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The Role of Transnational Experts in European Integration: Recharging the Debate

Workshop directors:

Angela Wigger (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen)
a.wigger@fm.ru.nl

Hubert Buch-Hansen (Copenhagen Business School)
hbh.ikl@cbs.dk

Outline of the Topic

The workshop seeks to contribute to the understanding of the politics of expertise in EU agenda setting, policy-making processes, and governance, in particular with regard to transnational expert communities. It provides a platform for discussion on the various roles experts and expert knowledge play in the EU integration trajectory, cutting through diverse policy fields and political agencies.

The issue of transnational private expert knowledge and the multi-faceted roles expert play in the policy process constitute a crucial point of debate for European Integration scholars. Following the ‘classic’ debate about the elitist, elusive, and technocratic nature of decision-making in the European Community in the early years of European integration, more recent approaches have focussed on the public perception of the ‘politics of expertise’ (Radaelli, 1999), transnational regulatory networks and the lack of democratic legitimacy (Eberlein and Grande, 2005), and the increasing politicisation of expertise as an important aspect of this legitimacy crisis (European Commission, 2001). While Member State officials still play an important role, for instance, in the comitology process, the number of ‘independent’ and private experts committees, communities, and networks is proliferating (see e.g. Egeberg et al., 2003; Quaglia et al 2008). The transnational character of these expert committees or groups, most notably their interlinkages with global policy networks and their shared cognitive and value schemes, render them an important instance of political agency in the EU.

Relation to Existing Literature

In response to the debate on the technocratic nature of the EU in the 1950s and 60s (e.g. Haas, 1968), and the discussion of the EU as a ‘regulatory state’ (Majone, 1996), the vast literature on new modes of governance and private authority has brought the role of experts in public policy-making processes to the centre of attention of political scientists and public administration (Fischer, 1990; Radaelli, 1999). Within the field of EU studies, the politics of expertise has been researched from a variety of perspectives – most prominently with an advocacy coalition (Sabatier, 1998), or epistemic community framework (Haas, 1992; Verdun, 1999; Zito, 1999; Kälberer, 2003; Van Waarden and Drahos, 2003). In the field of International Relations (IR), the emerging literature on the role of experts in global

policy networks (see e.g. Stone, 2004), advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), or private authority (Cutler *et al.*, 1999), points towards the role of transnational expert committees in policy making in the EU and beyond. Yet despite the prominence of the concept of ‘epistemic communities’, which originated in an IR framework, there is little actual dialogue between IR and EU studies on the issue of transnational expert actors. For this reason, we seek to recharge the debate on transnational expertise in EU regulatory processes.

Academic Rationale

The topic of transnational expertise in the EU policy-making processes, in combination with the format of an ECPR workshop, constitutes a particularly apposite opportunity for researchers to bring together recent case studies from a variety of approaches and theoretical perspectives. The objective of the proposed workshop is to go beyond generic discussions on the politics of expertise by recharging the debate between various perspectives, both from an IR as well as an EU studies, on the role of expert knowledge on the basis of recent empirical analysis. We see considerable merit in facilitating a theoretically informed debate between various perspectives on the politics of expertise, rather than seeking to arrive at a uniform research agenda. To this aim, the approach of the workshop will be threefold:

1. To map the variety of perspectives on the politics of transnational expertise (in the EU context, and beyond) across different policy fields and sectors;
2. To discuss questions regarding the level of analysis, the conceptual tools applied, and research methodology;
3. To facilitate dialogue and discussion on theoretical approaches between IR and EU studies.

Participants and Type of Paper

The workshop invites researchers working on topics linked to the politics of expertise in EU policy making and governance. It seeks to engage scholars from a variety of sub-disciplines, such as (but not exclusively) comparative politics, international relations, political sociology, critical political economy, political psychology, and European Union studies more generally with a focus on regulatory governance. Given the nature of the workshop, the participation of young researchers (on the PhD and Post-Doc level) who have conducted in-depth empirical research on this topic is encouraged. At the same time, the workshop provides established scholars the opportunity to advance and discuss their own research agenda in this field.

The workshop invites papers combining empirical research on the politics of expertise with a thorough theoretical perspective. Ideally, papers should seek to explain why experts have emerged in the particular field of investigation, what the agency of experts consists of, and at what stages of the policy-making process they surface. Papers seeking to address the agency and structure dimension, informed by theories from international relations, as well as theories borrowed from comparative politics are particularly welcome. We consider empirical substantiation of theoretical claims to be indispensable for the envisaged debate, and hope to generate more research in this area. Moreover, we welcome papers dealing with methodological issues.

The following research issues would seem particularly relevant to the workshop:

1. *Empirically*: Case studies of expert committees on EU and/or Member State level;
2. *Methodologically*: Research methodologies and issues in qualitative research (e.g. network analysis, expert interviews, discourse analysis, etc);
3. *Theoretically*: Ontological and epistemological questions on how we should/can understand the role of expert knowledge, and how to conceptualise the role of expert actors;
4. *Normatively*: Considerations about implications of the politics of expertise on democratic legitimacy and accountability, and more generally, on modes of governance in the EU.

A selection of workshop contributions, reflecting the range of approaches and perspectives, would be considered for the submission of a special issue proposal to a EU studies journal (e.g. *Journal of European Public Policy*).

Biographical Note

Angela Wigger is Assistant Professor International Relations at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, The Netherlands, where she teaches courses on European Governance, International Governance, and International Relations. Her areas of interest and specialisation are the politics of European and global competition laws and practices, International Political Economy, and European Union Politics. Her most recent publication is in the *Journal of Common Market Studies*.

Hubert Buch-Hansen lectures at the Copenhagen Business School, in Denmark. His areas of interest and specialisation are EU competition policy, and more generally, the history of the political economy of European integration, as well as critical theories of International Relations, European Integration, and International Political Economy. He has published a co-authored textbook on critical realism.

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