

The Role of Experts in the European Union's Research Policy

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Abstract

This research analyzes the role of experts in the European Union's policy-making process. Focusing on the field of research policy, this study seeks to probe how expert participation in the Open Method of Coordination informs policy decisions. The paper reports on an analysis of the expert group in the European Internationalization Strategy in Science and Technology. Our analysis reveals the dynamics of expert participation at the micro level, as it identifies who these experts are, how they are appointed, and in what ways expert knowledge gets used in policy making.

KEY WORDS: governance, regional governance, high-tech, policy learning, expertise, research policy, science and technology policy, Open Method of Coordination, EU

Introduction

Expertise has taken a central role in the conceptualization and implementation of a broad range of public policies. An extensive multidisciplinary literature has documented, analyzed, and critiqued this trend (e.g., Hilgartner, 2000; Maasen & Weingart, 2005; Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007). The European Union (EU) is a vast laboratory for the use of experts in policy making: there were 1,237 actively operating expert groups in 2007, initiated by the European Commission (EC) and composed of representatives from the member states (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011). Efforts at enlisting experts in policy making relate in part to the aim of enhancing participation and public dialogue in EU policy making (Wallace, Pollack, & Young, 2010).

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC), introduced in 2000, is an approach to policy development that affords experts a central role. The OMC works through experts from member states evaluating national policy performance according to commonly agreed objectives and indicators. This method uses benchmarking, action plans, and voluntary exchange of best practices, potentially leading to changes in policies at the national and European level. Kerber and Eckardt (2007) argue that OMC is a tool for spreading new knowledge concerning appropriate public policies.

The OMC has been described as an example of liberal governance (Haahr, 2004), where opportunities exist for expert participation in the policy process. Such opportunities may be restrained when government support is provided only for politically acceptable ideas. OMC presents a mechanism for government to steer policy making from a distance. Wallace (2001) argues that the OMC entails a "partial delegation of power" where governments are primarily relying on each other to act as mutually supporting agents, rather than handing over policy-shaping powers to an independent institution. Others note that OMC leads toward

Europeanization through overarching governance structures and practices that endorse collectively built norms and ideas (e.g., Morano-Foadi, 2008; Olsen, 2002; Radaelli, 2003). Several researchers conceptualize OMC as a new valuable mode of governance (Eberlein & Kerwer, 2004; Kaiser & Prange, 2004), where decentralized and participatory rule making based on policy learning may contribute to more effective, transparent, and democratic governance in the EU.

The OMC has been applied to research policy since the end of 2003. Coordinated research policy has become a central element in the EU's aspiration to become "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy," as stated in the Lisbon Strategy (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm). Some see the OMC as a potentially useful approach for policy learning in this area (McGuinness & O'Carroll, 2010; van Vught, 2010). Efforts to align national policies in a flexible political space with procedures of a political nature are arguably its greatest novelty (Borrás & Greve, 2004). The search for more effective policies through a process of trial and error, combining application with analysis, and focusing on policy learning are its strongest potential contributions (Dill & van Vught, 2010). Critics point to the lack of tangible results at the national level (de Elera, 2006; Shaw & Laffan, 2007). They also argue that the OMC has been used as a tool to streamline national initiatives as opposed to exploring a range of policy alternatives (Borrás & Greve, 2004; Room, 2005). The OMC is expected to serve diverse interests with respect to speed and nature of European integration and it has been presented as a solution to a number of problems (Gornitzka, 2007), although empirical evidence on its workings is still limited.

This paper analyzes the role of experts in the OMC, focusing on the field of research policy and particularly the European Internationalization Strategy in Science and Technology (S&T). This study seeks to probe how expert knowledge contributes to European research policy processes addressing the following questions: who are considered to be the experts in the OMC Internationalization of Science and Technology working group? In what ways do experts inform policy decisions? How does OMC process contribute to the European cooperation? The paper first lays out the conceptual framework that grounds the analysis. Then it discusses the "Internationalization of S&T" case study, pointing out the mechanisms used by experts for collecting information and forming their opinions. In the findings sections, the profile of experts is discussed, followed by the analysis of expert contributions toward enhancing uniformity in their recommendations. The paper ends with a discussion of the findings.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical debate around defining expertise has focused on distinctive approaches through which expert knowledge is gained and on the ways expertise has been used in the policy processes. Two main views on the meaning of expertise could be categorized as *the evidence-based approach* and *the value-based approach* (see Table 1). These categories are presented to illustrate two distinct perspectives, which might play out in a more diverse ways in reality.

The evidence-based approach highlights the importance of scientific methods in gaining objective knowledge that legitimizes experts (Boswell, 2009; Chubin &

Table 1. Comparison of Theoretical Approaches

Main Concepts	Evidence-Based Approach	Value-Based Approach
Experts	Qualified individuals possessing recognized expertise, importance of educational credentials	Individuals with shared professional beliefs and values (e.g., epistemic communities, advocacy coalitions)
Expert knowledge	Knowledge is objective, evidence-based, gained through scientific methods	Knowledge is socially constructed and shaped by expert interactions
Grounding of expertise	People with scientific authority (e.g., scientists, government units)	People with legitimizing authority (e.g., scientists, government officials, societal actors)
Instrumental use of knowledge (create effective policies)	Input based on measurable evidence	Input based on negotiation and consensus
Conceptual use of knowledge (contribute by providing ideas and concepts)	Presenting evidence-based input	Providing ideas and concepts
Political use of knowledge (contribute to the legitimacy of the organization or decisions)	Scientific evidence is used selectively and strategically to support already made decisions	Participation of diverse stakeholder groups provides foundation for legitimacy
Learning use of knowledge (accumulate knowledge, build individual expertise)	Through collection of scientific data	Through social interaction where ideas and experiences get shared

Hackett, 1990; MacRae & Whittington, 1997). Expert knowledge is defined as systematic, scientific, and technical knowledge, emphasizing the application of rigorous methodologies (Hellström, 2000). Some scholars see expertise as grounded strictly on academic knowledge, involving sound theoretical and conceptual coherence and appropriate educational credentials (Boswell, 2009). Experts, in this view, are scientists or researchers that are able to provide information and analysis in an empirically rigorous way. Others suggest a broader view where academic knowledge intersects with the information gained through professional practices. For example, Weible (2008) defines expertise as a knowledge generated by professional, scientific, and technical methods of inquiry. Nutley and colleagues (2007) note that knowledge gathered from a range of sources including research and evaluation studies, information from stakeholders, and professional knowledge from experts could be all regarded as valid evidence for evidence-based practices and expertise.

The value-based view focuses on the social interactions in knowledge exchange. The value-based view suggests that knowledge is socially constructed and is a product of human interpretations shaped by the interactions of knowledge, environmental conditions, and political actions. It concentrates on knowledge sharing, emphasizing value systems, consensual knowledge, and personal interpretations of scientific data in shaping expert knowledge (e.g., Haas, 1992; Sabatier, 1986, 1988). Shared beliefs and values inform the advice offered by experts and such advice might outweigh preexisting political preferences of high-level policy makers. The expert's position is grounded in the authority to validate knowledge. Therefore, experts come from a variety of occupations, including not only scientists and other credentialed researchers but also a broader range of societal actors and government officials. Nutley and colleagues (2007) claim that knowledge has a major role in shaping values not only for policy makers but participating experts themselves and therefore should not be regarded as a purely technical role.

Several authors within the value-based framework have theorized about how ideas get picked up and endorsed by experts. Sabatier (1986) argues that a variety of state and non-state actors form advocacy coalitions based on the same belief system. Membership in these coalitions is defined by two main criteria: knowledge and interaction. Knowledge is used to advance one's belief systems through the implementation of public policies. Haas (1992) articulated the epistemic communities framework. He sees such communities as "network[s] of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area" (p. 3). In his view, epistemic communities share specific understandings, values, and beliefs, although members might come from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds or professional settings. Members have the power of validating knowledge in the domain of their expertise.

Epistemic communities play an important role in the generation and articulation of new ideas, helping frame policy decisions and encouraging the search for solutions. Similar worldviews and experiences—the core belief systems according to Sabatier—help to form epistemic communities among experts. Working in a group allows establishing connections with others who share the same values, ultimately providing opportunities for promoting specific ideas and practices for policy making. Research confirms that knowledge-based experts play a crucial role in articulating complex problems, helping states to identify their interests, proposing specific policy recommendations, and identifying salient points for debate and negotiation (Haas, 1992; Schot & Schipper, 2011). Marier (2008) notes that not only can epistemic communities influence the selection of specific topics for public policies, which may become embedded within institutions over time, but they can nurture learning innovations that can alter policy outcomes in the future.

Epistemic communities generate consensual ideas concerning public policy. They do not necessarily generate "truth" but rather articulate public concerns. That problematizes the effectiveness of consensual knowledge when it comes to implementation of expert advice. Researchers have pointed to some obstacles to epistemic communities to exert expert influence. First, due to embedded political interests and preexisting institutional arrangements, political institutions do not easily welcome new ideas provided by expert communities (Zito, 2001). Second, when a policy problem is highly technical, experts tend to dominate the policy process, making it difficult for political actors to get involved and endorse certain policy ideas (Peters, 2005). Dunlop (2009) notes that the concept of epistemic communities fails to take account of the possible forms of learning dynamics that arise between epistemic communities and decision makers. Control over knowledge is presented as something that epistemic communities have and decision makers do not have, overlooking the nuances of such mutually beneficial relationships.

In the context of EU, an expert group is seen as a consultative entity composed of external experts that advise the EC in the preparation of legislative proposals, policy initiatives, but also as engaging in monitoring, coordinating, and cooperating with the member states (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011). Gornitzka and Sverdrup identify three distinct groups of experts in EU policy making: scientists, government officials, and societal actors, that is, business associations, non-governmental organizations, industries, unions and employers' associations, practitioners, and

consumers. Involving scientists in the expert groups allows the government to present itself as neutral, grounding its actions in updated and specialized knowledge-based information. National government representatives are invited to participate in the decision-making process in order to increase information flows and to promote administrative integration. The involvement of societal actors increases the authority and legitimacy of government by mediating different political forces coming from diverse interest groups. In addition, it allows mediating economic and corporate interests and providing them access to the decisions. As such, the EU expert groups cannot be regarded merely as a technical or scientific problem-solving instrument, but also as a system for resolving political and inter-institutional conflicts, as well as building legitimacy for EU policy making.

Expert knowledge gets used in policy making for several purposes. Weible (2008) identifies three practices related to how expert-based information gets used in the policy-making process. He distinguishes between instrumental, political, and learning practices. The *instrumental* use occurs when expert-based information directly affects policy making. This occurs in problem-solving situations where rational decisions need to be made. In the evidence-based approach, decisions would be made based on measurable evidence and indicators. In the value-based approach, decisions are made based on negotiations and consensus. Boswell (2009) adds that instrumental use of expert knowledge is likely to occur where an organization perceives itself to be under pressure to adjust to societal interventions.

In a similar manner, Amara, Ouimet, and Landry (2004) and Beyer (1997) note that in cases where actors who are involved in the decision-making process are not able to guide the process in the rational, instrumental way, knowledge gets used *conceptually*. Conceptual use involves using research results for general enlightenment, where results influence actions indirectly (Beyer, 1997). Conceptual use is the predominant mechanism of knowledge use in the value-based approach, but evidence-based information clearly provides additional basis for forming concepts and ideas that may inform decisions.

The *political* use of expertise is practiced when decision makers rely selectively and strategically on expert-based information to legitimize previously made policy decisions. Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980) note that decision makers use knowledge for substantive and political purposes to negotiate political constraints, organizational requirements, and individual expectations. Boswell (2009) argues that this type of knowledge use is likely to be a feature of political organizations, which derive support from multiple actors in an unstable environment and where the policy area is considered to require a high degree of expertise in taking well-grounded decisions. This type of knowledge use is characteristic of the evidence-based approach.

The *learning* practices involve the accumulation of information where change happens slowly and information indirectly affects policy by gradually altering decision makers' beliefs concerning preferred solutions. The argument is that a single research study or report rarely has a significant impact on the beliefs of political actors (Weible, 2008). Knowledge affects policy indirectly by accumulating and gradually altering the belief systems of the actors involved in the policy process. Learning practices are observed during conflicts, when they help to mobilize allies and to argue with opponents. Arguments are usually made by using scientific

evidence in the case of the evidence-based approach. In the value-based approach emphasis is placed on the ideas and experiences shared through social interaction.

Overall, both approaches on expert knowledge provide useful insights to unpack experts' role in policy making. As the evidence-based approach traces the ways expert knowledge is constructed, the value-based view focuses on the social conditions that shape policy ideas and advise practices. Both views are taken into account below in the analysis.

Methods

In research policy, the implementation of the OMC process was assigned to the Comité de la recherche scientifique et technique (CREST; EU's Scientific and Technical Research Committee). The CREST (now European Research Area Committee [ERAC]) serves as a permanent advisory committee to the EU composed of country representatives. Each country during its presidency at CREST has an opportunity to propose topics for further discussions by forming an OMC expert group. To probe how experts contribute to policy process in the EU's research policy, this study examines the "Internationalization of S&T" policy initiative that was suggested in 2007 during the German presidency.

There are several reasons that make scientific research collaboration an interesting case. Scientific knowledge production in Europe is historically embedded in the nation state aiming for enhanced national competitiveness (Gornitzka, 2009). The "Internationalization of S&T" OMC group was the first European-level initiative that aimed at coordinating mutual research collaboration with the countries outside of Europe, that is, third countries. This policy area contains complex and diverse national interests, making the dynamics and power hierarchies among experts especially apparent. In addition, the review of progress toward Lisbon Strategy (2005) had been identified as a crucial need to strengthen horizontal policy coordination among the member states, which set the OMC mechanism into a center stage to produce results. The Seventh Framework Programme that started in January of 2007 set the transnational cooperation, collaborative projects, and networks in the forefront of the European research policy. The Framework Programme served as a trigger for enhancing the need to learn about the various national research collaboration initiatives, best practices, and country-specific challenges that would make the impact of expert contributions especially timely. The time frame between the expert group meetings—seven meetings were held in 2007—and final policy recommendations—in 2009—provides an opportunity to analyze the impact of those recommendations.

This study employs the analysis of relevant policy documents as well as interviews with country experts conducted in the spring of 2011. A content analysis (Weber, 1996) of the OMC expert meeting reports and country-specific reports as examples of productive research cooperation initiatives was conducted first. Such information is crucial in order to better understand and analyze the contribution of experts and mechanisms used to foster policy ideas. This analysis allowed creating a profile of the "expert" typically involved in the EU level policy process.

The following step involved interviews with experts participating in the OMC International S&T policy initiative. All representatives from the EC Directorate

General Research (N = 5) and experts from 21 EU member countries (N = 40) that are listed in the report on the Internationalization of S&T as experts were contacted. The final group of interviewees consisted of ten country representatives who have been involved in the expert group meetings and two EC representatives. Throughout this study, in-depth interviews were used to reconstruct the role of experts in informing decision-making processes and clarifying knowledge on how experts participate in the policy design and coordination in the EU. Data analysis techniques involved determining categorical themes via open coding, establishing patterns through axial coding and selective coding, and developing generalizations from the information provided through the interviews (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

As noted previously, the topic of international research collaboration was regarded as important and was selected for further extensive expert discussions for several reasons. In addition to strengthening overall policy coordination among member states, it helped the EC gather information for developing a common European Framework for International R&D cooperation. The information and advice from experts was important for the EC to gain firsthand knowledge concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the member states with regard to research cooperation. Moreover, such input allowed the Commission to learn about the overall perspectives on European-level research coordination. Furthermore, Germany and Austria were having a national debate concerning the issues with the objective of developing a national strategy for internationalization of research. Therefore, the topic was especially timely to feed relevant information into several national policy discussions as well.

Germany took the leading role with the input from the EC¹ in order to specify the main responsibilities of the group. According to the mandate, the aim of the group was to define common objectives and priorities of the member states toward third countries, to monitor implementation of coordinated internationalization activities of the member states and the EC, and to propose actions to the member states and the EC (EU CREST Conclusions 1207/07).

To obtain relevant information and collect data of the best practices, several questionnaires were sent out to all European countries as well as the associated countries: Turkey, Iceland, Israel, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. The questionnaires serve as an important tool for experts to collect information and form the foundation for further discussions and exchange of ideas. The content of the first questionnaire touches upon information on the practices and policy tools of scientific research cooperation in the member states asking detailed questions concerning research mobility, national funding mechanisms, government strategies for research collaboration, impact of the Framework Programme to the enhancement of research collaboration with third countries, examples of best practices, and explanation of why these practices are perceived to be helpful. The second round of questionnaires, sent out in 2008, asked specific information on government strategies and examples of countries identified as potential European-level research partners such as Brazil, India, Russia, and China.

Country experts were involved in designing the questionnaires and had the opportunity to include questions relevant to them. The collected information was composed into a final report that includes best practices and recommendations to

the national policy makers and the EC. The final report² was distributed to all the member states for dissemination of information.

The interviews revealed that the expert group in internationalization had a high participation rate and relatively long existence. Twenty countries were represented out of 38 member states and associated countries of the EU. The significance of creating a first-time European-level discussion on research collaboration and the efficiency of the group to produce results led to the extension of the group existence for 2 years as the traditional lifetime of the OMC is usually 1 year. Several in-depth reports were produced containing country-specific information and examples of good practices on international collaboration with the third countries that were especially useful to the EC. Finally, the group was able not only to influence the process of developing the European-level internationalization strategy through policy recommendations but also to have some indirect influence on the policy design in national settings.

Findings

Building an Epistemic Community

According to the value-based approach, epistemic communities have the opportunity to frame ideas and validate knowledge based on similar policy beliefs. It is useful to examine what features provide the grounding for creating an epistemic community. It was apparent that shared belief among the working group experts on the importance of coordinated research policy provided a starting point for productive participation. The invitation to participate was sent out to all of the member states, but only those countries that saw value in participating remained actively involved throughout the cycle. The core group of active members clearly shared the common belief that international research cooperation with third countries is important and useful to the member states and regional coordination would enhance the benefits of such cooperation. Similar beliefs and experiences in the area reportedly made the group dynamics cooperative: "There was no divergence between us. It was very soft and very easy going group."

Another feature in common was the fact that people were selected and nominated by their governments providing them with an equal starting point for recognized expertise. Being a government-recognized expert is a particular feature that all experts had in common. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that the informational foundation of the Commission is strongly biased toward officials from national governments as opposed to independent scientists or societal actors (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011). Another shared feature was related to the relevant practical experience that participants possessed. Typically, Ministry officials with professional experience in internationalization and European-level research policy were identified as experts and participated in the OMC working group.

Six out of ten informants mentioned professional experience as an important factor for nomination. The experience had been usually gained through their professional careers, typically in national Ministries dealing with the education policy or R&D policy. One expert worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and another at the Ministry of Economic Affairs. These people had developed contacts

among national stakeholders over the years and were familiar with the current situation and history of the topic. The background of one informant is illustrative: "I have extensive knowledge of scientific and technological policy of OECD countries and international cooperation." Most experts stated that their previous experience with European-level policy issues, usually in Brussels, had been an important factor in the selection process. For example, one informant worked at the department within the Ministry involved in the EU research policies, and had participated in the CREST meetings before. The person had previous knowledge on CREST working routines and was thus seen to be the best representative of the country at those CREST Committee meetings. Another expert had built his professional expertise in the area of research policy by first working with international cooperation issues in his home country and then with EC for several years. That knowledge was seen as crucial when selecting representatives for the CREST OMC group.

Academic background and research-based expertise, and features emphasized in evidence-based approach, in areas linked to research policy, seemed to be less important than policy-relevant practical experience. It was mentioned only a few times when explaining how one got involved in policy development related to research and innovation: "I have a background in policy coordination. I was studying and doing research in governance and innovation policy. And I was organizing a workshop on policy coordination in S&T cooperation."

Research shows that government representatives often evoke various preferences, interests, roles, and identities due to their multiple institutional affiliations (Egeberg, Schaefer, & Trondal, 2003; Schot & Schipper, 2011). Public officials tend to represent blends of political loyalty versus professional autonomy (Gornitzka, 2003). By attending different institutions at different levels of governance, officials learn to live with diversity and partially conflicting interests and loyalties. Involvement in the EU committees imposes additional obligations to public officials. They are exposed to new agendas and actors and are expected to look for common solutions, as is the case with the OMC. Participants are expected to behave more like independent experts as opposed to promote their national interests. The results indicated that the non-binding, informal, and voluntary nature of the OMC—outcomes involve voluntary policy recommendations—helped with participants identifying themselves as independent experts. Several mentioned that they were talking from their individual experience and not representing specific national interests. As an informant recalls:

The different [country-specific] interest did not really come out. . . . They always point out that they speak on behalf of themselves and not really as a country. This is kind of [an] informal discussion and therefore the interests are not really visible, country interests are not really visible in such working groups.

Several informants stressed the benefit and value of establishing those professional connections.

It created networks of national representatives and in that respect, I think, the OMC process was good.

We have a good group of people who share common interests and are ready to some extent to contribute to debates or at least to take some value out of this, to create some impact for themselves.

[P]eople that are in [the expert group], are the people that work in international cooperation. So this is very good. One of the good things about this group was . . . this opportunity to meet each other and to discuss common problems, and to decide how to move forward or how to plan a cooperation.

Overall, the OMC process seemed to serve as a tool for facilitating the formation of epistemic communities. The process investigated in this working group in particular was built around identifying and bringing together people with shared experiences and specialized knowledge. Our research revealed the important role played by the government apparatus in creating those communities. The initiative to form OMC groups comes from the EC and is supported by the national governments, determining the composition of the groups. Nominations made by the national governments afford legitimacy to participants. The experts themselves through the knowledge exchange in the area recognize professional benefits to community building. This shared knowledge contributes to strengthening professional beliefs and also provides a network of contacts when needed. The following section examines in more detail the ways experts participate in the group, providing evidence on the use of expert knowledge in the policy processes.

Expert Contributions

Experts grounded their work on integrating evidence-based expertise through the empirical work of the OMC group and also value-based expertise. The empirical work was conducted through survey methodology described previously. The initial information was collected through questionnaires that were sent to all of the EU member countries and associated countries to provide an equal opportunity for each country to participate. Published academic research was used rarely, only when background reports were composed on Russia, China, India, and Brazil. Academic research was generally seen as too theoretical for this type of discussion and therefore not useful. Expert contributions in the process included collecting information on policy approaches on internationalization of research and innovation, identifying and analyzing best practices, examining proactive internationalization strategies among member countries, and developing scenarios for the future. Ideas got shaped through participants' input, discussion, and synthesis of information collected during face-to-face meetings. Through discussions when experts would share ideas and knowledge, participants agreed on certain positions, which helped to shape their policy beliefs.

There was considerable variety in individual involvement in the expert group. Not all country representatives listed as experts in the working group played an active role. The level of participation was related to the countries' interest and experts' previous experience in internationalization. The most active participants were those seeking to establish a common framework in research cooperation with third countries to avoid duplication and possible waste of resources by approaching the countries individually. One representative noted that the main goal for participation was to benchmark country-specific activities and policies, comparing with what others are doing in the area. Two noted that their contribution was marginal as they were primarily supporting another expert from their country.

The most noteworthy outcome of the work of the expert group was related to the instrumental use of knowledge. Experts' contributions were used to trigger orga-

nizational change at the European level. Namely, as a result of the group work, and as one of its main recommendations, the need to form a European advisory body by the member states with political power to better coordinate research cooperation was recognized. This policy idea was adopted and led directly to the formation of the Strategic Forum of International Cooperation in S&T in 2008. The Forum is currently composed of high-level political representatives of the member states and the EC. It aims at facilitating further development, implementation, and monitoring of the international dimension of the European Research Area for joint research initiatives with partners outside Europe. One interviewee explains:

We developed [a] new Strategic Forum on International collaboration . . . this actually was one of the recommendations of the first cycle of the working group. And even the terms—Strategic Forum for International Collaboration was a term which was born through this OMC working group.

In some cases, there were indications of the political use of the information when evidence-based knowledge was used to match political decisions and negotiate government expectations. Expert endorsement added more weight to the policy choices, according to informants. For example, an interviewee noted that a political decision to open bilateral cooperation with India was corroborated by information arising from the expert consultations in the OMC group, which validated that course of action.

The conceptual use of expert advice was observed when ideas gained through the group work were used to influence policy change at the national level. For example, two experts report on disseminating ideas picked up from the OMC discussions, resulting in actual policy changes. One mentioned the establishment of a Research Council focusing on supporting joint research programs among scientists, a practice apparently widely used in the EU. Another indicated crafting a national internationalization strategy for research cooperation where knowledge from the expert group was used.

Many experts referred to the situations where the expert group was seen as very useful from a professional point of view, but dissemination did not result with any visible changes in domestic policy making. Information was forwarded to the decision makers within their Ministries and could potentially influence gradual change of policies in the future. The following quotes, expressed by experts, illustrate the frequent challenges that experts face.

I couldn't influence in any way what was going on. I hoped that the Ministry will take into account the work done to consider some good or well structured cooperation.

The challenges are related to the big question what's happening with the results from this OMC because there is no guarantee actually, that it will be taken up by the highest policy level.

I'm not the person, I'm not a political person, I'm only an expert, I can only suggest ideas. It depends on politicians to implement or not.

Overall, three main findings arise related to the contributions of experts in the working group. The most visible contribution involves the instrumental use of expert knowledge where a European-level organizational change—the formation of the Strategic Forum—has occurred as a result of the expert group's work. However,

the more common approach to knowledge use is more nuanced, where expert knowledge, ideas, and concepts enter the policy process more indirectly. In some cases, expert contributions might involve the political use of knowledge where mutually generated ideas support or foster the decisions about to be made at the national level. Sometimes, participants recognized great personal learning experiences but witnessed indirect or minimal influence on political decisions.

Enhancing European Cooperation

Participation in the OMC exercises provides experts with a position to shape and enhance European-level policy directions, in this case for research cooperation. A country representative indicated a tendency of the ideas that group members have agreed upon to spread and influence policy trends in the EU member states.

Once they [topics, recommendations] are accepted, they are really widely accepted by quite a number of member states. So, and those members who contribute to these discussions do really have an interest in it, interest to learn and interest to share [their] experience.

An important role in enhancing the European-level cooperation agenda is played by the EC representatives that are typically included in the expert groups. They are usually participating as observers and provide support only when the group members require additional information. However, by participating in the group, the EC representatives have firsthand access to ideas and information circulated among country experts. The EC representatives regarded that information as most useful for testing relevant policy ideas and setting the stage for future actions. The various perspectives provided by the experts help EC representatives to learn what would be the shared areas of interest and what areas might create tensions. These shared perspectives help the EC in preparing the groundwork for future high-level political negotiations and joint strategies. An EC informant noted:

For the Commission it was very interesting and we learned a lot [about] how member states can . . . act together in this area. This knowledge we also used in the work . . . when we set up the Strategic Forum for international cooperation. . . . We knew then already how member states felt to a certain extent about areas where they can work together, and where they want to work together, or barriers for coordination in S&T processes.

Our data indicated that those countries that have the most to gain advance the research cooperation agenda. The representatives of the most powerful Western countries have a notable tendency to set the agenda and dominate the discussions, for example, Germany, France, Italy, Austria, Norway. This view was expressed by the experts from newer member states and from the older EU countries alike. Their considerable experience in internationalization, examples of best practices, and availability of significant resources in implementing proposed initiatives were seen as the driving forces of the working group. The participants from countries that recently joined the EU noted that those meetings were a truly useful learning experience, but they also expressed their regret for not being able to fully embrace all ideas because of the limited resources.

The main problem is when you have to decide on joint activities. This is quite difficult because there are countries that have resources and they can do a lot of things that other countries cannot do because they don't have resources, human resources or financial resources. And in this situation, you as a country, you don't feel very comfortable in this position and so sometimes you have to decide and to vote. And so this is not a very nice position.

These country representatives viewed these suggestions made by the more influential countries as potentially valuable, but clearly indicated that the implementation of those ideas in their countries will not be possible due to limited resources. In these cases, the exchange of information was seen as the primary and most useful outcome of the process.

As illustrated previously, informants frequently noted that it was easy to agree on issues, mainly because of the non-binding nature of the decisions and also because of the shared beliefs and common understanding of the issues discussed. The nature of the OMC, such as voluntary recommendations, prevents any political bargaining that could have been apparent otherwise. In a few cases, experts agreed on conclusions, knowing that those would not work well in their countries. The reports that experts agreed upon were disseminated to all of the member states, describing the drivers, obstacles, priorities, and policy objectives for international research cooperation. This information could enter policy discussions indirectly in all member states, providing local policy makers with interpretations of what practices are seen useful. By wide dissemination of policy ideas, the group clearly aimed toward a coordinated policy approach based on shared and validated knowledge grounded in the expertise of country representatives as well as the EC delegates. Therefore, the OMC groups could be seen as a potential channel for policy coordination in Europe.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has explored the dynamics of the expert group in the European Internationalization Strategy in Science and Technology, revealing the interplay between the evidence-based and the value-based perspectives on expertise. While both approaches provide valuable concepts for the study, the value-based approach seems to be especially relevant as a conceptual lens to interpret our findings. The study found that government officials who have extensive experiential knowledge concerning the issues of research cooperation have an important role in shaping the EU's policy making through the OMC, consistent with previous finding in other fields (Fouilleux, de Maillard, & Smith, 2005). Several factors, including political interests, professional autonomy, the non-binding nature of the decisions, and voluntary participation influence the dynamics of the expert group.

In answering the first research question, *Who are considered to be experts in the OMC process?*, the dominance of Ministry representatives was clear. The diversity of stakeholders, in this case, experts, from a variety of member states' governments, provides legitimacy for the group decisions. The formation of mutual agreement and policy recommendations by a large group of country experts is a powerful statement that is difficult to ignore. The dominance of the government representatives led us to analyze the political influence in appointing experts. As stated in the

literature, policy decisions are often results of the complex social negotiations where various factors are at play (e.g., Maasen & Weingart, 2005). Political interest is a central factor that drives decisions in research policy, as in public policy more generally.

Scientific cooperation is a topic that has been highly influenced by the political ambitions of the nation states in Europe (Gornitzka, 2009). Research and scientific knowledge production has historically contributed to the competitiveness of nation states. Therefore, it is not surprising that the experts participating in the OMC group are mainly individuals who serve the national Ministries in their countries as opposed to independent scientists or officials from research institutions. Experts are trusted to represent national interests and values and report back on potentially useful information for enhancing national strategies. As demonstrated by our findings, the bigger players in this OMC cycle are typically the representatives from the most influential Western countries. The roles of experts related to their country's political position in the region but also to their professional expertise. On one hand, their leading role in the process provides them with an opportunity to shape the decisions according to their professional beliefs and national interests, but also have firsthand access to relevant information. On the other hand, these experts have the most extensive experience in research cooperation that provides them with authority and power in the group.

Even as political institutions, for example, national governments and the EC, influence the initial formation of the expert groups, the professional autonomy of experts also shapes the process. Professional autonomy helps experts to distance themselves from political pressure and represent ideas based on their personal beliefs and values. As Sabatier (1986, 1988) proposed, shared beliefs and values might outweigh preexisting political preferences. Several informants noted representing themselves as professionals as opposed to representing their countries.

The OMC process seems to induce the formation of epistemic communities at the European level. As our results suggest, active members emerged among those who share common values and believe in the importance of the issue under debate. By identifying networks of experts from member states and affiliates and providing them with roles in the policy process, the OMC confers legitimacy to such groups and their participants. The connections experts made during the process were reported to be continuous, and the professional network created was seen as extremely useful.

The second research question focused on examining the ways expertise informs policy decisions. Experts contribute in the process through instrumental, political, conceptual, and learning types of knowledge use. Clearly the reality of the knowledge use is more complex, but these theoretical concepts provide valuable tools in thinking about the ways knowledge enters the policy process. The most visible was the instrumental use of expertise, as was the case with the formation of the Strategic Forum of International Cooperation in S&T. This instrumental kind of knowledge use is rather rare and only the pressure to make commitments at the highest level of governments triggered this particular example. The most typical are the learning and conceptual modes of knowledge use where change is not directly visible but could be brought upon by constant dissemination of ideas over the longer periods of time (Amara et al., 2004; Gornitzka, 2009; Weible, 2008). It was clear that experts

tend to provide ideas and concepts rather than knowledge instrumentally affecting individual policy decisions confirming the value-based approach to expertise. The political use of knowledge was mentioned only a few times where decisions made at the national level were supported by knowledge obtained from the group.

In examining the third research question on how OMC process contributes to European policy cooperation, several aspects of the OMC process seem to be relevant. Voluntary participation exercised during the OMC discussions is a factor contributing to the operation of the group. As noted previously, research production remains deeply embedded in national contexts (Gornitzka, 2009). Even today, governments are not easily willing to transfer policy-making competencies to the European level. In order to come to mutual understanding and overcome resistance at the national level, power for decisions was given to the country experts. This bottom-up nature of the process, where there is a freedom and choice to contribute, has yielded results in the Internationalization working group. Participating in EU level policy making and contributing expert opinions helps to build ownership of policy decisions among experts and soften opposition to building a European-level, unified framework for research cooperation. Forming the Strategic Forum represents a step in this direction.

Another component of the OMC structure—the non-binding nature of decisions—is an important factor in understanding the potential of unified policy coordination. As participating experts did not feel pressure to change national policies, they discussed ideas and possible policy scenarios openly and honestly. In general, experts aimed at fostering consensual recommendations applicable to all countries. However, when it comes to the possible implementation of such recommendations, the process is clearly driven by the diversity among member states. Tangible outcomes depend on various factors including the resources available to a country, the position experts hold within Ministries or government agencies, and the real and perceived need for actual policy change.

Clearly, the OMC structure provides an important tool for fostering European cooperation through supporting the development of shared policy positions. Those positions will be disseminated to the member states incorporating value-based expert interpretations of what practices are endorsed, approved, and agreed to be useful. However, as one knowledge source is hardly enough to affect policies in an instrumental way, the direct adoption of those recommendations at the national level toward harmonized policy approaches is questionable.

In conclusion, political institutions such as the EC and national governments serve as an important catalyst for forming experts groups, nominating members to the group, validating their expertise, and building professional networks. Some argue that the OMC is a tool for the EU to increase its legitimacy (Borrás & Jacobsson, 2004; Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011). A high degree of involvement of national officials in the expert groups and their direct access to national policy making could potentially enhance policy implementation and lead to the growing power of the EU. In addition, the relationship between experts and political institutions could be seen as a “two-way street.” Political organizations need experts to provide legitimacy for their policy decisions. The EU uses contributions from the member states to create policies that on one hand are developed by national experts, but on the other hand strengthen the scope and influence of the EU over

member states. Experts as professionals participate in the process to build up professional knowledge and networks, and at the same time increase their authority domestically.

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Notes

- 1 As one expert commented: “The mandate was designed before the group was formed. It was prepared by CREST, in fact. The leading country in this case was Germany. They had a great interest in such work. So, the Germany, in fact, drafted this mandate and then it was approved by CREST. So the mandate was prepared by Germany, of course with some other countries but I was not involved in drafting the mandate.”
- 2 CREST report, “Internationalization of R&D. Facing the Challenge of Globalization: Approaches to a Proactive International Policy in S&T” (January 2008). Available at http://ec.europa.eu/invest-inresearch/pdf/download_en/kina23330enc_cover_txt_web.pdf

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