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between organizational membership and  
inter-organizational relationship : a  
three-logics model to assess the  
heterogeneity of meta-organizations and  
variations among them**

Garaudel, Pierre

IAE Paris. Université Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne

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# Membership in meta-organizations between organizational membership and inter-organizational relationship

A three-logics model to assess the heterogeneity of meta-organizations and variations among them

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**Abstract:** In this paper, we advance a specific understanding of the concept of logic of membership in a meta-organizational setting by building on the literature on organizational membership and pinpointing how membership in meta-organizations theoretically connects to the dual nature of meta-organizations as organizational entities and as patterns of inter-organizational relationships. On this basis, we develop and present a new analytical tool aiming at assessing the heterogeneity of meta-organizations and at providing a novel theoretical account of variations among them. This framework is based on the characterization of three fundamental logics of membership, which relate to the fundamental nature of the inter-organizational relationship that connects a member organization to a meta-organization: (1) the logic of service (members as clients and meta-organizations as service providers) pertains to a market-type form of relationship; (2) the logic of representation (members as represented constituents and meta-organizations as representative intermediaries) pertains to a principal-agent form; and (3) the logic of coordination (members as collaborative partners and meta-organizations as structures of inter-organizational coordination) pertains to a collaborative form. We argue that distinguishing between these three logics of membership is important because each affects the very nature of meta-organizations and has very different (meta-)organizational implications, which also means that the source of differentiation highlighted by our three-logics model can shed important light on core issues of the theory of meta-organizations.

**Keywords:** meta-organization, organizational membership, inter-organizational relationship, organizational diversity, service provision, representation, coordination, secretariat.

## Introduction

The concept of meta-organization (MO), which refers to organizations that have other organizations as members, has been proposed by Ahrne and Brunsson (2005, 2008) mostly in response to the long-standing focus of organizational theorists on what these authors call “individual-based organizations”. While distinguishing between organizations with individuals as members and organizations whose members are other organizations, the seminal paper of Ahrne and Brunsson (2005) traces the differences between MOs and individual-based organizations back to differences between organizations and human beings. Most importantly, it argues that MOs differ from individual-based organizations in important ways that call for somewhat different theories. In other words, the specific features of member organizations challenge the traditional theoretical framework of organizational analysis (Berkowitz & Dumez, 2016), which in turn raises the need for a theory built on the idea that not only individuals but also organizations can be members of organizations (Ahrne et al., 2016a).

However, although one of the main purposes of the theory of MOs is to theoretically highlight how MOs fundamentally differ from individual-based organizations, it has also been recognized that the concept of MO relates to a large array of empirical phenomena and encompasses a very large set of sub-categories of organizations. This raises the issue of the heterogeneity of MOs and variations among them. Garaudel (2020) observes that MOs present such a wide diversity that it is difficult to generalize empirical results based on a specific type to all kinds of MOs, which suggest the need to investigate as many forms of MOs as possible to gain still more knowledge about their distinctive traits and the main dimensions of differentiation among them. It can be argued that this issue is a central topic of the theory of MOs in that variations among MOs impact some important organizational dimensions and structural features of MOs. Berkowitz et al. (2022) thus suggest that it would be valuable to analyse systematically whether differences, varieties of, and variations in MOs affect key aspects of their functioning. The theoretical analysis developed in this paper is in line with these calls for a better understanding of MO diversity and how variations among MOs may affect their internal functioning.

More specifically, we adopt a “logics approach” (Demougin et al., 2019a) to develop a three-logics model based on the concept of logic of membership. We contend that this concept of logic of membership is both a meaningful and useful analytical tool for investigating variations among MOs.

First, it obviously connects to a key conceptual cornerstone of the theory of MOs, namely the notion of organizational membership by member organizations.

Second, it encompasses two fundamental and interconnected lines of enquiry in scholarship on MOs, which respectively relate to the functions of MOs and the motivations for being member of an MO.

Last and most importantly, it allows us to address the issue of heterogeneity of MOs and variations among them in conjunction with another fundamental and distinctive feature of MOs, which relates to the dual nature of MOs as a specific pattern of inter-organizational relationships and as an organizational form. Our main argument is drawn from the general literature on organizational membership and the notion that membership may be viewed as a special status and as a pattern of relationship. Regarding the case of MOs, the view of membership as a special status is relevant for all MOs in that a clear membership boundary is a key attribute of these organizations. The view of membership as a pattern of relationship is also relevant for MOs given their dual nature as both a specific pattern of inter-organizational relationships and as an organizational form. However, membership in MOs may be associated with different types of pattern of relationship and these different patterns of relationship, i.e. these different logics of membership, are not equally salient in all MOs, which paves the way for a new theoretical account of MO diversity.

In line with this overarching theoretical objective, our theoretical analysis contributes to the MO literature in several ways.

First, our literature analysis allows us to theoretically establish, in an analogical way with the literature on organizational membership in individual-based organizations, the dual nature of membership in MOs as an “associational special status” and as a specific form of inter-organizational relationship. On this basis, we propose and characterize a specific understanding of the concept of logic of membership in a meta-organizational setting that explicitly links together the dual nature of membership in any organization with the dual nature of MOs as a specific pattern of inter-organizational relationships and as an organizational form.

Second, we build on this concept of logic of membership to provide a novel theoretical account of variations among MOs by distinguishing and characterizing three fundamental logics of membership, which relate to the fundamental nature of the inter-organizational relationship that connects a member organization to an MO: (1) the logic of service (members as clients and MOs as service providers) pertains to a market-type form of relationship; (2) the logic of representation (members as represented constituents and MOs as representative intermediaries) pertains to a principal-agent form; and (3) the logic of coordination (members as collaborative partners and MOs as structures of inter-organizational coordination) pertains to a collaborative form.

We argue that distinguishing between these three logics of membership is important because each has very different implications regarding key dimensions of MOs, and consequently we suggest that the fruitfulness of our three-logics model, and the source of differentiation among MOs that this analytical perspective highlights, lies in its ability to shed light on core issues of the theory of MOs. Whilst each logic has been extensively scrutinized in many ways and in different terms in various bodies of literature, it is rare that the three logics are considered simultaneously in a same theoretical perspective. Our paper therefore highlights that the theory of MOs provides a valuable generic theoretical approach to apprehend comprehensively all three logics in a unified framework.

Last, our theoretical analysis provides a more specific contribution to academic discussions on the functions of MOs. A first and immediate benefit of this three-logics model is to emphasize the role of service provision in MOs, which is somewhat underestimated in the extent literature and has long been neglected. Most importantly, it also helps clarify and disentangle the generic concept of collective action by distinguishing the logic of representation and the logic of coordination, which have very different (meta-)organizational consequences. This especially leads us in this paper to put more emphasis on the logic of representation, which we argue is well recognized but comparatively less theoretically investigated in the MO literature.

The paper is organized as follows. In the first part, we clarify the theoretical positioning and underpinnings of the research. In the second part, we present the central concept of organizational membership as it stands in general organization studies and in the MO literature, and more specifically how the notion of organizational membership by member organizations in MOs is illuminated by the concept of logic of membership. In line with this, after having emphasized in the previous part the dual nature of membership in MOs as an “associational special status” and as a specific form of inter-organizational relationship, we present in the third part our three-logics model, which is based on the identification and the characterization of three logics of affiliation by member organizations that relate to different types of inter-organizational relationships. These logics of affiliation are of course not mutually exclusive, and several logics often coexist in a same MO. Finally, in the last part we discuss some important theoretical implications of our three-logics model. We especially analyse how the different logics of membership are frequently linked together in a functional manner and can shed light on core issues of the theory of MOs, which we illustrate by considering how the three logics of membership affect differently the role of member organizations in MOs, the nature of their relationship with the secretariat, and the role of the secretariat itself.

## **I. Theoretical positioning and underpinnings of the research**

In this first part of the paper, we first emphasize how our research lies in continuation of previous academic reflections pertaining to the issue of MO diversity. Next, we present the concept of logic of membership that is at the center of our logics approach. Last, we clarify the scope of literature on which this theoretical essay is based.

### **1.1. A contribution to the literature on the heterogeneity of MOs and variations among them**

MO diversity is a key subject in the MO literature. Berkowitz and Dumez (2016) note that the diversity and heterogeneity of MOs raise methodological issues that require original approaches. In addition, Berkowitz et al. (2022) suggest that one important avenue for future research is to investigate whether differences among MOs affect other factors. In practice several empirical categories of MOs have been identified (multi-stakeholder MOs, inter-governmental MOs, etc.). Various dimensions of differentiation among MOs have also been proposed. Garaudel (2020) advances that recognizing the main dimensions of differentiation among MOs can help build an analytical framework that enables a comparative and systematic account of the full diversity of MOs. Such an approach is typically illustrated by Bor and Cropper (2023), who analyse how MOs differ in terms of resourcing and how their various patterns of resource acquisitions interact with important organizational dimensions. In addition, a classification approach has been used and some analytical typologies have been proposed, even though most are specific typologies pertaining to a more or less closely defined sub-category of MOs and are not intended to be general typologies (Garaudel, 2020). The three-logics model developed in this paper is in line with these calls for a better understanding of MO diversity, especially through the identification of the main dimensions of differentiation among them and a consideration of how these dimensions of differentiation affect key features of MOs. Indeed, we believe that the three logics of membership highlighted in the paper offer a helpful analytical tool to grasp and give an account of the profound heterogeneity of MOs with respect to both the relative salience of each logic and the way they combine each other.

### **1.2. A logics-approach based on the concept of “logic of membership”**

Our theoretical analysis is based on a “logics approach” (Demougin et al., 2019a). More specifically, the concept of “logic of membership” we refer to in this paper mainly originates from the literature on trade associations. In continuation of Schmitter and Streeck (1981/1999), who establish a distinction between the logic of membership and the logic of influence, Bennett (2000) proposes another distinction between the logic of service and the logic of collective

activities, in relation to the rationales of membership affiliation. Our own use of the concept of logic of membership is in line with this perspective centred on the motivations for membership. However, we proposed a refined categorization with three logics of membership. Indeed, whereas Bennett considers the search for representational influence as a dimension of the logic of collective activities, we argue for a more precise distinction between what we call the logic of representation and the logic of coordination. The reason for this lies in the fact that the concept of MO refers to a much wider and, most importantly, much diverse population of organizations than those referred to by the concept of trade association. In particular, as will be detailed below, our definite understanding of what we call the logic of coordination allows to take into account more specifically a whole group of MOs that rely on inter-organizational collaboration but for which collective action is not primarily mediated through the agency of a representative intermediary.

Three elements motivate our central interest in the concept of logic of membership. First, this concept is closely and obviously connected to a key conceptual cornerstone of the theory of MOs, namely the notion of organizational membership by member organizations. Second, the concept of logic of membership is an encompassing concept in that it also relates to two central and interconnected topics in the MO literature, which respectively concern the functions of MOs and the motivations for being member of an MO. Last, and most importantly, by linking together the two concepts of organizational membership and inter-organizational relationship, it highlights the dual nature of organizational membership in MOs as both an associational special status and a pattern of inter-organizational relationship, and therefore embodies the notion that MOs intrinsically belong both to the realm of organizations and the realm of inter-organizational relationships.

Motivations for membership is a key concern since MOs are highly dependent on their members but membership of an MO is a voluntary decision by an independent organization and therefore organizations need a reason for becoming and remaining a member (Cropper & Bor, 2018). However, and most importantly since it is also why the concept of logic of membership is an encompassing concept and a meaningful analytical tool from an MO theory perspective, motivations for membership in MOs and MO purposes are closely connected issues. Indeed, as member-driven organizations, MO functions follow from the reasons members participate (Lawton et al., 2018). In other words, while the choice of membership is likely to be made through an assessment of its costs and benefits (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005), by virtue of the associative nature of MOs (*ibid*), members' inducements are also directly linked to the MO's main purpose and activities: organizations choose to join an MO because they share both the

purpose and interests of it and because they value the activities undertaken and the results achieved (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; Malcourant et al., 2015). It is for that matter revealing that in their seminal paper, Ahrne and Brunsson (2005) introduce the various purposes of MOs they emphasize (facilitating interactions, facilitating cooperation and joint action, achieving external influence, and enhancing the status of their individual members) by first pinpointing the inducement for joining MOs with such purposes.

Numerous functions have since been identified in the literature on MOs, sometimes in general terms and sometimes with respect to a specific category of MOs. Some classifications have also been proposed. Ahrne and Brunsson (2008) identify three general purposes for which a MO may be set up: (1) interaction among members; (2) collective action among members; and (3) creation of a collective identity. Other scholars differentiate MO functions according to whether they relate to cooperation, coordination, and regulation among members, *i.e.*, their inward functions (Laurent et al., 2020), or whether they relate to the management of relationships with external stakeholders such as NGOs or policy makers (König et al., 2012; Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2017; Garaudel, 2020; Laurent et al., 2020). In addition, Berkowitz et al. (2022) emphasize four common and crucial activities in MOs: (1) governance or comanagement activities; (2) advocacy activities; (3) boundary and category work; and (4) service provision.

### **1.3. A theoretical essay building on three main bodies of literature**

In this paper, we theoretically consider how logics of membership relate to MO diversity by drawing on three main bodies of research that pertain respectively to the general literature on organizational membership, the theory of MOs, and various empirical categories of meta-organizational entities that have been investigated without any specific reference to the concept of MO (in particular in research on inter-governmental organizations, trade associations, civil-society organizations, and international union organizations).

Regarding the MO literature, we focus on the body of literature that explicitly refers to the seminal works of Ahrne and Brunsson (2005, 2008). This means the exclusion of all publications that do not cite Ahrne and Brunsson's contributions and only refer to the concept of MO as devised by Gulati et al. (2012a), who adopt an inter-organizational network perspective based on the notion of "meta-organizational design" in contrast of Ahrne and Brunsson's understanding of MOs as associations of organizations and as autonomous organizational actors (Berkowitz & Bor, 2018; Garaudel, 2020; Berkowitz et al., 2022).

Regarding the large array of studies pertaining to empirical categories of meta-organizational entities that have been investigated without any specific reference to the concept of MO, we

focus on illustrative contributions that we perceive as especially relevant and insightful in respect of the three logics of membership delineated in this paper, especially those that shed an interesting light on the logic of service and the logic of representation.

Last, with respect to the general literature on organizational membership, we focused on two specific dimensions of organizational membership that we reckon are particularly relevant for both membership in individual-based organizations and membership in MOs (membership as a “special status” and as a pattern of relationship, membership as a decided organizational element). In other words, we neglected other important bodies of work concerned with organizational membership in individual-based organizations that we deem less relevant for the understanding of organizations as members of other organizations. A first example is the characterization of membership in the social systems theory developed by Niklas Luhmann, who views membership as a necessary precondition and the central determinant of organizations (Luhmann, 1964/2020; Grothe-Hammer, 2019a, 2020; Grothe-Hammer & la Cour, 2020). A second meaningful example relates to organizational behavior studies, in which membership is fundamentally conceived of as a psychological relationship between individuals and organizations, i.e., as a “relational tie” with a perceptual and subjective dimension (Masterson & Stamper, 2003; Stamper, Masterson, & Knapp, 2009; Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2011; Epitropaki, 2013).

However, even though it appears less applicable to the case of organization members due to its intrinsically psychological orientation, the organization behavior perspective may also be viewed as a specific illustration of the more generic view presented in the next part and denoted by Grothe-Hammer (2020) as the processual view.

## **II. Membership in individual-based organizations and in MOs**

Membership is one of the most important concepts in organization theory (Grothe-Hammer & la Cour, 2020) and has been identified as a crucial element by classic works in early organization theory (Ahrne et al., 2016a). However, while it is widely used in numerous fields of literature, this concept is also one of the most taken for granted and is rarely defined (Rafaeli, 1996; Bencherki & Snack, 2016).

In the following, we investigate the issue of organizational membership by member organizations in two ways. First, we consider the MO literature and propose a brief overview of how the issue of membership in MOs has been addressed in this strand of organization studies. Second, we consider how traditional conceptions of membership in individual-based organizations shed light on the issue of organizational membership in MOs. Overall, this

comparative literature review dedicated to membership enables us to theoretically establish the dual nature of membership in MOs as an “associational special status” and as a specific pattern of inter-organizational linkage.

### **2.1. Organizational membership in the MO literature**

The theory of MOs has been proposed by Ahrne and Brunsson (2005, 2008) mostly in response to the long-standing focus of organizational theorists on what these authors call “individual-based organizations”. Ahrne and Brunsson (2005) note that theories about organizations implicitly or explicitly assume that the members of organizations are individual persons and suggest that organization studies have focused mostly on individual-based organizations, while organizations with organizations as members have been largely ignored. Ahrne et al. (2016a) also observe that most organization theories build on the assumption that the members of organizations are individuals, adding that this assumption was explicit in early organization theory and has become implicit and almost taken for granted in later theorizing.

While recognizing the organizational nature of members in MOs and highlighting the significant theoretical implications is of critical interest, this rapidly growing research area also raises new questions regarding the very notion of membership. The starting point is that, at first sight, regarding traditional conceptions of membership, different types of actors and stakeholders could be considered members of these specific types of organizations. The organizational nature of MO members does not preclude a potentially important role for individual actors in MOs; individual actors can also take part in decision processes, especially as decision-makers or individual representatives of member organizations (as “delegates”, Lafon, 2018), but also as employees of the MO (and more generally as “individual members of the secretariat”; Roux & Lecocq, 2022). This therefore calls for a need to characterize the very notion of membership, and more specifically to specify on what grounds affiliated organizations should be considered the “members” of the MO rather than individual actors such as employees. The theory of MOs provides a key rationale for treating affiliated organizations as focal members, which lies in the associational component of their connection to the MO. Thus, from this perspective, the theoretical primacy of member organizations derives from the very nature of MOs as “associations of organizations” (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008). In other words, MOs fundamentally correspond to an associational form of organization, and affiliated organizations are intrinsically their associational members.

### **2.2. Organizational membership as a status and as a relationship**

When one considers the case of individual-based organisations, membership may be viewed as an “administrative tie” (Bencherki & Snack, 2016; Grothe-Hammer, 2019a, 2020), or as a

“special status” that can be granted and withdrawn or relinquished by an organization (Luhman, 1964/2020). It can also be conceived of as a “relational tie” (Masterson & Stamper, 2003). For example, while also noting that the concept of membership is not as easily or clearly articulated as it may appear at first and may be defined and construed in different ways, Rafaeli (1996) considers five possible perspectives on organizational membership, all of which being characterized as “patterns of relationship” : organizations and membership as physical or temporal relationships, as contractual relationships, as hierarchical relationships, as production relationships, and as cultural relationships.

This dual understanding of membership as a special status and as a pattern of relationship has been especially emphasized by Grothe-Hammer (2020), who identifies two different core ideas of what membership is, denoted as the static and processual views. The most widely shared view is the static view, which sees membership as a structural element or a fixed premise implying that certain individuals become members at one point and then remain members until their memberships are terminated. Conversely, it has been suggested that membership should be seen as a precarious process in which the degree of belonging to an organization is constantly renegotiated. The author adds that in this processual view, membership is rather a question of the degree of actual “participanship” in the organizational processes.

If we now consider more specifically the case of member organizations in MOs, the static conception of membership might at first sight appear to be more relevant with respect to the very definition of MOs as formalized associations of organizations. It immediately results from this definition that member organizations are connected to the MO through associational membership rather than a contractual or an inherently more relational tie, and consequently this definition seems quite consistent with the traditional conception of membership as a kind of status based on a formal, administrative tie with a focal organization. From a theory of MOs perspective, it can be argued that it is this constitutionally based (Bor, 2014), special status resting on a formal associational tie, that fundamentally distinguishes organizational membership in MOs from other types of inter-organizational relationships. However, in the third part of this paper, we will argue that this associational membership tie with an MO may also be thought of as intrinsically coupled with other forms of inter-organizational relationships.

### **2.3. Organizational membership as a defining organizational element of MOs**

The partial organization framework developed by Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) sheds an interesting light on the topic of organizational membership in individual-based organizations, and more generally in any forms of social collectives. It has also a specific connection with scholarship on MOs, and not only because this framework has been developed by the same

authors who had previously given rise to the theory of MOs. First, it provides a new organization theory perspective on the fact that membership is obviously a constitutive feature of MOs, insofar as the very definition of an MO rests on the organizational nature of its members, which supposes that there are members clearly identified as such. Second, it allows a specific conceptualization of MOs in terms of degree of organizationality.

The partial organization framework is grounded in an understanding of organizations as fundamentally “decided social orders” and focuses on the five decision-based “organizational elements” that organizers may draw on to achieve organized order: membership, rules, monitoring, hierarchy, and sanctions. As an element of organizationality, membership relates to the organization’s decisions about who will be allowed to join the organization as an employee, a citizen, or a member of an association (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011). These decisions on membership contribute to defining who is a member and who is not (Ahrne et al., 2016b). More specifically, from this perspective membership is viewed as an organizational element that consists of defining membership standards (Laviolette et al., 2022) in the shape of inclusion/exclusion criteria upon membership (Brankovic, 2018), and of inclusion/exclusion membership practices (Crespin-Mazet et al., 2017) through admission, selection, or exclusion of members.

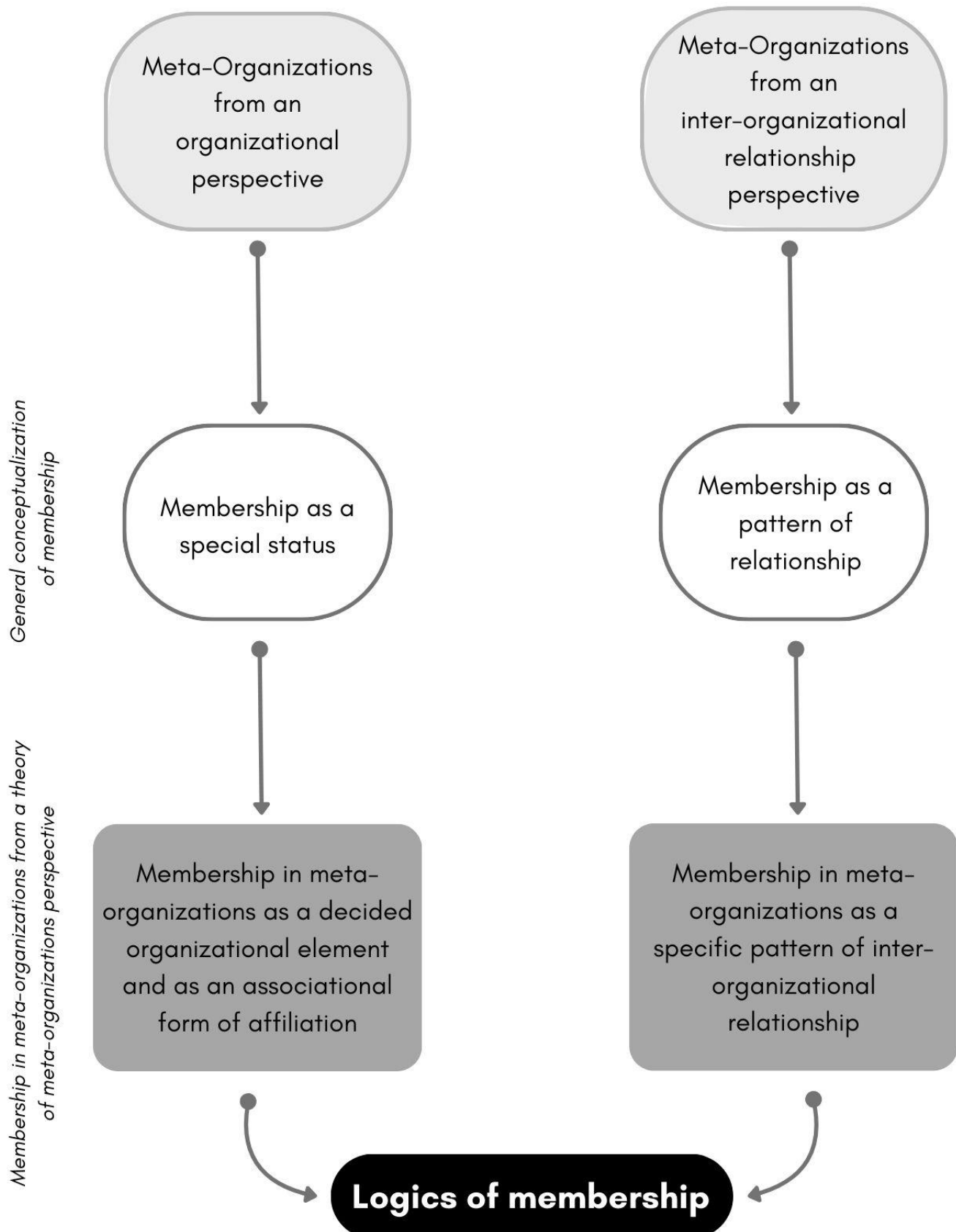
Regarding the theory of MOs, this framework is of special interest since it has been frequently used by MO scholars to characterize MOs as formal *but* incomplete organizations with a lower level of organizationality than most formal organizations (Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015; Garaudel, 2020; Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022; Berkowitz & Bor, 2022). As associations of independent organizations, it is rare that MOs can use all five organizational elements. MOs are characterized by a low level of hierarchy, and they often lack the resources to carefully monitor members or the power to sanction them (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Berkowitz, 2018; König et al., 2012). This is inversely why membership, i.e., the decisions that directly affect the MO’s “membership composition” (Paoletti et al., 2011; Cropper & Bor, 2018), has a central importance as an organizational element. Membership is the most salient (Ahrne et al., 2016b) and the most systematically present (Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015) organizational element. In other words, organizational membership is a *sine qua non* of MOs (Berkowitz et al., 2022).

Most importantly, this view of membership as an organizational element based on decision-making is also consistent with an understanding of membership in MOs as an associational special status, even though certain MOs have different types of membership, which allows partial membership (Brankovic, 2018); in other words, there may be different degrees of membership in MOs and organizations may be MO members in different ways, e.g., as full or

ordinary members, associate or affiliate members, candidate members or observer members (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Brankovic, 2018; Cropper & Bor, 2018; Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019; Carmagnac et al., 2022).

In the light of what precedes, Figure 1 below visually outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of logic of membership in a meta-organizational setting. It illustrates how the concept intrinsically lies at the crossroad between the literature on MOs and the literature on organizational membership. It also illustrates how this concept theoretically connects the dual nature of membership in any organization with the dual nature of MOs as a specific pattern of inter-organizational relationships and as an organizational form. The characterization of membership in MOs as an associational special status points to the organizational nature of MOs (MOs as organizational actors drawing on decided organizational elements), and emphasizes the common associational dimension of members' affiliation that allows to qualify every member organization of any MO as such. This characterization allows to identify member organization as members of an MO in contrast of any individual participant to the MO's activities, but also of any other organization interacting with this MO. In conjunction, the characterization of membership in MOs as a specific pattern of inter-organizational relationship points to the inter-organizational nature of MOs, and provides the basis on which different logics of membership can be distinguished between and within them according to the fundamental way(s) member organizations relate to an MO.

**Figure 1: Theoretical underpinning of the concept of logic of membership**



### **III. The “logics of membership” in MOs: a three-logics model**

The three-logics model developed in this paper is based on the core argument that the common associational status of organization members in MOs does not preclude important variations with respect to the fundamental nature of the inter-organizational linkage that connects members to each other and to the MO. In the previous part of this paper, we have emphasized the dual nature of organizational membership as both a kind of status and as a form of relationship. In a closely connected way, a similar reasoning may be applied to MOs insofar they intrinsically belong both to the realm of organizations and the realm of inter-organizational relationships. Indeed, it is an important contribution of the theory of MOs to show how this form of organization contributes to bring a higher level of organizationality into specific sets of inter-organizational relationships. The analytical perspective that is presented below is consistent with the cornerstone premise of the theory of MOs that meta-organizational entities should be considered fundamentally as organizations on their own right, even though the organizational nature of their members establishes an intrinsic connection between the fields of organizations and inter-organizational relationships. In the following, we successively present the three logics of membership in MOs that underpin our three-logics model and detail how each logic is associated with a specific form of inter-organizational relationship and a specific characterization of MOs and their members.

#### **3.1. The logic of service: members as clients and MOs as service providers**

The logic of service holds a special place regarding the issue of MO's functions insofar as it is rare that provision of services to individual members is heralded as the principal purpose of an MO. However, several studies show that an important activity of some MOs may consist of providing services and bringing direct support to their singular members. Moreover, even if provision of services to individual members is not a central purpose of MOs, for some of them services activities may have important implications in terms of membership recruitment and in terms of resource generation.

The logic of service has been mainly highlighted in the literature on some specific forms of MOs, especially in research on trade associations and more generally on interest organizations. By contrast, even though service production for their members is put forward by Berkowitz et al. (2022) as one of the four main activities of MOs, it has received relatively little attention in the literature on MOs. Furthermore, it has been principally considered in relation to the case of trade associations (e.g., Paoletti et al., 2011; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015; Sheldon et al., 2024). A first exception are authors who consider as a specific form of MO the business cooperatives,

such as cooperatives of buyers, R&D consortia, patent pool and job pooling associations, that generate concrete and immediate benefits to their individual members by organizing the sharing of a set of activities among them (e.g., Bor, 2014; Azzam & Berkowitz, 2018; Roux & Lecocq, 2022). A second is Garaudel (2020), who highlights how global union federations give to some of their singular members direct support from an international solidarity and a union capacity-building perspectives, for example, by developing education and training activities.

In contrast, service provision has received much more attention in other strands of literature related to the meta-organizational form. For example, Demougin et al. (2019b) highlight the role of trade associations as service provider along with their roles as industrial relations actor and political actor, while Gooberman et al. (2020) propose a typology of trade associations in which the primary defining feature for each type is their main organizational function and where service provision is one the four main functions identified alongside lobbying, negotiating and standard-setting. In more theoretical terms, services activities have typically been analysed in reference to the classical distinction proposed by Olson (1965) between collective goods and selective goods. Selective goods are services that are only provided to members. These services make membership attractive for new members and may be viewed as an inducement to and reward for membership (Paoletti et al., 2011; Gooberman et al., 2020; Sheldon et al., 2024). In continuation of this classical distinction, a refined categorization has been developed by Sheldon and Thornthwaite (2004), who note that besides collective goods, not only selective goods —free and mostly standardized services directly to and solely for members— can be provided, but also elective goods, i.e., customized, commercial fee-based services to members and non-members alike (Paoletti et al., 2011; Sheldon et al., 2016).

### **3.2. The logic of representation: members as represented constituents and MOs as representative intermediaries**

Representation is a key concern in the MO literature and in other fields of literature pertaining to specific empirical forms of MOs, especially in research on civil-society (meta-)organizations and on trade associations. For example, research on trade associations is illustrative of a broader strand of literature on interest representation and, more specifically, on business representation (May et al., 1998; Battisti & Perry, 2015; Gooberman et al., 2018). In the following, we first consider how representation has been addressed in the MO literature. Next, we emphasize several important distinct features of the logic of representation. Our focus on civil-society organizations specifically provides a political science perspective in which the relationship between member organisations and many civil-society MOs is conceptualized as a vertical and delegating represented(constituent)-representative relationship. On this basis, we

argue that the logic of representation emphasized in this paper—in its ideal-typical embodiment— involves two specific elements: the fact that the members of a representative MO correspond to a distinct category of organizations, which collectively make up the constituency of the MO, and the fact that the search for external influence is mainly mediated by the secretariat of the MO, which then acts as a representative intermediary.

### **3.2.1. Representation in the MO literature**

In the MO literature, a specific emphasis is put on the inherent difficulties of representation in MOs. In his studies of political representation in the Danish disability field, Bonfils (2011) observes that representation may create identity tensions when it comes to agree on who can be given the mandate to represent the investigated disability MO in official and political settings, i.e., who can be given the mandate to speak on behalf of all members of the MO and more generally of all disabled people. Representation may raise a problem of internal solidarity and internal identity among members, but also a problem of organizational actorhood. Kerwer (2013) notes in his study on the European Union that representation is a great challenge for any MO and that, due to the inherent conflict of autonomy, MOs will find it hard to act on behalf of their members: *“In MOs, external representation is also subject to the competition for autonomy. A MO claiming to represent its members exclusively implicitly mounts an attack on their autonomy. Since action on behalf of an organization is a crucial dimension of organizational actorhood, we can expect that member organizations will not give up their claim”* (p. 43). Karlberg (2019) also submits that the issue of being represented by another organization is connected to trust, adding that to allow a new level of authority and a different actor to represent you and speak on your behalf is not an easy thing, because it essentially means giving up parts of your control and autonomy.

Regarding MO's functions, Ahrne and Brunsson (2005) make a distinction between MOs for which the main purpose is internal to the organization and those for which the main purpose is to achieve external influence. The logic of representation is closely in line with the latter purpose. However, it also more specifically involves two definite elements, which respectively concern the facts that:

- the members of the MO correspond to a distinct category of organizations, which collectively constitute the constituency of the MO
- interactions between the organizational field and the environment are mainly mediated by the secretariat of the MO, which then acts as a representative of the related category of organizations and as an intermediary between these organizations and their external interlocutors.

### ***3.2.2. Representation as a representative relationship***

Representational activities are far from being limited to the scope of business representation. In particular, the role of representation by civil-society organizations has been scrutinized in the non-profit literature, which especially stresses the importance of representativeness, representational capacities, and representational legitimacy in these organizations (Guo & Musso, 2007; Guo & Zhang, 2013), but also in political science studies. Representation, representativeness, and accountability are indeed core concepts in theories of democracy, and organized civil society has been depicted as providing the societal infrastructure for public deliberation in representative democracy (Greenwood, 2007; Kohler-Koch, 2013). This political science perspective on political representation especially allows an understanding of the relationship between member organisations and many civil-society MOs as a vertical, represented-representative relationship (Trenz, 2009; Kohler-Koch, 2013) or, more simply stated, as a representative relationship (Kröger & Friedrich, 2013; Kroger, 2019).

### ***3.2.3. MOs as representative intermediaries***

The concept of representation is closely connected to those of intermediation and intermediaries (Frandsen & Johansen, 2015). Different types of organizations have been described as intermediary organizations, in particular trade associations (Van Waarden, 1992; Bennett, 2000; Frandsen & Johansen, 2018; Gooberman et al., 2020), but also political parties and trade unions (Frandsen & Johansen, 2015, 2018), or more specifically regulatory innovation intermediaries (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2024). For instance, Van Waarden (1992) notes that business interest associations are organizations which undertake interest intermediation by mediating between two types of organizations: (a) the group of businesses the associations intend to organize and represent; and (b) their interlocutors or adversaries such as the state and the organizations of workers.

### ***3.2.4. MO members as represented constituents***

In his article on interest representation, and with respect to democratic representation conceived of as a principal-agent relationship, Kröger (2019) observes that there first needs to be a constituency for it to be represented. From a broad organizational perspective, formal members of a representative organization could be considered as the inner's core of an organization's constituency, even though there may be looser forms of affiliation with individual or organizations acting as "beneficiaries", "contributor" or "supporter" of the organization (Johansson & Lee, 2014). This is also why some representative organization may consider having extensive and detailed regulation and control of their membership as their primary way of defining a constituency (*ibid*).

With more specific regard to the theory of MOs, the logic of representation implies the existence of a category of organizations perceived as sufficiently homogenous with respect to some common characteristic they possessed and some common interests they share. MOs are generally based on similarity and intended for a certain kind of organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). Moreover, their boundaries are frequently aligned with boundaries of well-established and deeply institutionalized categories (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008), sometimes in relation to similarly well-defined organizational or societal fields (Laurent et al., 2020). This means that the membership composition of an MO affects the organizational identity of the MO itself (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; Paoletti et al., 2011; Brankovic, 2018), but at the same time being member of an MO may affect the status of a member organization and have a self-definitional dimension. Joining an MO can then be seen as a self-categorization process, whereby the organization's membership in identity categories or groups are declared (Brankovic, 2018). This has also important implications in terms of motivation for membership in MOs. Ahrne and Brunsson (2005) thus observe that the inducement-contribution model based on an assessment of the relative costs and benefits of membership is not always sufficient to explain membership in MOs, and that the decision to participate may be connected more closely with identity and a logic of appropriateness than with any calculation of consequences.

### **3.3. The logic of coordination: members as collaborative partners and MOs as structures of inter-organizational coordination**

Inter-organizational collaboration, broadly understood as an intrinsically relational form of collective action based on relational coordination (Bolton et al., 2021) and relational practices (Manning, 2010), is obviously a paramount dimension of MOs. Indeed, beyond the fact that members of MOs often share common organizational features, they are typically depicted as organizations driven by common goals and working together to achieve a common purpose. It is therefore not surprising that MOs themselves have been characterized as a specific form of inter-organizational cooperation (Sanioossian et al., 2022) and that a large number of studies on MOs refer to the literatures on inter-organizational networks (Bor, 2014; Corazza et al., 2019; Dumez & Renou, 2020; Zyzak & Jacobsen, 2020; Helfen, 2022) and inter-organizational collaboration, including studies on coopetition (Berkowitz & Dumez, 2016; Berkowitz, 2018; Azzam & Berkowitz, 2018).

This has also led to a general characterization of MOs as collective action devices (Dumez & Renou, 2020) or governance devices (Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz et al., 2020) for joint decision-making and joint action. However, the notion of collective action or joint action may

be understood in different ways, and it may correspond to a very diverse set of inter-organizational activities. Whereas the logic of representation is more related to the purpose of achieving external influence and managing interactions between members and outside stakeholders, the logic of coordination is more “internal to the organization” (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005) in that it is more about concrete cooperation and regulation among members. This is why in this paper we more specifically draw on the notion of coordination understood as a “deliberate and orderly alignment or adjustment of partners’ actions to achieve jointly determined goals” (Gulati et al., 2012b).

There exists a large array of collective activities distinct from representative functions and less infused by the logic of representation. A typical example of purpose internal to the MO is the purpose of self-regulation when MOs contribute to regulating, controlling, and managing the behaviours of their members (Berkowitz et al., 2022), often by producing “soft laws” under the form of voluntary measures and nonbinding rules such as standards, norms, recommendations, best practices, principles or guidelines (Vifell & Thedvall, 2012; Ahrne et al., 2016a; Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019).

The logic of representation and the logic of coordination are far from being mutually exclusive. For example, trade associations but also a number of civil society MOs (Laurent et al., 2020) typically carry out advocacy activities while simultaneously trying to regulate behaviours and practices of actors in their organizational or societal field. However, some categories of MOs are relatively less concerned with the logic of representation and are characterized by a strong prevalence of the logic of coordination. Typical examples of such MOs are intergovernmental MOs, sport federations, and multi-stakeholder MOs, the latter category even not complying with the logic of representation fundamental cornerstone that relates to member similarity.

Table 1 below summarizes our three-logics model by associating each logic of membership with a specific form of inter-organizational relationship, a specific characterization of member organizations, and a distinct understanding of MOs. We also associate each logic of membership with different broad categories of MOs, which may and often are connected to several logics, but for which the focal logic appears as comparatively relatively salient. Each generic category of MOs is illustrated by a few studies specifically focused on MOs of this category.

**Table 1. The three logics of membership**

| <b>Logic of membership</b>                                                                                     | <b>Logic of service</b>                                                                                                                       | <b>Logic of representation</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Logic of coordination</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Form of inter-organizational relationship</b>                                                               | Market-type (buyer-seller) form between MO members and the MO secretariat                                                                     | Delegative, principal-agent form between MO members and the MO secretariat                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Collaborative form between MO members                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Conceptualization of members</b>                                                                            | Members as clients                                                                                                                            | Members as represented constituents                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Members as collaborative partners                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Conceptualization of MOs</b>                                                                                | MOs as service providers                                                                                                                      | MOs as representative intermediaries                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | MOs as structures of inter-organizational coordination                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Illustrative categories of MOs</b><br>where the logic of membership is comparatively relatively significant | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Business cooperatives (e.g., <i>Azzam &amp; Berkowitz, 2018; Roux &amp; Lecocq, 2022</i>)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trade associations (e.g., <i>Dumez &amp; Renou, 2020; Helfen, 2022; Laviolette et al., 2022</i>)</li> <li>- Civil society MOs (e.g., <i>Bonfils, 2011; Karlberg &amp; Jacobsson, 2015; Laurent et al., 2020; Čada et al., 2022</i>)</li> <li>- International union organizations (e.g., <i>Garaudel, 2020; Hyman &amp; Gumbrell-McCormick, 2020</i>)</li> <li>- University associations (e.g., <i>Brankovic, 2018; Vukasovic &amp; Stensaker, 2018; Zapp et al., 2021; Nicolle, 2021</i>)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sport federations (leagues)</li> <li>- Territorial cluster MOs (e.g., <i>Lupova-Henry et al., 2021; Berkowitz &amp; Bor, 2022; Berkowitz &amp; Gadille, 2022</i>)</li> <li>- Social and health care partnerships (e.g., <i>Leys &amp; Joffre, 2014; Cropper &amp; Bor, 2018; Gimet &amp; Grenier, 2018</i>)</li> <li>- Intergovernmental MOs (e.g., <i>Malcourant et al., 2015; Ahrne et al., 2016a; Peixoto &amp; Temmes, 2019; Vähä-Savo et al., 2019; Berkowitz &amp; Grothe-Hammer, 2021; Hartwell et al., 2023</i>)</li> <li>- Other inter-territorial MOs (e.g., <i>Zyzak &amp; Jacobsen, 2020</i>)</li> <li>- Multi-stakeholder MOs (e.g., <i>Chaudhury et al., 2016; Berkowitz, 2018; Valente &amp; Oliver, 2018; Carmagnac et al., 2022; Corazza et al., 2019; Berkowitz et al., 2020; Saniossian et al., 2022</i>)</li> <li>- Issue-oriented, special-purpose (sectoral) business MOs (e.g., <i>Berkowitz et al., 2017; Megali, 2022; Shiu et al., 2023</i>)</li> </ul> |

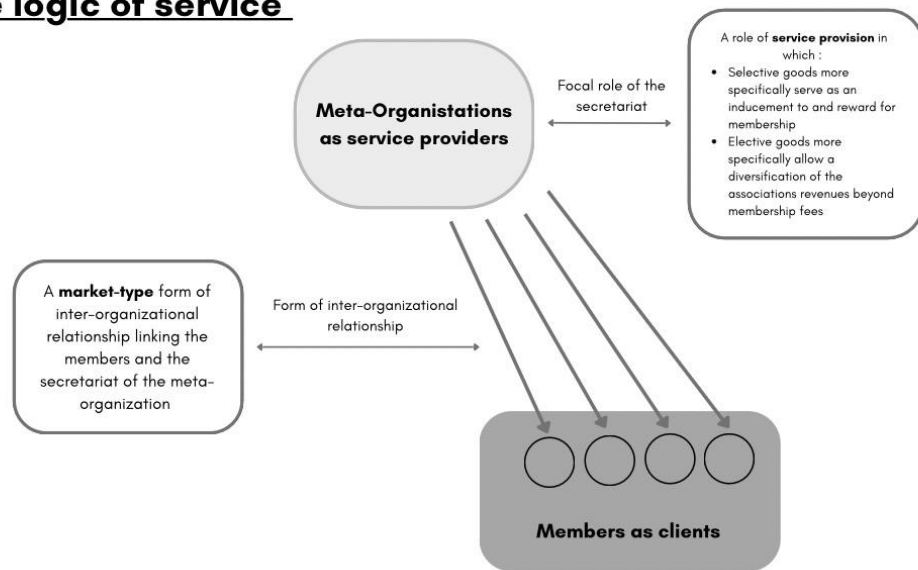
## **IV. Theoretical developments and implications**

In this last part of the paper, we discuss some important theoretical implications of our three-logics model. We begin by providing a synthetic visual representation of the three delineated logics of membership. We next argue that the fruitfulness of our analytical perspective lies in its ability to provide a novel theoretical account of the heterogeneity of MOs and to shed light on core issues of the theory of MOs. We more specifically illustrate the point by considering how the three logics of membership affect differently the role of the secretariat and member organizations in MOs. In continuation, we illustrate how the different logics of membership are frequently linked together in a functional manner, which paves the way for a possible characterization of MOs with respect both to the relative salience of each logic and the way they combine each other.

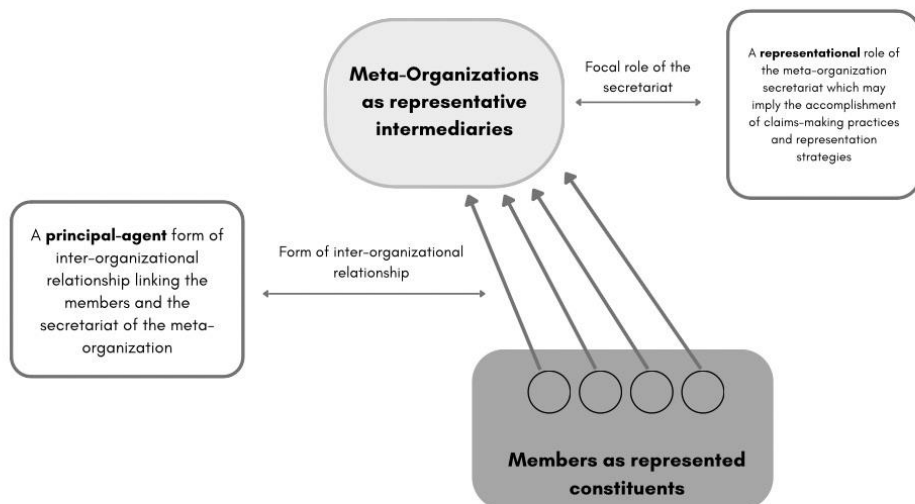
### **4.1. A synthetic depiction of the three logics of membership**

Figures 2, 3, and 4 below provide a visual depiction of each logic of membership. These three figures especially allow to visually contrast the more horizontal form of inter-organizational relationship among members that corresponds to the logic of coordination with both the more vertical and “downward” form (service provision from the MO to its members) that corresponds to the logic of service, and the more vertical and “upward” form (a representational role of the MO based on a process of delegation from member organizations to the MO secretariat) that corresponds to the logic of representation.

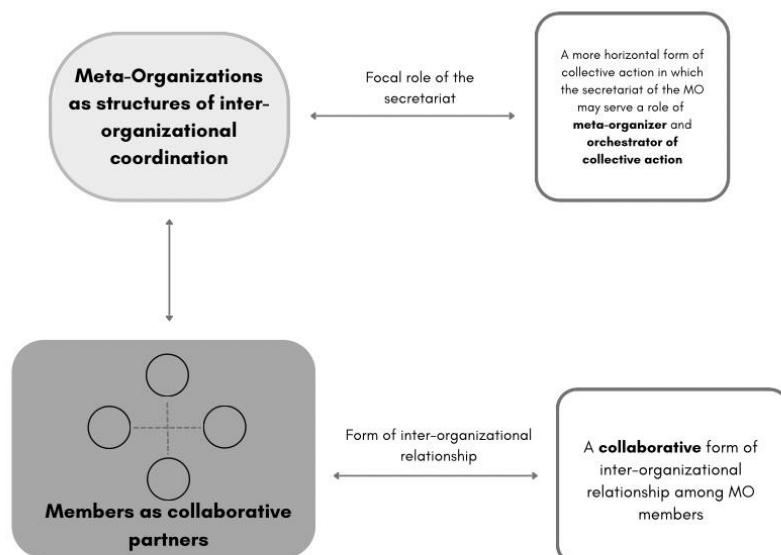
**Figure 2 : The logic of service**



**Figure 3 : The logic of representation**



**Figure 4 : The logic of coordination**



## **4.2. Implications for the theory of MOs**

A first benefit of the three logics model developed in this paper is to help perceive, with regard to the nature of the empirical MOs that are the most frequently investigated by MO scholars, how MO studies are largely centred on the logic of coordination, while the logic of representation tends to be comprehended as one among other by-products of collective action and the logic of service is often neglected. This relative unconcern with the logic of representation in the MO literature may seem paradoxical but an explanation can probably be found in the multiplicity of theoretical frameworks and disciplinary perspectives available to study the empirical categories of MOs that are the most connected with the logic of representation. For instance, the various forms of interest organizations constitute a natural object of investigation in sociological and political science studies, and in more specific areas of literature such as the non-profit literature in the case of civil-society MOs, or industry sectoral research and industrial relations studies in the case of trade associations. In contrast, the MO theoretical framework provides a unique and particularly well-suited theoretical perspective to study the less scrutinized and less institutionalized forms of MOs which, for instance, many multi-stakeholder MOs and many territorial cluster MOs typically are.

Most importantly, the fruitfulness of our analytical framework lies in its ability to shed light on core issues of the theory of MOs. In the following, we first provide a specific illustration which pertains to the relative weight of the logic of coordination and how it impacts the respective roles of the secretariat and member organizations in MOs' activities. We next emphasize how each logic of membership affects differently the role of the secretariat and the nature of its relationship with member organizations.

### ***4.2.1. Logics of membership and the role of members in MOs***

Grothe-Hammer et al. (2022) reflect that MOs and their member organizations are somehow simultaneously internal and external to each other. It could be argued that : 1) the issue of the “proximity” between an MO and its members (if not their oneness to the extent that member organizations as constitutional members not only collectively own but also constitute the MO; Bor, 2014), or of their “distance” as two separate and distinct organizational entities on their own right (and therefore their fundamental exteriority to each other), is also a matter of degree; and 2) this degree is largely contingent upon how the MO is infused with the logic of coordination.

For example, a pure representative MO does not necessarily imply, but at the very least is practically compatible with a low involvement of many members. Different studies thus observe that every interest association has a significant share of passive membership (Behrens,

2018) and that many memberships in trade associations are nominal and involve little real interaction with the association (Bennett & Ramsden, 2007). It is from this perspective very revealing of a certain “degree of exteriority” between some MOs and their members that van Waarden (1992) depicts members of trade associations as their “membership environment” in the same way that trade associations are also facing an “interlocutors environment”. Besides, as pointed out in the literature on civil-society organizations and consistent with the notion that the meta-organizational form can be strongly fostered by an influential third-party (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Brankovic, 2018), there may also be a high degree of proximity between a representative MO and its “interlocutors environment”. For instance, in his study on the European Woomen Lobby (EWL), Karlberg (2019) suggests that the European Commission may be described as the sponsor of the EWL, which is mainly financed and somehow co-opted or institutionalized by the Commission.

This configuration sharply contrasts with situations in which, in order for MOs to be able to accomplish their purpose, they need not just the passive consent of their members but their active commitment (Hyman & Gumbrell-McCormick, 2020). In the MO literature, it has been observed that MOs are dependant for many decisions on the active involvement of members and their willingness to cooperate and contribute their own resource (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Bor & Cropper, 2023). Bor and Cropper (2023) also note that the different types of MO activities differ regarding their requirement for direct participation of member organizations. A specific but important form of member commitment is when members agree to adopt certain types of practices and modify certain aspects of their own internal functioning. This is typically illustrated by the case of the European Union, which has a singular capacity for rule enforcement (Kerwer, 2013), but also by all the MOs that act as standard-setting organizations (Brunsson et al., 2012; Shiu et al., 2023). Such a configuration characterized by a strong need for member commitment tends to reduce even more the hierarchical authority of the secretariat (Hyman & Gumbrell-McCormick, 2020) and, in more general terms, the logic of coordination is probably the most consistent with the common characterization of MOs as heterarchical organizations (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019; Dumez & Renou, 2020) based on a horizontal leadership (Gimet & Grenier, 2018) and a participatory and horizontal model of governance (Berkowitz, 2018). This may be associated in the extreme case with a relatively low “degree of actorhood” (Kerwer, 2013; Ahrne et al., 2016a; Grothe-Hammer, 2019b; Lupova-Henry et al., 2021; Berkowitz et al., 2022) of the MO itself, where the latter is viewed merely as a coordination tool or an arena (Ahrne et al., 2016a) in which the representatives of member organizations act but not the MO itself as an organizational actor on its own right.

#### ***4.2.2. Logics of membership and the role of the secretariat in MOs***

The three logics of membership delineated in this paper have significant implication regarding the role of members in MOs but also, correlatively, regarding their relationship with the secretariat and the role of the secretariat itself, as illustrated in Figures 2, 3, and 4.

The intersecting lines linking members together in Figure 4 suggest that the logic of coordination is the one for which MOs are the most in need of a direct involvement of their member organizations in their activities to achieve the collective goals they are intended to pursue, including by adopting some specific agreed-upon behaviors. However, it may also be associated at the meta-level (Berkowitz et al., 2022; Roux & Lecocq, 2022) with a strong “collective actorhood” (Berkowitz et al., 2022; Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022) and the secretariat itself may have an active role as “meta-organizer” (Gadille et al., 2013) or “orchestrator” (Laviolette et al., 2022) of collective action.

In contrast, the logic of service and the logic of representation are intrinsically conducive to a more central role of the secretariat. The logic of service provides the secretariat with a role of service provider, while the logic of representation provides the secretariat with a representational role and positions it as a representative intermediary. However, the two logics involve a quite different type of relationship between the secretariat and the member organizations.

As suggested by the vertical and upward arrows in Figure 3, the logic of representation involves a collective delegation of representative power from members to the secretariat. This manifests a representative-constituent relationship (Trenz, 2009) that relates holistically the membership base to the secretariat through a delegation process by which the secretariat is granted by the collective of members representational prerogatives and is endowed with representational capacities. In this context, the secretariat plays a representational role that typically involves the accomplishment of representative claims-making practices (Trenz, 2009) and representation strategies (Johansson & Lee, 2014). Of course, the central role of the secretariat does not preclude that some important member organizations may have more internal influence than others in the course of this delegation process (Barnett, 2013; Dumez & Renou, 2020).

In an opposite way, as suggested by the vertical and downward arrows in Figure 2, the logic of service is more centred on the specific needs of each singular member organization. This focus on singular member organizations has contrasting implications. On the one hand, service provision allows a diversification of the MO revenues beyond membership fees and therefore a reduction of the financial dependence on members. Moreover, selective goods serve to

improve members' commitment and provide an incentive for potential members to join. On the other hand, especially when the services provided also include elective goods (i.e., customized, commercial fee-based services to members and non-members alike), too much emphasis on service provision may also challenge the traditional purpose of the MO, thereby inducing a shift away from of its collective and associational identity towards a more business-like identity where members are progressively seen more as clients (Demougin et al., 2019b; Sheldon et al., 2016).

#### **4.3. Articulations between logics of membership: toward a more fine-grained analytical framework**

The previous section has illustrated the fact that distinguishing between the three logics of membership presented in this paper is important because each affects the very nature of MOs and has very different (meta-)organizational implications. Correlatively, insofar as the different logics of membership are not equally salient in all MOs, the fruitfulness of our three-logics model also lies in its ability to provide a novel theoretical account of the heterogeneity of MOs. However, the way logics of membership relate to the theoretical issue of MO diversity is not straightforward.

As previously noted, the three logics of membership are not mutually exclusive, and several logics often coexist in a same MO. For example, the business cooperatives we referred to in Table 1 to illustrate the logic of service is obviously also connected to a form of collaboration and regulation among members, and therefore to the logic of coordination. Moreover, not only several logics may occur together just like in practice MO purposes commonly come in combination (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Berkowitz & Bor, 2018; Berkowitz et al., 2022), but they are also frequently linked together in a functional manner.

The literature on trade associations provides a good illustration of how the logic of representation may logically and practically combine with both the logic of service and the logic of coordination.

On the one hand, the valuable complementarity between the logic of representation and the logic of service in trade associations can be comprehended through the analytical lens of Olson's (1965) collective action problem. Whilst collective activities to achieve representational influence is the *raison d'être* of almost all trade associations and is a key part of the constitutional mission and democratic structure of almost all associations (Bennett, 2000), this type of collective action constitutes primarily a collective good that is non-exclusive and from which both members and non-members can benefit (Traxler, 2000; Brandl & Lehr, 2019; Gooberman et al., 2020). The reliance on collective goods and the defence of collective

interests therefore leaves trade associations vulnerable to free riding in that individual firms can take advantage of interest representation without being a member and paying membership fees (Paoletti et al., 2011; Gooberman et al., 2018). One way for trade associations to overcome the collective action problem and to mitigate the effects of free riding, that challenge both their financial resources and their representativeness (Paoletti et al., 2011), is through the provision of selective incentives, i.e., services that relate to individual rather than collective interests (Gooberman et al., 2018) and make membership attractive for new members (Gooberman et al., 2020). These selective incentives are thus private goods (Brandl & Lehr, 2019) that take the forms of selective goods serving as an inducement to and reward for membership (Paoletti et al., 2011), and help disconnect member recruitment processes from interest representation (Traxler, 2000).

On the other hand, a crucial form of articulation between the logic of representation and the logic of coordination in trade associations directly derives from their role as intermediaries, and more specifically as collective bargaining actors. Historically, participation within bargaining structures has enabled trade associations to act as interlocutors (Demougin et al., 2019a), and collective bargaining was often regarded as their quintessential activity (Gooberman et al., 2020). However, trade associations as key actors within the system of multi-employer bargaining do not only have to represent members' interests in negotiations, in addition they need to commit members to the outcomes of negotiations (Behrens, 2018). In other words, trade associations must structure the relation to their members in order to be a credible and reliable partner in consultations and negotiations with interlocutors, and in particular they have to ensure that their members will observe and honour the agreements made with other parties (van Waarden, 1992).

Beyond the illustrative case of trade associations, it is important to note that the two forms of interactions between logics of membership mentioned above can also be observed in many other organizational or inter-organizational contexts. For example, the first form of interaction relates to a more general issue of incentives in collective action organizations that concerns a much larger array of organizations (Knoke, 1988; Griffin et al., 2017). In the same vein, the second form of interaction could also be illustrated by the fact that the politics of inter-regionalism and inter-regional trade negotiations between regional organizations necessarily rest and depend on some form of internal coordination within each regional group of countries (Doidge, 2007; da Conceição-Heldt & Meunier, 2017; Meissner, 2019).

In more general terms, it appears from this small set of examples that, while each logic of membership has specific and important organizational implications on its own, the

combinatorial impacts of logics of membership and their mutual interactions also deserve investigations. The relative salience of each logic and the way they combine each other are important regarding how logics of membership collectively impacts the internal functioning of MOs, but possibly also regarding how the widely diverse spectrum of MOs might relate to different and distinct patterns of logics of memberships. It follows that a promising avenue for future research consists in considering more thoroughly the various forms of interactions between logics of membership. In what precedes, we only considered how the logic of representation interacts with the logic of service and the logic of coordination, but one might also consider the possibility of significant interactions between the logic of service and the logic of coordination. Moreover, we illustrated interactions between logics of membership only in a bilateral manner. A next step would be to scrutinize more complex forms of interactions involving all three logics of membership, with the aim of delineating typical patterns of logics of membership. Hopefully, this could pave the way for a more fine-grained and comprehensive analytical framework linking these typical patterns with distinct organizational features of MOs.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this paper was to develop and present a new analytical tool aiming at assessing the heterogeneity of MOs and at providing a novel theoretical account of variations among them. This framework is based on the characterization of three fundamental logics of membership, which relate to the fundamental nature of the inter-organizational relationship that connects a member organization to an MO. One main underlying argument is that the fruitfulness of our three-logics model lies in its ability to provide a novel theoretical account of the heterogeneity of MOs, but also its ability to shed light on core issues of the theory of MOs. While we previously illustrated this analytical potential by considering how logics of membership affect differently the role of the secretariat and of member organizations, it would be also interesting to consider how the three logics of membership relate to other important dimensions of MOs. For example, we emphasized that the logic of coordination necessarily requires more direct participation from members than the logic of representation, but the logic of service may also directly impact the pattern of resourcing (Bor & Cropper, 2023) of MOs, especially when associated with the provision of commercial services, along with their degree of attractiveness to actual and potential members and the pattern of (asymmetrical) interdependence (Garaudel, 2020) between an MO and its members.

At a higher level of theoretical abstraction, it would be also highly interesting to examine how logics of membership relate to fundamental organizational features of MOs such as their

degree of organizationality and of organizational actorhood. More specifically, a promising line of investigation lies in the question of whether the logic of representation, in that it is more associated with a vertical relationship between members and the MO secretariat in contrast of the logic of coordination which is more associated with a set of horizontal relationships between members, has a more intrinsic connection with the entitative organizationality of MOs than their structural organizationality. While the structural organizationality of a social collective relates to its degree of use of the five organizational elements emphasized within the partial organization framework, its entitative organizationality relates more specifically, beyond the presence of interconnected processes of decision-making (Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022), to its degrees of actorhood and collective identity that may constitute this social collective as an externally recognized actor (Berkowitz & Gadille, 2022). From this perspective, and in view of the fact that the logic of representation as defined in this paper inherently puts the secretariat of an MO in a position to act and speak in the name of the collective of members and therefore of the meta-organizational entity itself, we can suggest that the logic of representation all the more contribute to constitute the secretariat as the main carrier of MO actorhood in the same way that managers may be viewed as “key carriers of organizational actorhood” in individual-based organizations (Bromley & Sharkey, 2017; Halgin et al., 2018).

Another fruitful advancement of our three-logics perspective would consist in considering how the importance and the comparative salience of each logic tend to evolve over time. For example, in the same way that the process of formalization of MOs often emerges from a more informal set of inter-organizational relationships (Saniossian et al., 2022), one may suggest that, at the time of their creation, numerous MOs are initially intended to be pure coordination platforms within the framework of an inter-organizational collaborative project, with therefore a strong prevalence of the logic of coordination. It would therefore be of high interest to examine how, why and under what conditions the logic of service and the logic of representation can develop and gain traction from this starting point. Ultimately, this could also be conducive to a better understanding of the long-term process of “institutionalization” through which, beyond their initial purpose and formation conditions, pure coordinating structures can progressively assert their organizational actorhood and become autonomous organizational actors on their own right.

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