

# Social OMC Lab

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Presentation on the state of the art in  
measuring the effectiveness and impact of  
the Social OMC and other OMCs

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# Outline of the talk

1. How did we go about it?
2. Social OMC literature: some general findings
3. Assessing methodologies
4. Assessing evaluation results
5. Conclusions

15'!

# Preamble

Inspiration drawn from 3 deliverables by:

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# 1. How did we go about it?

- Literature review of some 100 ‘recent’ documents engaging with:
  - The functional adequacy of the operational framework of the Social OMC (its ‘effectiveness’)
  - The actual (i.e. empirically established) substantive policy and procedural changes brought about by the Social OMC (its ‘impact’)

# How did we go about it?

- Necessarily selective: representative sample of English language publications
  - From 2005 onwards (mostly 2007 or more recent)
- Including :
  - Academic texts, Joint Reports and SPC publications, Reports from stakeholders, Communications from the Commission, Reports from other experts

## 2. Social OMC literature: some general findings

- While two-thirds of the reviewed literature was published in 2007 or more recently, the lion's share covers time-span *prior to* streamlining (2006)
  - Sometimes not clear about which period is actually covered

# Some general findings (II)

- Even more recent publications do not always take into account changes in the OMC process
  - E.g. completion of the portfolio of indicators, enhancement of ML
- Some issues are barely covered:
  - The effective take up of EU recommended policies (Impact)
  - Adequacy of NSR, effectiveness of guidance notes; reporting cycle; visibility and awareness (Effectiveness)



# Some general findings (III)

- Most research covers the EU-15
  - Fewer studies for the New Member States
  - Very strong representation of the Nordic Member States (DK, SW, FI)
  - Germany, France and UK well covered.
  - Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain addressed in five to seven studies. (other old Member States are covered even less often)



# 3. Assessing methodologies

- Which concepts, indicators and methods have been used (Deliverables 1 and 4)
- Reveal some important methodological caveats

# Assessing methodologies (II)

- Wide array of concepts used
- Often imprecise about definitions
  - E.g. distinguish ‘policy diffusion’ from ‘policy transfer’ and ‘policy convergence’
  - ‘Policy learning’ (most cited concept) with *wide variety* of understandings

# Assessing methodologies (III)

- Only few scholars rely on clearly operationalized indicators
  - OMC often only *one among many possible* influences
- Almost all researchers rely on a *qualitative* methodology
  - Often no insight in interview material or even questionnaires

# Assessing methodologies (IV)

- Relatively few studies on OMC's effectiveness (often focus on 'early years')
- Questions with regard to the technical, procedural dimensions have been omitted (eg EC guidelines)
- New context (streamlining, Integrated Guidelines)?

# Assessing evaluation results

- Few clearly specified hypotheses about the impact/effectiveness of OMC
- ‘Selection bias’ in OMC studies (looking for *any evidence*) suggesting OMC had an impact
- One-shot studies: not really comparable over time

# Assessing evaluation results (II)

In *substantive* terms:

- Increased the salience of efforts to tackle long-recognized national problems
  - e.g. early exit from the labour market, childcare provision, gender segregation, and the integration of immigrants
- In several countries the EU commitment to eradicate poverty pushed the fight against poverty and the activation issue higher on the domestic inclusion agenda

# Assessing evaluation results (III)

- Social OMC put new issues on the domestic political agenda:
  - In a variety of countries (old and new Member States)
  - On a variety of topics (including activation, social exclusion, child poverty and the marginalization of different ethnic groups)
- OMC's concepts, indicators and categories penetrated in domestic policy making.
  - E.g. European risk-of-poverty norm acquired a broader mobilizing character, at least in some countries



# Assessing evaluation results (IV)

In *procedural* terms:

- OMC led to stimulation of **self-reflection** on national performance
  - ‘Mirror effect’ of the Social OMC: policymakers discover that they are not - against their own expectations - the ‘best pupil in the class’ after all

# Assessing evaluation results (V)

- OMC led to a more **strategic approach** in social policymaking
  - Planning, targeting, resources assigned, policy analysis
  - For many countries “governance by objectives” was an entirely new feature in social policymaking
- EES and Social OMC promoted **evidence-based policymaking**
  - Monitoring and evaluation, use of indicators, data sources and analytical capacity

# Conclusions

- Main finding → considerable impact on Member States' policies and politics (striking)
  - this impact varies between countries, strands and types of impact
  - Variations in involvement depends on the outcome
  - More impact if looking “on the ground”
- Which direction and scope?
  - Beneficial effects (raising awareness, increasing involvement, improving coordination )
  - Undesirable effects (liberalization discourses neoliberal solutions )

# Conclusion (II)

OMC's impact is not limited to the domestic level  
→ EU-level effects

- Including **shaping** of discourses and deliberation
- Providing **legitimacy** for economic actors to further bring social protection and social inclusions under their influence
- The EU together with Member States and anti-poverty organizations developed the **discourses** and **policy analyses** that are at the heart of the OMC procedure

# Conclusion (III)

- **Mechanisms**

- Shift from a focus on '*policy learning*' to '*leverage*'
- Through the use of OMC, there might be changes in actors' *cognitive and normative frames* resulting from *policy learning*
- OMC impact only if 'picked up' by actors at the domestic level (including blame-shifting or amplifying national reform strategies)
- The degree of engagement of the actors should be considered

# Conclusion (IV)

- **Highly political nature** → ‘hard politics of soft law’
  - Fierce debate, opposition, debate and bargaining
  - OMC highly vulnerable to political preferences
  - Felt much harder in its impact than expected
- **Social OMC institutionalized** (national and EU)
  - ‘Template’ for soft governance
  - Coordinating social (inclusion) policies in federalized countries
  - Linked to other EU policy instruments (EU law, ESF)
  - Trusted resource for a variety of domestic and EU actors



# Conclusion (V)

- **New findings from the analysis (including):**
  - Not clear-cut distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ modes of governance
  - Lack of impact of ‘harder’ policy coordination mechanisms (BEPG, EES)
  - The ECJ’s actual use of soft law mechanisms
  - Effects and link of the OMC on/with the ESF
- **Theoretical analyses** → over or under-estimate
- **Empirical analyses** → rich empirical data, more nuanced picture (institutionalization and Europeanisation concepts)
- Fit/misfit presumption less indicative of OMC impact
- **More useful analysis: how actors consider and use OMC**  
(for agenda-setting, conflict resolution, maintaining focus on a policy issue, developing a policy dialogue, etc)