

Trade Associations in Ireland and New Zealand: Does Institutional Context Matter for Collective Action?



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ABSTRACT

The performance of individual businesses is affected by conditions shared across an industry. This is reflected in the widespread participation in industry-based trade associations. As agents of potential importance to business and industry development this study explores whether there is opportunity to transfer practice between trade associations in two comparable economies: Ireland and New Zealand. Industry and institutional influences on trade association activity are identified to explain why associations may differ between the two economies. Industry influences consider how business populations differ in the ease of coordinating collective action; institutional influences include economic governance structures and the extent of embeddedness within social environments. A comparison of eighteen matched associations finds that overall support for associations is higher in New Zealand but that the individually strongest associations are found in Ireland. This outcome is explainable by differences in industry characteristics, confirming the expected sensitivity of trade association to levels of business heterogeneity. Limited evidence of institutional influences on trade associations suggests scope to strengthen industry-based collective action.

Key Words: trade association; New Zealand; Ireland; embeddedness; collective action

INTRODUCTION

Industry-based trade associations are the main manifestation of an individual enterprise's awareness that their prosperity is partly a collective matter (Olson, 1971; Aldrich and Staber, 1988; Bennett, 1998; Barnett, 2006; Perry, 2009). Of all the various forms of member-based business associations, including pan-industry groups such as those representing the

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small business sector as a whole and geographically based groups such as chambers of commerce, trade associations have the highest level of support (Bennett and Ramsden, 2007). With their main role in addressing concerns shared by a particular branch of economic activity, trade associations frequently have fewer than 100 members but this can represent a large share of the membership targeted (Bennett, 1998; Perry, 2007). In the United States (US), for example, it is claimed that almost every industry is represented by at least one trade association and almost every firm is a member of at least one (Barnett, 2006: 1755).

Trade associations are of research interest for four main reasons. First, trade associations have been studied as an external resource providing enterprises with a bundle of support services, including management advice, market information and assistance in complying with business regulations (Bennett, 1998; Boléat, 2003; Barnett, 2006; Bennett and Ramsden, 2007). Second, trade associations have informed understanding of collective action problems and the conditions favouring the organisation of groups that generate public goods (Olson, 1971, 1982; Streeck, 1991). Third, trade associations have been studied as markers of the institutional environment in which they operate with particular focus on the way systems of 'social partnership' tend to heighten support for trade associations (Lane and Bachmann, 1997). Fourth, the mobilisation of private interests through trade associations is of interest, as with the lobbying against financial market regulation by the International Swaps and Derivatives Association, a trade association representing financial conglomerates including Goldman Sachs, J.P. Morgan and other international banks, in the lead-up to the post-2008 global financial crisis (Tett, 2009: 39).

The investigation reported in this paper links to the first three of these four areas of research interest. It reports the findings of a small but matched sample of trade associations representing businesses in New Zealand or Ireland. It examines their respective levels of support and activities and considers whether this identifies an opportunity to transfer experience between countries. The underlying motive for the study was to further explore recent New Zealand evidence suggesting that trade associations were important sources of enterprise and industry development support (Perry, 2007). Thus, as well as the possibility of transferring organisational experiences to strengthen trade association contributions to enterprise support, the comparison was undertaken to explore whether New Zealand's business environment is in some way conducive to trade association activity. In this study, the environmental influences on trade association support are broadly differentiated between those connected to the characteristics of industries (such as their degree of enterprise heterogeneity) and those connected to the institutional environment (including both direct government encouragement for business associations and the broader social context). Before providing further information on the research design the organisational challenges facing trade associations are explained. Then indicators of trade association support and influences on their effectiveness are identified. Finally, the sources of difference between the associations are examined and some conclusions are drawn.

TRADE ASSOCIATIONS AND MEMBERSHIP MOTIVATIONS

Trade associations recruit members nationally from within a particular industry and, as in the case of the former New Zealand Beer, Wines and Spirits Council, can operate with as few as two members. More typically, trade associations usually have from 50 to 100 members that share affiliation to a specific area of business activity (Bennett, 1998; Perry, 2007). They generally provide a bundle of services that variously provide collective, club and member benefits (Table 1).

Table 1: Three Types of Trade Association Benefit

Association Benefit	Definition	Illustrative Benefit Examples
<i>Collective</i>	Benefit diffuses to all industry participants	Lobbying, representation, submissions to public agencies Industry-good research
<i>Club</i>	Benefit available to all members as a consequence of membership	Membership certification Marketing logo Member-only information distribution
<i>Member service</i>	Benefit obtained through decision to utilise a service or product supplied by the association; may be available to non-members at a differential cost	Advisory service Discounts on business services/products Training, conferences and networking events

Collective benefits derive from lobbying and representation activities that aim to advance the interests of the industry to which the association is affiliated. Efforts to influence the scope and design of government regulations and initiatives to address industry-wide resource issues typify the collective activity of associations. This action potentially benefits all industry participants regardless of their involvement in the association. In contrast, club activities produce benefits that are confined to 'club' (association) members and selectively to eligible outsiders. Benefits from club activities arise from three main sources:

- Goodwill that members may receive from external stakeholders in return for affiliating with the club. Entry standards and membership codes of practice are ways to bolster the status of an association and assist members obtain a reputational advantage.
- Member benefits in the form of discounted prices on products and services supplied on a preferential basis to club members exclusively.
- Access to association resources made available to all members such as industry data, guidance on industry regulation and tools to assist specific types of business transaction (such as employment or supplier agreements).

Member services, the final type of association benefit, are supplied to individual members on an 'as used' basis and may include the organisation of trade shows, professional development workshops and networking events.

A challenge for associations is that these three types of benefit tend to bring different organisational priorities. The delivery of effective representation and lobbying services depends on being able to speak on behalf of an industry or at least a large share of the industry or sector whose interests are at issue. This can be difficult because of the public good nature of the benefits of collective representation which allows non-joiners (free riders) to gain the same advantage as joiners. A fundamental barrier to the building of inclusive associations has been claimed because the benefit obtained by 'free riding' increases with the value of collective activity (Bennett, 2000: 19).

The collective action problem has further implications for the provision of club benefits. Maximising the value of club benefits depends on balancing the need to set membership entry requirements low to attract a sufficient quantum of members against the need for strict enforcement of membership rules to enhance the value of the association's goodwill advantages (Prakash and Potoski, 2006: 54). Low entry requirements may assist recruitment whereas strict monitoring may deter membership but is necessary to protect the value of club benefits. The rigour with which entry requirements and rules for ongoing membership are enforced has the potential to produce associations of markedly different capacities to support industry strategy (Table 2). In practice, 'open access' trade associations predominate. Associations typically have limited leverage to enforce club rules given an overriding need to maximise membership so as to maintain the credibility of their representation on industry issues (Bol  at, 2003; Bennett and Ramsden, 2007).

Table 2: Typology of Club Management

	Stringent Entry Rules	Permissive Entry Rules
Strict Enforcement of Membership Rules	Elite associations with stringent entry standards and enforcement of club standards	Regulatory associations with weak entry standards but with enforcement of club standards
Weak Enforcement of Membership Rules	Separatist associations with stringent entry standards but without enforcement of club standards	Open access associations with weak entry standards and little enforcement of club standards

The precedence of collective representation explains why enterprise involvement in business associations remains divided between their support for industry-specific trade associations and sector-wide associations. Associations pursuing interests shared by a small group have more chance of gathering support than associations addressing issues shared by a large population of members (Olson, 1971, 1982; Bennett, 1998: 245). This is partly because non-members in a small constituency are more visible and potentially under greater social pressure to join than where non-members are widely dispersed across

an economy (Olson, 1971: 50; Bennett and Ramsden, 2007: 55). With a small membership search, bargaining and monitoring costs between businesses to check on shirking are kept low. The initial formation of groups drawing from a small constituency is further assisted by the possibility that one or a few enterprises are prepared to underwrite group activity on the basis of their individual share of the collective gain (Olson, 1971).

INFLUENCES AFFECTING TRADE ASSOCIATION ACTIVITY

Trade associations are a universal feature of industrial economies but there is much scope for variation in the support they attract and in their operational capacity. The proportion of industry participants recruited or membership density is a key indicator of the strength of an association. Without a high density (60 per cent or more), it is difficult to claim representation of the industry that the association aims to speak on behalf of (Boléat, 2003; Perry, 2007). A large population of 'free riders' threatens the ability to retain members sensitive to the extent to which their investment in the association spreads benefit to outsiders. It is generally believed that the rate of participation in industry associations declines as membership numbers increase (Olson, 1971; Streeck, 1991; Bennett, 2000). The threshold below which associations cease to be credible lobbyists varies as low recruitment is most problematic where there are relatively few industry participants. For industries dominated by a few large enterprises the failure to recruit one or more industry participants can weaken an association even when most other participants join. This can depend on the reasons for remaining outside an association. Some businesses may be philosophically opposed to membership of an association. Danger arises for associations when the outsider has different priorities to the member enterprises and is motivated to lobby against the association's agenda (Boléat, 2003).

Association resource strength is indicated partly by the existence of a professional executive staff. Coordination by a third party that is independent of any member and that has some power to aid, abet, guide and cajole participating businesses is a way of distinguishing trade associations from other types of collective group (Provan, 1983). This is different, for example, from inter-firm networks where members of the network manage their joint activity directly. Within Provan's (1983) schema, trade associations are typically participatory forms of association in which affiliates retain control over the group's constitution and influence over activity. This involvement supports the work of a professional secretariat. The number of association staff affects the capacity of the association to engage in activity and may act to lessen the extent to which associations are dominated by a few active members. It has been claimed that most trade associations have resources to support only a small executive and that the absence of a strong professional secretariat curtails service delivery over that which members could benefit from (Bennett, 1998: 256).

The dependence on membership fees is a further influence on the strength of associations. Some diversification of income sources can be a source of strength. It reduces the need for members to fully fund association activities through their membership fees: this can be a barrier to membership where prospective members are concerned with the extent to which non-members gain from association activity and where members do not see value

in all of an association's services. Offsetting these concerns, reliance on membership fees reduces the administrative effort that may be required to obtain funding and allows association effort to concentrate on service delivery rather than being side-tracked by revenue raising. Some association executives work with a 60:40 split as the maximum spread on the basis that having more than 40 per cent of funding from sources other than membership fees makes too many demands on association resources (Perry, 2007).

Trade associations generally provide a bundle of services to maximise their ability to recruit members and because of transaction economies in sourcing a range of connected services from an established association compared with the development of focused, purpose-designed bodies (Bennett and Ramsden, 2007; Perry, 2007). This diversity is a longstanding feature of trade associations as reflected in their dual existence through the logic of services and the logic of influence (Olson, 1971). Consequently, a restricted range of activity can indicate that trade associations operate in an atypical environment or are facing particular organisational challenges. For example, associations may emphasise club and member benefits when their level of membership is low and they cannot claim to represent their industry as a whole.

Motivations for membership are expected to differ between small and large enterprises (Perry, 2007, 2009). Businesses with the resources to represent their own interests directly and the ability to purchase business support services tend to draw selectively on collective associations according to the perceived need for an industry-wide approach to address individual issues (Salisbury, 1984; Mitchell, 1990; Bennett, 1998). For example, large firms operating across international boundaries have been found to participate in multiple forums (national and international) rather than give exclusive support to a national-based association (see Bennett, 1998: 247). This can reduce associations to being valued as a form of insurance to be drawn on as needs arise rather than being viewed as a source of continuous support. Small enterprises in contrast to large enterprises may value the access to individual advice and opportunities for ongoing engagement with other industry participants and be comparatively less concerned with the representational role of associations. Hence individual types of member are each expected to have particular cost-benefit sensitivities, a different willingness to pay for membership and particular preferences for the specific service or collective representation roles of an association (Bennett, 1998: 246). A diversity of membership motivations can, therefore, indicate that an association is appealing to a variety of enterprise types.

These indicators provide ways of distinguishing the support given to trade associations. The influences affecting the level of support can be distinguished between those connected to the characteristics of industries and those connected to the institutional environment in which trade associations operate. This distinction is not clear-cut but broadly relates to influences that differ in three ways:

1. The extent to which the impact is industry-specific as compared with the impact being to shift support for collective association across all industries
2. Industry characteristics can change over the short term, for example through mergers

- and acquisitions; institutional characteristics change slowly
3. Partly due to the frequency of change, the ability to observe the impact of industry characteristics is greater than are aspects of the institutional environment (see James, 2005)

Industry Influences on Trade Associations

A variety of industry-specific conditions have the potential to shape the organisational capacity and effectiveness of trade associations in promoting the interests of their affiliated enterprises (Table 3). The actual and perceived existence of issues that require a collective response can be expected to differ across industries and over time. As an individual firm's ability to operate is threatened by pressures affecting the industry as a whole, the greater is the interest in industry-level action and the greater is the willingness to compromise with other industry participants over the focus of industry strategy (Barnett, 2006). Support for collection action is, therefore, expected to increase as the external threats mobilise against an industry and as these external pressures increase in their coherence and level of organisation (Barnett, 2006: 1761). The sensitivity to this pressure will grow as industry participants perceive that individual company behaviour has the potential to affect the reputation of the industry as a whole. Within the chemical industry, for example, high-profile incidents involving individual companies highlighted how the reputation of the industry as a whole was at stake (Hoffman, 1997). This led to the introduction of the Responsible Care health and safety programme as a voluntary initiative of chemical industry trade associations around the world (King and Lennox, 2000; Lennox and Nash, 2003; Environmental Data Services, 2005). This includes associations in Ireland and New Zealand representing the chemical sector that make participation in Responsible Care a condition of membership. The strength of ties between industry participants, including geographical concentration, can also encourage support for trade associations (Semlinger, 1995; Barnett, 2006). Industry profitability and business scale have been identified as further influences on the support for trade associations. High profitability because it increases the resources available to support collective action (Lorenz, 1993) and business scale because large enterprises can capture a substantial share of the benefits obtained from collective action (Barnett, 2006: 1765).

The relative sensitivity of industries to external threats will vary with the degree of enterprise heterogeneity among industry participants: as industry participants differ in their organisational characteristics and strategies so the scale of external challenge is expected to increase before support for collective action grows (Schmitz, 1999). Associations with a single type of member (for example all small or all large) sharing a common business environment are therefore likely to more readily agree over collective issues than a mixed member association (Bennett, 1998). As well, associations are affected by their individual experiences. Association managers are potentially faced with a wide range of challenges and tactical decisions that can affect the ability of the association to retain members and sustain activity (see Boléat, 2003). In theory associations are controlled by their membership through elected representatives but frequently some members are more active than others. This can become a problem to broadening support for an association where it is

seen to be under the control of an unrepresentative clique. The tendency for associations to survive over long periods of time can also create issues of inertia that result in associations failing to adapt to changing industry conditions (Perry, 2007).

Table 3: Variables Affecting Trade Association Activity and Expected Outcomes

Variable	Explanation	Main Outcome
Coherence of pressures threatening an industry	Barriers to industry-based cooperation reduce as external pressures threatening an industry intensify	Extent of free-rider constraints on association activity
Industry susceptibility to reputational contagion	The incentive to join trade associations increases where external stakeholders do not differentiate the performance of industry participants	Rate of recruitment
Strength of ties among industry participants	Increased commonality of interests, such as a market focus, increases the likelihood of agreeing an industry agenda	Membership diversity
Industry profitability	Increased profitability of industry participants increases the ability to invest in shared industry resources	Resource capacity of association
Industry ownership concentration	Fewer industry participants reduce the barriers to coordinating collective action	Motivation for membership
Enterprise heterogeneity within the industry	Diversity of enterprise types reduces the extent of shared interests	Rate of recruitment
Preponderance of large or small enterprise membership	A single type of industry participant reduces enterprise heterogeneity	Balance of association activity between collective, club and member benefits
Capture by unrepresentative clique	Domination by a small group reduces attractiveness of the association to others	Membership representativeness
Independence of association executive	Executives with freedom of action pursue an agenda to maximise membership and income	Balance of association activity

Institutional Influences on Trade Associations

A larger issue is the extent to which associations are affected by the institutional environment in which they operate. This is known to be the case where economic governance systems impinge directly on the role of associations in governing economic affairs. The status of associations has been shown to be higher in economies with a history of 'social partnership' than in those comparable economies without a tradition of organised cooperation between business representatives and trade unions (Sayer and Walker, 1992: 137; Sabel, 1994: 152; Herrigel, 1993; Lane and Bachmann, 1997; Traxler, 2000). The remaining question is whether trade associations are affected by broader influences on the willingness of enterprises to recognise and support collective issues. Cultural and geographical attributes may be distinguished among the potential sources of difference.

There is much discussion that regional economies are distinguished by the extent to which they support networks of interaction between firms through which learning and innovation is shared (see Perry, 2010). This is frequently linked to the suggestion that successful economies draw on so-called untraded interdependencies encompassing flows of tacit knowledge, technological spillovers, trust-based business relationships and shared values (Storper, 1995; Camagni, 2002; Turok, 2004). These arguments are frequently summarised by the notion that economic activity is embedded in a locality-specific culture, an idea developed by Granovetter (1985) drawing inspiration from the work of Polanyi (1944). The embeddedness thesis challenges the assumption that market economies are governed by a universal logic such that relationships between enterprises are influenced by cost-benefit calculations that are everywhere the same (see Sayer and Walker, 1992). Instead it argues that economic rationality is moderated by the social context in which it occurs. Social context is a potentially diffuse concept but is generally understood to refer to the social conventions, embracing behaviour norms, standards, customs and the 'rules of the game' that underlie interactions between people and enterprises (James, 2005: 1199). A well-known application of this framework is Saxenian's (1994) comparative study of Silicon Valley and Boston's Route 128 in which the former's enduring success was ascribed to local cultural determinants that favoured knowledge sharing.

A geographical context has been identified in the suggestion that support for business associations and other forms of inter-firm network increases in small economies (Maskell et al., 1998). This perspective points to shared backgrounds and the likelihood of mutual participation in activity outside the workplace (social, political or professional) as a basis for trust and the identification of joint interests. By lowering barriers to business cooperation and reducing the extent to which common interests are obscured by intervening interests, as where affiliation to regional cultures attracts more support than national common interests, small countries are thought to be distinguished by their extent of collective association. These ideas were developed in the context of Nordic economies which are distinguished by a particular political history and location alongside other small economies (Mabbett, 1995). Nonetheless there are some common characteristics to small economies that suggest this geographical context may influence levels of business associability.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, CONTEXT AND DESIGN

This study has practical and theoretical objectives. The practical questions are to examine how trade associations in Ireland differ from trade associations representing similar industries in New Zealand, how this affects the activity of associations and what explains the differences in association support. Explanation leads to the theoretical interest in exploring influences shaping support for trade associations. As institutions that depend partly on the willingness of enterprise managers to support collective interests and as forums that can help establish and monitor behavioural norms among industry participants, trade associations may show evidence of embeddedness. This would be of significance as embeddedness has been dismissed as little more than a fuzzy, under-defined concept (Markusen, 1999). Of course some limits to the ability of this study to comment on the significance of embeddedness need to be acknowledged. Strong differences in trade association support that cannot be explained by industry characteristics may suggest evidence of embeddedness. Conversely, similarity in trade association characteristics is inconclusive as this may simply show that trade associations are somewhat superficial entities rather than being sensitive to the social context in which they operate. Previous research has, for example, argued that membership of business associations is based on 'calculative trust' in which judgements of immediate costs and benefits are uppermost (Bennett, 1996, 1998). Similarly, Bennett and Ramsden (2007) endorse the verdict of Curran and Blackburn (1994) that the intensity and extent of the business networks fostered by business associations are weak and unlikely to be of significance in developing untraded interdependencies. By implication, these observations suggest that support for trade associations is not affected by their social context.

The ability to observe evidence of social embeddedness is enhanced by comparing trade associations affiliated to the same industries in two small economies in which there is no direct government support for trade associations. By keeping the scale and governance of economies comparable and by matching associations in the two economies the objective is to reveal the respective roles of industry and other institutional influences on the strength of trade associations. This excludes two potential sources of difference: geographical context and direct government encouragement of economic governance structures that elevate the status of trade associations. Where differences cannot be explained by industry characteristics the residual gap will be attributed to the social context in which business populations exist. Given the exploratory nature of the study it is recognised that further investigation will be required to confirm this conclusion.

The status of Ireland and New Zealand as small economies is relatively unproblematic. Respective populations in 2011 are 4.6 million and 4.4 million while a threshold of 20 million has been used to distinguish small economies (Maskell et al., 1998). That the management of both economies is broadly neutral as it affects the status of trade associations does require justification.

Economic management took different directions in Ireland and New Zealand in response to deteriorating conditions experienced in the mid-1980s but the consequences for trade associations may not have been great. The Irish government and the principal social

partners (business, unions and farmers) negotiated a 'Programme for National Recovery' that ran from 1987 to 1990 and was the first of five such agreements based on an agreed economic policy framework (Pike et al., 2006: 231). New Zealand in 1984 embarked on a radical programme of economic deregulation that simultaneously removed many controls on industry entry, price setting and the operation of the financial, labour and other markets supplying inputs into economic activity (Bollard and Buckle, 1987). New Zealand's reform programme marked a move away from consulting with interest groups over the broad direction of economic management but this principally affected sector associations rather than industry-based trade associations (Jesson, 1992: 372; Mabbett, 1995: 15). As well, the speed of New Zealand's reform programme tended to polarise opinion and strengthen employer interest groups (Castles et al., 1996: 10). Similarly reducing any divergence, social partnership in Ireland evolved in ways that have not depended on or encouraged cohesive employer groups (O'Donnell, 2004: 64). Rather, partnership agreements addressed a widening range of perceived impediments to economic growth, including childcare, life-long learning and social exclusion (see Roche and Cradden (2003) for comment on the development of social partnership in Ireland). This is unlike 'neo corporatist' partnership that relies on partners having monopoly representation of their interest group, a functional role in the economy and centralised structures for representing and disciplining members (Traxler, 2000). Some confirmation of the similarity in the political economy context is provided by Siaroff's (1999) composite index of integration which measures the extent to which industrial relations and wage bargaining are centralised. Ireland and New Zealand had scores of around 2.5: for comparison, Nordic countries had scores over 4, the United Kingdom (UK) and US around 2.

Two differences between Ireland and New Zealand were seen as potentially influencing support for trade associations in the two economies: New Zealand's relative physical isolation and high levels of foreign ownership in selected industries in Ireland. Trade associations are national organisations and possibly of more significance in economies where national boundaries define a prime focus of economic activity. This may give associations in New Zealand an advantage. New Zealand's market potential – defined as the sum of all countries' gross domestic product (GDP) weighted by the inverse of the bilateral distance from the focal country – is the lowest among Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) nations while Ireland is around the average (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2009: 59). Counterbalancing this, Ireland's stock of foreign investment as a share of GDP is more than double that of New Zealand (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2004: 52). In Ireland, agencies and investment regulations have selectively targeted inward investment and multinational enterprise has been a large part of Ireland's post-1980 economic transformation (O'Hearn, 2000; O'Donnell, 2004; Pike et al., 2006). Four leading manufacturing sectors (software, pharmaceuticals, computer and instrument engineering, and electrical equipment) that are based almost entirely on foreign ownership have been the recipients of much of this support (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2006: 23). Industries dominated by a single

enterprise type are expected to produce stronger associations than those recruiting from a diverse business population.

Sample Selection

Given uncertainty that any significant differences exist, the study proceeded through a small-scale investigation based on a purposively selected sample of trade associations. This allows for a relatively intensive and flexible investigation that is not limited by the need to pre-specify all the variables measured and that seeks to explain the patterns observed rather than claim representation of a larger population (Massey and Meegan, 1985).

Observing how the support for and activity of associations varies between the two economies requires that the national samples comprise a broadly similar range of industry affiliations. Within New Zealand, for example, association recruitment rates vary from around 10 per cent of the membership targeted to 100 per cent and membership numbers vary from 6 to over 6,000 according to the industry represented (Perry, 2007). To control for this kind of variation, a sample was constructed that matches associations in terms of the industry activity represented (Table 4). To maximise the sample, one cross-sector pairing is included. In Ireland the distributors and producers of chemicals have separate associations whereas in New Zealand the Chemical Industry Council encompasses both parts of the value chain (but predominantly users and distributors as New Zealand has little manufacturing activity). To retain both Irish chemical industry associations in the sample and an equal number of associations in the comparison, Pharmaceutical Ireland is matched against the Wood Processors Association on the basis that both represent export-orientated sectors with a high degree of overseas ownership. As well, there are three cases where matched associations share a sector affiliation but vary in the range of activity represented. With these exceptions, the sample encompasses associations that seek members from comparable ranges of business activity.

The matching commenced with a population of 101 New Zealand associations that had been identified in an earlier study (Perry, 2007). They represent around two-thirds of the larger New Zealand trade associations affiliated primarily with manufacturing and service activities. The matching was limited to associations in the original New Zealand sample excluding associations affiliated to trade-based and consumer services. The sample of 101 New Zealand associations yielded 25 potential matches where a comparable association in Ireland could be identified. Those not included in the final sample declined to participate or were not contacted due either to the location of the executive office or because of specific industry conditions. The interviews with Irish trade associations were conducted during April–May 2009; New Zealand associations were interviewed in late 2007. During the time interval, economic conditions in both countries were affected by the global crisis which encouraged the study to omit associations linked to the finance and property sectors. No information exists to comment on the representativeness of Irish associations but in the case of the New Zealand associations in the matched sample they broadly follow the characteristics of the larger sample from which they are drawn (Table 5).

Table 4: The Matched Sample of Trade Associations and Sources of Variance

Matched Associations		Extent of Similarity in Membership Coverage
<i>Ireland</i>	<i>New Zealand</i>	
Animal and Plant Health Association	New Zealand Association for Animal Health and Crop Protection	High similarity
Association of Advertisers in Ireland	Association of New Zealand Advertisers	High similarity
Chemical Distribution Ireland	New Zealand Chemical Industry Council	Membership of the New Zealand association is open to any business making, supplying or using chemicals
Federation of Aerospace Enterprises in Ireland	Aviation Industry Association of New Zealand	High similarity
Irish Book Publishers' Association	Booksellers New Zealand	Booksellers New Zealand represents publishers and booksellers
Irish Hotels Federation	New Zealand Hotel Council	Irish association represents a wider range of accommodation types than purely hotels as in New Zealand
Irish International Freight Association	Custom Brokers and Freight Forwarders Association of New Zealand	High similarity
Irish Marine Federation	Marine Industry Association of New Zealand	High similarity
Irish Mining and Exploration Group	New Zealand Minerals Industry Association	High similarity
Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association	Researched Medicines Industry Association of New Zealand	High similarity
Irish Printing Federation	Print New Zealand	Irish Printing Federation is linked to a registered employment agreement rather than being open to all participants in the print industry
Irish Security Industry Association	New Zealand Security Association	High similarity

(Continued)

Table 4: (Continued)

Matched Associations		Extent of Similarity in Membership Coverage
Ireland	New Zealand	
Irish Tour Operators Association	Inbound Tour Operators Council	High similarity
Irish Tourist Industry Confederation	Tourism Industry Association New Zealand	High similarity in sector covered but Ireland's association is an 'association of associations' whereas in New Zealand individual business and association membership is sought
Irish Travel Agents Association	Travel Agents Association of New Zealand	High similarity
Periodic Publishers Association of Ireland (now Magazines Ireland)	Magazine Publishers Association	High similarity
Pharmaceutical Ireland	Wood Processors Association of New Zealand	No similarity but both represent mainly large, overseas-owned export businesses
Plastics Ireland	Plastics New Zealand	High similarity

Table 5: Profile of New Zealand Trade Associations Selected for the Comparative Sample

Association Attribute	New Zealand Trade Associations	
	All (N=101)	Selected (N=18)
Average membership number (%)	393	336
Membership range	6–6,200	17–2,000
Average number of executive staff (FTEs)	3.9	4.5
Average income share from membership fees (%)	67	64.2
Average recruitment density (%)	65.8	61.3
Average membership that are small enterprises (<20 employees) (% membership)	51.3	43.2
Associations with an industry strategy (%)	56.4	88.9
Association aspiring to encourage cooperation among members (%)	72.3	61.1
Association strength 'very strong' or 'strong'	85.1	77.8

Data source: Perry (2007)

Data Collection

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the directors of trade associations. The interviews were structured around the previously identified indicators of trade association support (see above), namely:

- Rates of recruitment
- Free-rider constraints
- Association resources
- Activity
- Membership motivation and diversity

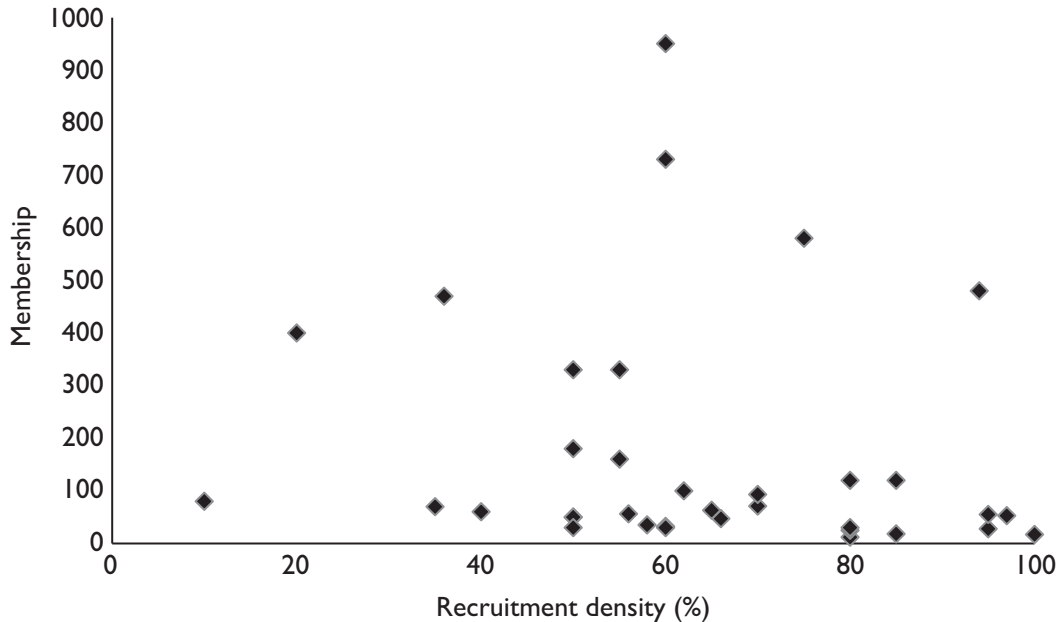
In addition, respondents were asked to comment on the recent performance of their association with respect to the extent to which it was able to develop and execute planned activities. Questions around these six issues sought a mix of quantitative (for example number of members and recruitment density) and qualitative information that examines how the association executive explains the profile and experiences of the association. The interview procedure was identical as between the original survey in New Zealand and the interviews conducted in Ireland for this comparative investigation. This procedure enables an in-depth and flexible investigation that was not limited to the responses obtained to pre-set questions. Other than the identities of the associations in the study and some broad characteristics of respondent associations, the results are limited to aggregate findings or individual findings are expressed without revealing the respondent association. This respects a commitment in the interviews to protect the confidentiality of responses.

COMPARISON OF ASSOCIATIONS IN IRELAND AND NEW ZEALAND

A summary of the quantitative findings in each of the six indicators is given before considering how the differences may be accounted for.

Recruitment

The rate of recruitment is similar in both countries. On average, Irish trade associations have recruited 63.8 per cent of the members that they target compared with 61.2 per cent in New Zealand. When an anomalous case is excluded (see below), the difference reduces to less than 1 per cent. Similarly, six associations in Ireland and five in New Zealand have recruited 80 per cent or more of their target membership and there is one case in both countries where recruitment falls to 20 per cent or below. As expected, the rate of recruitment declines as membership numbers increase (correlation coefficient -0.3614, Figure 1). As the New Zealand associations tend to have a larger absolute membership than their equivalent association in Ireland (average membership is 336 and 106 respectively) the comparability of the recruitment rates across the national samples suggests that the pressure or incentive to join associations is higher in New Zealand.

Figure 1: Relationship between Membership Size and Rate of Recruitment, Ireland and New Zealand (N=36)**Free-Rider Constraint and Membership Competition**

A failure to recruit one or more key industry participants is an issue for eleven of New Zealand's associations and eight associations in Ireland but fewer than one-quarter of associations in both countries report that recruitment gaps reduce the effectiveness of the association. A 'problem' or minor issue with non-members gaining from the associations' activities is more likely to arise in New Zealand than Ireland (thirteen associations versus eight report this). At the same time, more New Zealand associations (twelve versus four) have a deliberate policy of engaging with non-members, such as by opening association events to outsiders. More New Zealand associations have recently lost members to another association or perceive a risk of such loss occurring. This mainly comes about from the formation of new associations. Few associations in either country indicate that they compete with another association for members (six in New Zealand versus four in Ireland).

Association Resources

In Ireland there are on average 38.4 members per full-time equivalent (FTE) executive staff compared with 73.5 in New Zealand but more (fifteen) New Zealand associations have a full-time executive director than in Ireland (eight) and more have at least one full-time executive officer. Among the Irish associations, one association accounts for nearly one-quarter of all the FTE staff employed. This unevenness in association resources is reflected

in the lower overall correlation between membership size and FTE employed in Ireland compared with New Zealand (0.65 compared with 0.79). Both groups of associations rely on membership fees for an average of around two-thirds of annual income with varying types of trading activity accounting for the largest source of secondary income. Associations in New Zealand benefit from more active member participation than their counterparts in Ireland. Twelve of the New Zealand associations indicate that there is frequent engagement with their members. In Ireland four associations have equivalent active involvement from their members with most characterising their role as being more about 'pushing' information out to members than responding to member demands. Holding an annual conference is another indicator of different levels of membership involvement: thirteen New Zealand associations do this compared with five in Ireland.

Activity

Differences in association resources are reflected in the diversity of activity sustained by the two sets of associations (Table 6). More of New Zealand's associations are active across the range of activities supported by associations. This means having an agreed strategy to support industry growth, providing business tools for use by individual member businesses, annual reporting on industry activity, and professional development and training either directly or through an intermediary, and they have developed industry standards. Some form of industry marketing programme is more likely to be supported by an association in Ireland but half the New Zealand associations are also active in this area too.

Table 6: Trade Association Activity

Number of Associations with	Ireland	New Zealand
Strategy for industry development	7	12
Tools to assist individual member businesses	11	12
Annual reporting on industry activity	6	10
Industry marketing programme	12	9
Training programmes	11	10
Annual awards for industry participants	6	9
Industry standards	6	13

Membership Motivation and Diversity

Dividing association members into three size categories (less than 20 employees, 20-100 employees and over 100 employees), in Ireland the overall spread of membership is more even than in New Zealand. In New Zealand a greater share of members are in the smallest size category: 43 per cent compared with 35 per cent in Ireland. On the other hand, associations representing mainly foreign-owned enterprise are more a feature of Ireland than New Zealand. The motivations for membership are nonetheless broadly similar (Table 7). A difference is that association executives in Ireland see the opportunity to learn from

other members as a more important driver for their membership than do executives in New Zealand. This result is interesting in view of the greater investment in activity that potentially supports inter-member learning in New Zealand, such as conferences and industry award programmes. This suggests that in Ireland associations may be a more important forum for informal interaction than in New Zealand or that there is perceived to be more opportunity for learning perhaps in the context of particular regulatory regimes or through the presence of overseas managers working in an unfamiliar environment.

Table 7: Motivation for Membership

Motivation for Membership of Associations (number of associations indicating the motivation is important)	Ireland	New Zealand
Demonstrate status in the market	5	4
Loyalty to the industry	3	5
Learning from other members	8	3
Representation to government	12	13
Support industry strategy	7	8
Access to activities and privileges	8	8
Access to individual business advice	6	5

Performance

Evaluated against what the associations aspire to achieve, most associations (fourteen in both countries) judge that they are currently 'strong' or 'very strong'. A difference is whether associations have overcome membership resistance to some area of activity. As the coordinator of one of the larger Irish associations indicated, a sign of an active association is that it is addressing issues that initially some members regarded as outside the association's remit or over which there was initially no agreement. Few (five) associations in Ireland have this experience whereas in New Zealand twelve associations report that they have negotiated agreement over an issue now addressed by the association. This can be an indicator of associations in New Zealand having greater aspirations to the extent that they have obtained agreement to progress a matter over which members were initially divided. Similarly, eleven New Zealand associations have an issue or issues that members have yet to agree compared with two in Ireland and again this may show that greater ambition to extend the influence of the association exists in New Zealand.

SOURCES OF ASSOCIATION DIFFERENCE

Comparison of the samples points to a number of ways that New Zealand's associations are better positioned to support their industry than their Irish counterparts. The overall recruitment rate as a share of the membership targeted is near identical although relative to their larger membership it appears support for associations is stronger in New Zealand

than Ireland. New Zealand's associations are more likely to have produced an industry strategy and more likely to engage actively with their members than are associations in Ireland. The likelihood of associations having negotiated with members to expand their policy agendas is higher in New Zealand. At the same time, examining a number of key attributes affecting the capacity to develop and implement industry strategy the individually strongest associations are found in Ireland rather than New Zealand (Table 8).

Table 8: Strong and Weak Associations

Country	Membership Profile	Composite Performance (Maximum 5)*
<i>Strong associations</i>		
Ireland	Around 60 foreign-owned multinationals, most established in Ireland post 1980	5
Ireland	Around 50 foreign-owned research-based multinationals	5
New Zealand	Around 20 foreign-owned research-based multinationals	4.5
New Zealand	Around 20 members comprising mainly New Zealand and foreign-owned export processes	4
Ireland	Around 30 members comprising local and foreign-owned distributors	4
<i>Weak associations</i>		
New Zealand	Over 300 members, New Zealand SMEs, foreign-owned multinational enterprises and industry support services	1
New Zealand	Around 50 service sector members, mainly New Zealand SMEs but some foreign-owned enterprises	1
Ireland	Around 70 members, mainly Irish SMEs but including foreign multinationals	1
Ireland	Around 70 business, public sector and organisational members	1
Ireland	Around 50 Irish SME members supplying diverse markets	0

* Composite performance score based on:

- Full-time chief executive officer: Yes = 1, No = 0
- Ratio of members to FTE executive staff: <10 members/FTE = 1, 10–100 members/FTE = 0.5, >100 members/FTE = 0
- Recruitment rate: 90+% of target membership recruitment = 1, 50–90% recruited = 0.5, <50% recruited = 0
- Engagement with membership: High engagement = 1, Other = 0
- Industry strategy documented: Yes = 1, In process = 0.5, No = 0

As explained, support for industry-wide collective action is generally thought to increase where industry participants are similar in scale, specialisation and strategy (Streeck, 1991: 178). Business heterogeneity reduces the likelihood of individual businesses sharing strategic priorities for their industry because of the way that small and large enterprises can be differently affected by regulation or in the way that enterprise concerns may differ according to the markets served. The comparison of associations in Ireland and New Zealand illustrates how this general proposition is reflected in the strength of trade associations.

The sample includes trade associations in Ireland that are predominantly or exclusively the domain of foreign-owned enterprises. These are the strongest associations in the sample measured by their level of representation and executive resources, including the three associations with the lowest ratio of members to executive staff (Table 8). This support is linked to the way that members of these associations share a common agenda in maintaining a regulatory environment supportive of foreign investors, a shared concern to see the provision of institutional infrastructure that supports their industry (such as training facilities) and how head offices may mandate that subsidiaries join local trade associations.

Conversely, while associations of foreign enterprise are well supported those with a mixed membership of overseas and small-scale domestic enterprise produce the weakest associations in the sample. Where foreign-owned enterprises operate in an industry that also comprises domestic small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) there can be strong differences in business strategy, organisational resources and managerial concerns. How this affects a trade association can vary.

A New Zealand trade association executive with a membership of foreign and locally owned enterprises noted how the tendency for foreign-owned multinationals to be managed by expatriates on short-term assignment is an impediment to gaining their participation in the association. Such persons are considered to have a more functional interest in the association than managers of small locally owned businesses. Expatriate managers, it was suggested, look to an association to address specific industry issues and give priority to matters affecting multinational operators. In contrast, domestic business managers may equally value the association for its social and networking benefits and view their long-standing ties to the association as justifying their continued influence on association affairs. An Irish trade association executive encountered the foreign-local division in terms of the greater support among foreign multinationals for industry regulation, seeing that compliance fitted their customer profile, strategies and resource capacities more than small locally owned businesses. Having introduced performance-based membership eligibility to align with government regulation of the sector, the association's representation has fallen to around 10 per cent of the industry that it seeks to represent.

Recent changes in industry composition provide further dimensions of business heterogeneity that influence support for associations. Two cases of sector restructuring among the sample associations had opposing outcomes. One case involved an association in a sector where there had been one dominant industry participant around which

the association had been configured. Its position in the industry had changed through the competitive success of a new entrant that had introduced a high-volume, low-cost business model. With the industry based around shared, partly publicly owned and regulated infrastructure, realisation of the new entrant's business model depends partly on changes to an operating environment in which the industry incumbent had maintained dominance. The new entrant had initially joined the industry association but ultimately both key industry players have ceased to be members. Conversely, in another case changes in industry composition are leading to a convergence in competitive strategies and a strengthening of the association.

In Ireland and New Zealand the general pattern within the pharmaceutical and medical industries is that research-based organisations reliant on patent protection seek separate industry representation from competing generic producers. Research-based companies tend to view generic manufacturers as a threat to the integrity of patent protection and as adhering to lower business standards than they do, for example in respect to quality management and marketing methods. In Ireland one previously exclusive association has moved away from the traditional division by opening membership to selected generic companies. The executive director explained this as an outcome partly of ownership consolidation among own-research companies and a tendency for surviving companies to focus on research activity with increased subcontracting of their manufacturing activity. The former change brought an interest in diversifying membership to increase the resource base of the association. Outsourcing by some established members has blurred the distinction as some former generic producers have developed linkages with developers of patented products. With the change in representation the Irish association has diversified its activities to include projects of industry-wide significance such as the management of used plastic containers that must be treated before their disposal. In New Zealand the equivalent association recognises that the fragmentation of industry representation is an impediment to its lobbying for public investment in hazard awareness and other projects of industry-wide benefit.

Cases where the boundary of representation differs between Ireland and New Zealand provide further evidence of how heterogeneity affects collective action. Most trade associations are affiliated to an activity united by its value chain position as well as its industry affiliation. So, for example, the distributors of a product have a separate association to the producers of that product. This reflects how collective issues differ between the enterprises concentrated at each stage of the value chain. Comparing associations in Ireland and New Zealand there are a few cases where representation in one country is unified across value chain steps that in the other country are affiliated to two or more associations. As in the case of the chemical industry (see above), this is partly affected by industry scale and the ability to gather sufficient members to sustain a separate association. Booksellers New Zealand is the main case where there is a more encompassing association in one country that is not explained by the number of industry participants. It is of interest in showing how representational structures can assist the integration of value chains where there is a shared interest among participants attached to each link in the chain.

In the book industry, New Zealand's unified representation of publishers and distributors (mainly high-street bookshops) is a contrast to Ireland where there are separate associations for publishers and distributors. Fragmentation reflects how interests diverge over issues such as price discounts for high volume retailers, royalty payments to authors and how booksellers and publishers are differentially affected by the growth of electronic media. Booksellers New Zealand is New Zealand's only self-funding arts sector body and has close to 100 per cent of the membership it targets (Perry, 2007). The Irish Book Publishers' Association is a part-time organisation assisted by public sector grant funding with a lower rate of recruitment than its New Zealand equivalent despite the more specialised representation sought. The survival of local management in both parts of New Zealand's value chain gives greater scope for common interests to be identified than in Ireland. In Ireland, publishing mainly involves locally owned, independent companies targeting niche markets whereas distribution is mainly controlled by foreign-owned retail groups that emphasise mainstream markets. Indeed the UK-based Booksellers Association is the main trade association for booksellers in Ireland.

CONCLUSIONS

Whereas this study set out to discover differences in trade association activity the broad similarity among associations in Ireland and New Zealand is the major finding. Associations generally encompass similar ranges of activity with only one substantial case of an association in one country representing activity from across a value chain that has more fragmented representation in the other country. The overall rate of recruitment is near identical and frequently the recruitment rates of individual matched associations differ by less than 10 per cent. Associations with the highest and lowest rates of membership are the same in both economies. The broad similarity of representation suggests that the boundaries between trade association memberships are affected by widely experienced processes. Olson's (1971, 1982) theories of collective association continue to be relevant as a starting point for explaining the tendency for groups to remain fixed to comparatively narrow areas of business activity. Similarly, there are no clear differences in the activities performed with associations seeking to provide a wide range of services as well as representing their industry to government and other agencies.

This study provides little evidence of firms in either country having an unusual predisposition to recognise and pursue industry-level interests. This can be seen as a challenge to the suggestion that small countries have an advantage in their propensity for business cooperation, as proposed by Maskell et al. (1998). Rather there is more evidence in support of Streeck's (1991) contention that business differences are a barrier to industry-wide cooperation. On average, an association has recruited less than two-thirds of the targeted membership and in both countries a significant number of associations have failed to recruit at least one key industry participant. The presence of outsiders reduces the ability of an association to present itself as the voice of an industry, as compared with it being perceived as merely a self-interested lobby, and may signify division within an industry. Within the study, associations that solely or mainly represent foreign-owned enterprises

have the highest rates of recruitment and the most well-resourced executives. Multinational enterprises are well-resourced and strategic in their efforts to maintain a business environment supportive of their overseas operations. Being of comparatively recent origin, making use of foreign investment incentives and operating in regulated markets encourages support for industry associations but this results in strong associations only where foreign enterprise outnumbers other industry participants. Associations with a mix of foreign multinationals and small-scale domestic enterprise tend to have the lowest rates of recruitment.

Although faced with different organisational challenges, Irish and New Zealand associations generally aspire to be significant agents of business and industry development. They claim to be having positive impacts and are frequently able to claim representation of a large share of their industry. Nonetheless, with a few exceptions high levels of recruitment do not translate into well-resourced associations with capacity for high levels of service provision. The further message from this study is that associations are a product of their industry characteristics with relatively little to suggest that they are embedded in a particular social environment. Changes in industry composition, for example, can explain some of the more significant differences in association membership and activity. Thus where the association in one country had overcome the usual division between generic and own-research companies this can be explained by ownership consolidation that has lessened the divide between the two company types. The sensitivity to industry characteristics is consistent with membership being based on calculative trust in which prospective members consider the costs and benefits to their individual organisation of supporting their industry association. This may include, for example, weighing up the likelihood of the association addressing matters affecting their enterprise when other industry participants have different priorities to their own. Given that support for associations in the two economies appears to be based on cost-benefit calculations greater scope exists to modify the status of associations than where support is shaped by deeper social processes that evolve slowly over time. This may help justify public agency support of trade associations recognising their importance as agents for industry-wide cooperation.

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