way: people are caring about a particular issue (Interview 6)* • *they are the non-governmental actors who are trying to act for the public good on different sectors. It can be on rights, it can be on social justice, it can be on environment, it can be on international development. (Interview 4)* • *And then civil society organizations represent different interests from different groups of civil society, but they don't represent civil society as a whole - they represent different groups with interests (Interview 12)*	

Represent the interests of a specific group or a specific topic of shared interest		
<u>Expertise and information</u> *Bringing expertise and information to the EU institutions*	• *They are considered like experts [by the EU] and they are consulted as experts (Interview 1)* • *The work that goes back trickling down all the way to those national level offices. In terms of we also have people in XX literally on the ground in national parks, have their feet in rivers, have their heads underwater in the seas, checking out what's going on, and they can bring that data first hand. And that trickles all the way back up into the arguments we can make here (Interview 3)* • *Have members across the EU and that allows them to have the evidence to, to support their claims. Without that we wouldn't be what we are. (Interview 11)*	<u>Informants</u>
<u>Transformational vision</u> *Bring alternative views with the aim for catalysing or supporting social change*	• *This is how we see that we are making a real difference by creating public policies that will help us in this transition to climate neutrality, but also, as we say, to a more nature-positive society and economy. […] They are part of a broader democratic system because this is where you bring the alternative voices as well into the decision making process. (Interview 4)* • *I think the civil society has more of, at least in my understanding, this mobilization aspect (Interview 10)* • *I think it's more about structural changes (Interview 11)*	<u>Change Agents</u>