EXPERTISE AND POLICY LEARNING – THE CASE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S RESEARCH POLICY

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines policy learning and expertise in the European Union research policy by focusing on the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) initiative. The research is guided by the overarching question - *How do experts' individual policy learning experiences relate to the EU's research policy?* First, background of the European Union's research policy is presented, clarifying the need for policy learning. Second, the theoretical approaches on expertise and theories of policy learning are analyzed. The synthesis of the two streams of literature leads to a conceptual framework for the study, featuring two distinct perspectives of policy learning – the evidence-based approach and the value-based approach. This framework brings the individual experiences of the OMC participants into focus, allowing an examination of policy processes that do not always result in direct policy changes. For data collection three distinct OMC working groups are selected, each focusing on a different topic related to European research policy – research funding (Group 1), research cooperation with Third Countries (Group 2) and research activities in universities (Group 3). A case study approach is employed, involving document analysis, a pilot study and thirty-four interviews with member-

states' experts and European Commission policy-makers. The findings suggest that individual policy learning shapes the development of European research policy. Through the OMC policy learning initiatives participants gain new knowledge on policy approaches, programs, best practices and policy failures. In addition, learning experiences involve knowledge on individual relationships, decision-making styles, organizational cultures and power-relationships that diverse stakeholders bring with them to the process. Such knowledge helps to update the policy beliefs of participants, providing a strong foundation for developing mutual ownership of decisions that lead to policy coordination. The findings emphasize the importance of a value-based perspective in policy analysis, where results emerge gradually, over a long time period and contribute to policy change.

Acknowledgments

Similar to policy-making, a Ph.D journey is about building relationships and learning from them. Some relationships are continuous and lasting, others emerge and then fade. Yet each carries a certain purpose and influences people's lives. I have been extremely lucky to have many very rewarding relationships during my journey that have enriched my life and helped me to grow as an academic and a person.

First and foremost, I am grateful for the learning experiences that have been created as a result of working together with my supervisor Professor Creso Sá. His unique and brilliant approach has helped me to navigate academia, taught me the value of time management, and most importantly, has pushed me to think, write and publish. At one point there was a joke about me defending my thesis before defending my proposal. So thank you, Creso, for believing in me, having the patience to see the ideas behind numerous grammatical mistakes in my writings and pushing me to work hard!

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List of Abbreviations

CREST - *Comité de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique*, Scientific and Technical Research Committee
DG – Directorate General
DG Regio - Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy
DG Research - Directorate General for Research and Innovation
EC – European Commission
ERA – European Research Area
ERAC – European Research Area Committee
ERA-NET – European Research Area Networking Scheme
ESFRI - European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures
EU – European Union
EURECA – European Research and Educational Collaboration with Asia
FP – Framework Program
GR - Group
INCO – Inter-Regional Cooperation
INCO-NET – Inter-Regional Cooperation Network Scheme
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMC – Open Method of Coordination
RTD - Research, Technological Development
SF – Structural Funds
SFIC – The Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation
SME - small and medium-size enterprises
S&T - Science and Technology
UK – United Kingdom
US – United States of America

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview of the Problem

Policy learning through knowledge exchanges has become a central feature in contemporary governance systems. An extensive multidisciplinary literature has documented, analyzed and critiqued this growing trend (e.g. Sabatier, 1986; Jasanoff, 1990; Maasen & Weingart 2005; Nutley, et al., 2007; Boswell, 2009). Authors have proposed several rationales for explaining this increasing need for policy learning. References have been made to dissatisfaction with existing policies that lead to a search for alternative policy approaches (Sabatier, 1986; Rose, 1991), the emergence of horizontal governance patterns that assume consensus-building (Skogstad, 2003; Kohler-Koch & Rittberger, 2006), increasing uncertainties in dealing with quickly changing policy environments (Common, 2004; Paasi, 2005; Dunlop, 2009) and a need to increase political legitimacy in a multi-stakeholder environment by inviting different actors together for knowledge-sharing purposes (Maasen & Weingart, 2005; Radaelli, 2009).

The results of policy learning are largely dependent on the participating individuals, their policy beliefs, values, interests, attitudes and communication mechanisms (Sabatier, 1988; Jacobs, 2009). Policy learning is essentially a cognitive process that can ultimately result in a change in information, goals, values, behaviours, structures and policy outcomes. However, increased pressure to produce effective policies by evaluating policy outcomes in an evidence-based manner (e.g. Radaelli, 2004; Nilsson et al. 2008) has often overlooked the process of policy debate itself. Several authors have noted the lack of theoretical understanding about the policy learning micro-foundations that greatly shape policy decisions and organizational behaviour (e.g. Belkhodja, et al., 2007; Radaelli, 2009). To make better use of evidence and foresee potential policy outcomes, it is of crucial importance to understand the nuances of the agency of individuals in cooperation with others and the dynamics of how policy ideas shape the course of a policy process. How does policy learning take place in contemporary governance systems? Who can make claims for expertise and what ideas get recognized and adopted by decision-makers? These questions provide an overarching compass for this thesis.

Perhaps nowhere has policy learning been more formally employed than in the European Union's (EU) policy-making. The EU's multilevel governance system is characterized by policy coordination where individual experts facilitate policy learning (Zito & Schout, 2009). The process is interactive and dependent on social context. It requires diverse actors (e.g. various experts and administrators from the member states, European Commission (EC) representatives, politicians) to discuss and learn from each other in order to reach a consensus before any decision can be made (Montpetit, 2009). The emphasis on learning and individual expertise has been articulated in European

policy documents as well. For example, a White Paper on European Governance (2001) endorses the need to boost confidence in the expert advice that informs policy decisions. In research policy, the newly launched program for research and innovation - "Horizon 2020"- aims at widening stakeholder participation and supporting policy learning. As a result, in 2007 there were 1,237 actively operating expert groups initiated by the European Commission, mainly composed of country representatives referred to as national experts (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011).

Aiming on one hand to increase policy coordination among member states and on the other hand to enhance the effectiveness of policies (see Wallace, et al., 2010), a new policy-making initiative was introduced in the EU in 2000 – the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). This approach focuses specifically on policy learning and is based on information exchange, best practices, voluntary coordinated action, and collaboration among European Union member states. The process that is facilitated by the European Commission administrators aims to foster regional integration with the help of country experts.

The use of OMC is especially relevant to research policy. Coordinated research policy has become essential in the EU's aspiration to become "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy", as stated in the Lisbon Strategy[1]. Van Vught (2010) describes two main objectives in achieving this goal: the need to strengthen coordinated European research policy and the need to align European and national policies. Since 2003, the OMC method was employed as the main initiative to achieve these ambitious goals. Experts' shared professional knowledge is expected to contribute to policy learning and lead to policy changes both at the national and European level. The OMC in research policy provides a tangible setting for examining policy learning phenomena emphasizing the importance of individual agents - experts - shaping the process.

The EU provides a helpful setting for investigating the policy learning process from the individual perspective as it involves actors with diverse political interests and cultural backgrounds. It allows one to understand the core dynamics behind policy making and policy change revealing how and when policy change occurs and what type of policy agenda gets to be disseminated and integrated into policy-decisions. The literature review on the European context reveals that the majority of studies conducted on the OMC process have focused mainly on its instrumental outcomes. The studies tend to examine the OMC's potential impact on European level governance (e.g. De la Porte, 2002; Room, 2005; Gornitzka, 2005; Szchuzak, 2006) or discuss policy outcomes at the national level (e.g. Morano-Foadi, 2008; Borrás & Conzelmann, 2007). There are some studies conducted on the EU expert group participants in general, revealing the importance of the context. For example, Warleigh-Lack & Drachenberg (2011) highlight the importance of the Council of the European Union and the Commission's interest in

[1] Lisbon Strategy - http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ summits/lis1_en.htm

the topic. Only after the Council of the European Union and the Commission reinforced an explicit decision to increase cooperation in the field of education and training, did it empower the member-states to make greater progress in the policy area through the OMC method.

However, empirical studies examining the dynamics within the OMC expert groups in research policy, and its relation to individual policy learning, have not been conducted. Kerber & Eckardt (2007) suggest that the level of central coordination influences learning outcomes. In situations where non-centralized experimentation with different new policies is supported (laboratory federalism), mutual learning leads to increased capability for improving and adapting public policies. Similarly, Elgström & Jönsson (2000) indicate the influence of politicization on learning. Bargaining tactics in politically sensitive topics discourage learning, as the aim is to gain advantage over other parties. Fouilleux, et al., (2005) state that individual identities, rules and norms shape the learning dynamics. Depending on the policy area, more technical expertise is required, in other cases more political knowledge is used. Kerber & Eckardt (2007) state that much more detailed analyses of the interaction of EU's many participating agents, interest groups, and institutions, both on the EU and the member state level are needed to understand how policies are formed. This is the important gap in the literature that this study aims to address.

1.2 Research Questions

By interviewing member states' experts and European Commission policy-makers, this study examines how well policy learning has contributed to coordinated research policy in the EU. The research focuses on the role of individual experts in the EU's research policy in the OMC initiative by asking:

How do experts' individual policy learning experiences relate to the EU's research policy?

In order to unpack the individual approach to policy learning, it is important to understand who are regarded as experts and why certain individuals have been selected to participate in the OMC process. According to Stehr & Grundmann (2011) the growing number of experts, advisors and consultants in contemporary society has led to pluralisation of expertise. At the same time decision-makers in organizations are increasingly seeking advice from experts (Egeberg, et al., 2003; Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011). Experts in the EU policy-making are an important part of policy negotiations and they heavily influence policy outcomes (Fouilleux, et al. 2005). It is essential to clarify who are regarded as experts in the OMC policy learning initiatives and what type of knowledge these individuals bring to the process. The first sub-question tackles the issue of expertise by asking:

- Who has access to the OMC working groups in the EU's research policy?

The literature indicates that several drivers trigger the learning process at the organizational level such as the need for policy improvement, political conflict or dealing with uncertainties (Etheredge & Short, 1983; Rose, 1991; Common, 2004; Boswell, 2009). However, it is not clear what the particular drivers are for individual experts to participate in the policy learning process, except for the need for professional enhancement (Wenger, 1998). Understanding the specific individual rationales for participation helps to shed light on an expert's motivation for learning and potential outcomes of the learning process. The OMC process is a unique setting where individuals from the 28 member-states and associated countries participate, representing different cultural backgrounds and policy beliefs. This setting allows for probing of the relationships between the experts' political interests and professional knowledge in negotiating various policy ideas. The second sub-question examines the motivations of individual experts by asking:

- What are the participants' rationales for participating in the OMC policy learning initiatives?

As stated above, policy learning is a highly interactive social process where individuals exchange policy ideas, present opinions and advocate for their policy positions. Context and learning conditions play an important role in the overall learning experience (Hedberg, 1981; Blatner, et al., 2001). Currently, there is very limited information available on the factors that might enhance or hinder individual policy learning processes. Sabatier (1986) indicates a need for intermediate conflict for learning to occur. He states that preparing to respond to opposing viewpoints leads to serious analysis, learning and potentially to a greater convergence of views. If the conflict is too severe, the participants might dismiss the debate completely. Some authors emphasize the importance of socio-cultural factors such as institutional norms and geographic proximity contributing to learning (Wolman, 1992; Common, 2004; Toots, 2007). The OMC initiative has its own unique characteristics that allow examining learning factors. It is a voluntary bottom-up process, where decisions have a non-binding nature. The third sub-question addresses the issue of contextual factors by asking:

- In what ways does the OMC process contribute to individual policy learning experiences?

The OMC approach has triggered a significant amount of criticism from scholars who mainly point to the limited nature of any tangible policy results at the national or European level (e.g. Kaiser & Prange, 2004; Szchuzak, 2006; Kröger, 2009a). Lacking in this debate is a consideration of less visible and measurable change, which is crucial in terms of longer-term policy effects. There is a lack of analysis of the primary goal of the OMC – the contribution to a common policy understanding and facilitation of mutual learning that in the long run prepares a foundation for long-lasting policy results. This

study proposes that the impact of the Open Method of Coordination should not be understood purely in instrumental terms but should be also analyzed in terms of broader conceptual shifts taking place over longer periods of time. In order to analyze the issue of policy outcomes, the fourth research question is stated:

- What impact has the OMC policy learning initiative had on the EU's research policy?

To answer these research questions, a case study was conducted, where the individual learning experiences of the OMC participants are examined and analyzed.

1.3 Significance of the Study

With its intention of analyzing the involvement of experts in the EU's Open Method of Coordination approach in research policy, this research is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the theoretical understanding of policy learning in two main ways:

a) It is important to understand and clarify the relationship between individual learning and policy change. As some scholars note (Haas, 1992; Schot & Schipper, 2011), individual 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. So far the main focus on policy learning has been on specific organizational outcomes (e.g. De Elera, 2006; Shaw & Laffan, 2007). This study addresses the gap in the literature by examining policy learning from the individual perspective, revealing nuances in the process that ultimately can influence broader policy outcomes.

b) Individual policy learning is enhanced by relevant knowledge and social interaction where policy beliefs get updated and disseminated (Sabatier, 1988; Radaelli, 2009). As the process is clearly context specific, this study examines some of the factors that enhance or hinder individual learning processes. This should allow for an increased understanding of how new knowledge and learning can be better facilitated, so that the outcomes would be more visible and relevant to policy-making in multi-level governance systems.

Second, the study also makes contributions more specifically to the stream of European integration studies:

c) The majority of studies have analyzed the OMC process from the perspective of how well it has contributed to the EU's regional policy coordination agenda, emphasizing the interests of the EU (Szchuzak, 2006; Gornitzka, 2007). It is not clear what the specific rationales are for member states to participate, considering the constant resistance against EU attempts to coordinate national policy initiatives in research and innovation policy (Gornitzka, 2009). This research should advance knowledge on aspects of how

policy learning might contribute to influencing the national political agenda or individual experts' interests through participation in the EU's research policy coordination exercise.

d) In addition to gathering information on specific rationales for country experts' motivation to participate in the OMC, this study also aims to investigate how EU experts negotiate their political interests and professional knowledge in the OMC setting, aspects largely left unstudied in most of the research concerning EU integration. This information should make it possible to expand knowledge on the specific factors that shape policy learning outcomes.

e) Many see policy learning as a potentially useful approach (Van Vught, 2010; McGuiness & O'Carroll, 2010; Zeitlin, 2010), while still lacking tangible results in research and innovation (Kaiser & Prange, 2004). This research ties concepts of individual policy learning to the policy outcomes in the EU's research policy, suggesting ways in which individual policy learning practices could be better transferred to policy-making processes in regards to the EU's research policy. This knowledge is especially relevant considering the current debates on assessment and redesign of the OMC process in the European Union. Research results might help to inform how formal learning exercises can contribute to overall policy design in the EU's research policy.

Lastly, this research contributes to the field of higher education. Over the past few decades, research productivity has become the major defining criteria for national higher education systems (Dill and Van Vught 2010). Universities are expected to produce knowledge that is relevant and responsive to the directions set by national research policy. Hence, an informed understanding on how research policy gets designed and how diverse ideas are negotiated among individuals provide important insights on the factors shaping the academic research enterprise.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into ten chapters. Chapter 2 starts by providing the background on the EU's research policy, the OMC process and the role of experts in the EU's governance system. To understand the increasing emphasis on policy learning, it is important to clarify the main events that have shaped the EU's research policy and led towards promoting mutual learning. Then, the Open Method of Coordination is explained to clarify the main goal of this unique approach – to facilitate discussions and enhance cooperation among the member states. This goal is reviewed in relation to the scholarly critique that tends to focus on the lack of instrumental outcomes at the national and European level. Finally, the role of experts in the EU's multilevel governance system is reviewed, emphasizing the increasing importance of expert groups in influencing policy decisions.

Theoretical considerations on expertise and policy learning are presented in chapter 3. First, the concept of expertise is explained by describing how the meaning of expertise has shifted over the past few decades from knowledge production to knowledge facilitation. This helps to clarify the diversity among experts. Then, an overview of the theoretical perspectives on policy learning is provided. A definition of policy learning, its rationales and influencing factors are explained. From this theoretical literature, two contrasting lines of thought on policy learning and expertise emerge - the evidence-based and the value-based approach. These approaches provide a framework for data analysis. The main differences in these two perspectives are emphasized. The chapter ends with a summary of the key ideas presented in the literature review.

Research methodology and research design are described in chapter 4. Several steps in the study such as document analysis, pilot study, expert interviews, ethics protocol and data analysis methodology are outlined. A detailed description of the study participants is provided. Consideration is also given to the limitations of the current study.

The findings of the thesis are divided into four separate chapters. Each of those chapters addresses a distinct research sub-question. Chapter 5 focuses on analyzing group formation principles. It describes the role of CREST, a European level strategic advisory body, in initiating OMC expert groups. Then it turns to examining country-specific decisions, explaining the choice of country experts.

Chapter 6 outlines the individual rationales for the OMC participation. It first describes the rationales for the country-experts and then presents the rationales for the Commission experts. The diverse range of rationales is linked to the focus on policy learning. While learning was the primary focus for most participants, political agendas are impossible to avoid. Chapter 7 outlines the details of the OMC process to illuminate factors that influence policy learning. It starts with comparing three OMC expert groups, examining the similarities and differences. These factors are divided into context-specific and process-specific features. Then the chapter turns to the individual learning mechanisms related to learning. Learning mechanisms help to understand how learning takes place and clarify the primary focus of the knowledge obtained.

The focus of chapter 8 is on analyzing policy learning outcomes at the individual, group, national and European level. The evidence-based and value-based framework is used to organize the findings. The results indicate the limited instrumental impact on learning at the national level, but present evidence on the significant contributions that the OMC has made towards enhancing policy cooperation, shaping existing policy conversation at the European level. Chapter 9 presents participants' perceptions on the strengths and weaknesses of the OMC initiative. It also emphasizes the participants' views on the need to continue with the OMC process. The conclusion in chapter 10 highlights the main findings addressing the research questions, discusses implications, and provides directions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: Background

This chapter provides the background for the study and explains the main events that have shaped the EU's research policy leading towards promoting mutual learning. It is divided into three sections – 1) development of research policy in the EU; 2) expert groups in the EU's policy-making; 3) OMC as a policy instrument. Research and innovation policy has become one of the central areas contributing to the EU's global competitiveness agenda[2]. The need for strategic policy coordination has driven the European Commission to apply a "soft policy" approach by increasingly involving member-state experts in decision-making. Through the Open Method of Coordination initiative, national representatives are expected to exchange knowledge, learn from each other and enhance policy coordination at the national and European level.

2.1 Development of Research Policy in the EU

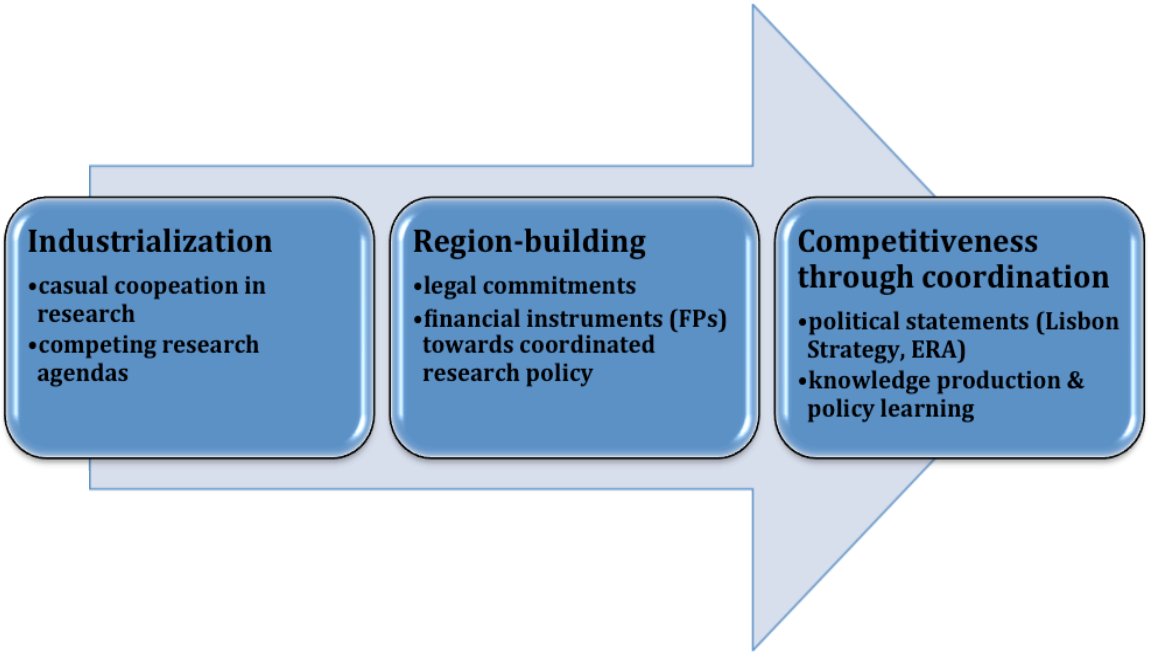
Since the 1980s coordinated research policy has been gaining a growing importance in the European Union. This has been mandated through political declarations such as the Lisbon Strategy (2000), the launch of the European Research Area (ERA) in 2000 and the presentation of the Innovation Union plan (2010) tied to the rapidly increased monetary instruments. Financial commitments reaching 80 billion euros for the period of 2014-2020 marks a 46% budget increase for research and innovation funding (European Commission, 2011), making research policy one of the central and most promising areas for regional growth for the European Union.

Gornitzka (2009) identifies three main periods that have shaped European research policy: 1) the early phase; 2) the development of core policy instruments; 3) the launch of the European Research Area (ERA) (See Figure 1). The focus and objectives of these stages, described below, explain why policy learning and expert involvement have been put into the heart of the decision-making process today.

Phase 1: Industrialization
The early phase of the European research policy (early 1950s to the end of the 1970s) is characterized by casual cooperation and competing research agendas at the national level. Nuclear energy research and interest in the development of new technologies to secure a strong industrial base were the driving factors for initial research collaboration among a few wealthy European countries. The first official attempts to establish a coordinated research policy had mainly an administrative nature. In 1973 a Directorate-General (DG) Research at the European Commission was founded with the objective to start further coordination of the European R&D policy.

[2] In Europe 2020 strategy a creation of "Innovation Union" through advancement of scientific discoveries and research excellence is expected. See http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

Figure 1. Development of EU's research policy (Author's conceptual illustration based on Gornitzka, 2009).



In the mid 1970s CREST[3] was established which served as a link between national ministries for research and the DG Research at the European level. Gornitzka (2009) reports that research policy had an inter-governmental nature (linking national policies) as opposed to being supranational (governing and coordinating at the European level).

Phase 2: Active region-building

The major initiative that defines the beginning of the second phase (1980s to the end of 1990s) was the establishment of a key policy instrument in the area of research- the European Framework Program (FP). The Framework Program became a central instrument for research funding across European member-states and started to contribute to the development of the European region. Even today, the Framework Program serves as the most significant European level research-funding instrument (Van Vught, 2010). The creation of such a single program meant a gradual development towards more coordinated EU level research policy. Gornitzka (2009) notes that the creation of the FP also represented a paradigm shift away from the science-dominated expertise towards fostering international consensus involving national administrators, scientific experts and transnational organizations. Representatives from the member states were very involved in designing the Framework Program, however, the right of initiative, agenda setting and funding decisions were left within the European Commission. In parallel, the formal legal basis of the European Union was strengthened. First, the Single European Act (1986) established the commitment to create a single

[3] CREST - *Comité de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique*, Scientific and Technical Research Committee

European market. The Maastricht Treaty (1992) further secured the overarching power of the European Union over member states, officially declaring the creation of the European Union and gradually introducing the common currency across the region, the Euro.

Phase 3: Competiveness through Coordination
The third phase (2000s until today) is characterized by the strategic political initiatives to establish a common European Research Area (ERA) and coordinate research and innovation initiatives further. The Lisbon Strategy (2000) clearly states the ambitious goal to become "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy" with the help of a coordinated research policy by 2010. This statement gave ERA a formal and permanent position in shaping European research policy (Gornitzka, 2009). In 2010 CREST was renamed ERAC (European Research Area Committee) with the focus to redefine its mission and work strategically towards building the European Research Area. The implementation of the Lisbon Strategy requires exceptions to the principle of national sovereignty and transfer of powers from the member states to the Commission (Veiga & Amaral, 2009). The increased attempt to move decision-making power over to the EU has created considerable resistance at the national level. Historically, the university as the core research institution has defined the nation state and its cultural role, serving as a gatekeeper for entry into national bureaucracies (Neave, 2001). In order to work productively, overcome the resistance and enhance the competitiveness of Europe as a region, increased national level involvement and help was critical. Since then a range of 'soft' methods of governance have been introduced, including the involvement of country experts and various societal actors (e.g. NGOs, industry representatives) to alleviate the criticism of having a rigid top-down governance system (see Wallace, et al., 2010). The era of mutual engagement in policy learning exercises began.

By giving the main decision-making power back to country experts, the Commission officially endorsed a bottom-up approach to policy-making, encouraging experts themselves to make decisions and determine strategic directions in research policy. This opportunity was actively put into practice. Since 2000 the number of expert groups has increased by more than 40 per cent (Gornitzka & Sverdrup 2008). The DG Research alone has created over 130 expert groups and committees of various kinds. Currently the European Union seeks to increase the investment in R&D (to 3% of GDP) and to create stronger coordination of national research policies. Lack of horizontal policy coordination among the member-states has been identified as a weakness in targeting the Lisbon goals (Gornitzka, 2009). With the ERA concept, new instruments for strengthening research production were introduced. The Open Method of Coordination was one of the significant instruments for achieving common goals in research.

New strategic directions for European growth were set in 2010 when the European Commission launched the Europe 2020 program. Research and innovation continues to be one of the top priorities beside employment, climate change, education and poverty

alleviation[4]. The new Innovation Union agenda does not emphasize the OMC method *per se* but continues to stress the importance of mutual learning in achieving its goals. Member states are expected to carry out self-assessments to identify their specific strengths, weaknesses and opportunities in relation with the EU and wider context, to formulate adequate policies and implement those in an efficient, effective and accountable manner.

As demonstrated above, a coordinated research policy has become one of the most important goals of the European Union, a goal that can only be achieved with the cooperation and involvement of the member states. Increasingly the expert groups and mutual learning practices have been introduced by the European Commission to advise on the EU's policy development. The following section examines more closely the role of expert groups in EU policy setting, and their influence during various phases of policy-making.

2.2 Expert Groups in the EU's policy-making

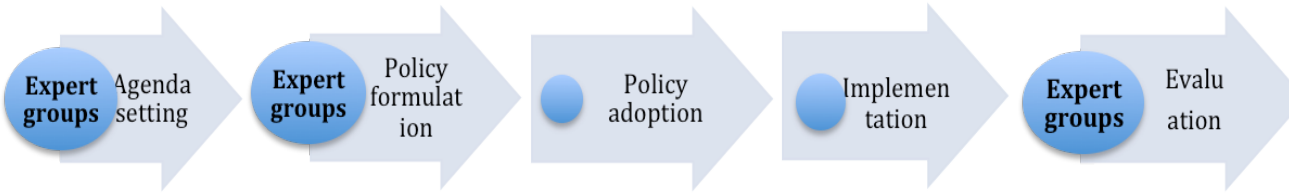
Expert groups are believed to be a central feature of the European governance system (Egeberg, et al., 2003; Kohler-Koch & Rittberger, 2006; Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011). In the context of the EU, an expert group is defined as "a consultative entity composed of external authorities that advise the European Commission in the preparation of legislative proposals, policy initiatives, but also engaging in monitoring, coordinating and cooperating with the member states" (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011, p. 50).

There are three types of expert groups that form the EU's committee system: Council working parties, comitology (implementation) committees and Commission expert groups (Egeberg, et al., 2003; Hayes-Renshaw & Wallace, 2006). While all these groups have several similarities (intergovernmental nature, loyalty to national governments), the Commission expert groups are distinct from the other two. As stated by Egeberg, et al., (2003), participants in the Commission expert groups usually evoke behavioural patterns that become more complex than what characterizes a typical intergovernmental interaction. Commission expert group attendants have more leeway than those on other committees; they are not very much involved in coordination processes at the national level, and they seldom bring with them a clear mandate on how to act. These expert groups are composed of country representatives and are facilitated by the Commission administrators. The OMC expert groups belong to the Commission expert groups category and are the focus of the current study.

[4] See five main targets for the decade at http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/reaching-the-goals/targets/index_en.htm

Experts are involved in all stages of the EU policy process by participating in agenda-setting, consulting, negotiating, and decision-making procedures (Fouilleux, et al., 2005; Schot & Schipper 2011). Expert groups do not formally make political decisions, but feed the decision-making processes by giving expert advice, providing scientific knowledge, sharing practical experience and information, and serving as forums for exchange of information (See Figure 2). Gornitzka & Sverdrup (2008) note that an expert group is most often composed for consulting purposes and the European Commission is in control of its composition. The distribution of expert groups is unevenly spread across the different Directorate Generals (DG) within the European Commission. Gornitzka & Sverdrup's (2008) research shows that the DG's that have created the most number of expert groups are DG Research, DG Environment and DG Enterprise, all having 120 or more expert groups. The least experts groups (fewer than 20 each) are set up by the DG involved in trade, competition, economic and financial affairs.

Figure 2. Input from the expert groups in policy cycle (Author's conceptualization).



Gornitzka & Sverdrup (2011) identify scientists, government officials, and societal actors such as business associations, non-governmental organizations, industries, unions and employers' associations, practitioners and consumers as experts enlisted in working groups. 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 for 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.

Conflict resolution within expert groups is typically achieved through discussions and negotiations, involving bargaining and problem-solving techniques. Elgström & Jönsson's (2000) research on EU expert groups show that the negotiation process in policy discussions largely depends on contextual factors. They emphasize the importance of

the decision-making rules (the situations where the most reluctant actor determines the pace and the level of achievement), level of politicization (more cooperative behaviour occurs in less politicized surroundings), stage in the decision-making process (agenda setting and policy formulation stages are most fruitful for mutual learning, as all parties are genuinely interested in rationales and priorities of others. The policy formulation stage is characterized by bargaining and the implementation phase by problem solving techniques), type of policy (sensitive policy areas are slow to change) and the network characteristics (EU networks are likely to generate cooperative behaviour and problem-solving techniques). These factors are important to consider when analyzing the group dynamics and policy outcomes of the OMC expert groups.

Overall, country experts are an important part of the European policy-making process. They shape policy decisions, determine policy agendas and decide upon what kind of policy ideas get picked up and promoted at the European level. The following section introduces the most prominent policy learning instrument in Europe – the Open Method of Coordination. The section describes the initial goals and expectations of the method, providing explanations why the method has received criticism in triggering immediate policy change.

2.3 Open Method of Coordination as a Policy Instrument

2.3.1 Background and Characteristics

The Open Method of Coordination is a policy-making method of the European Union and its member states characterized by voluntary policy coordination through mutual learning initiatives (Borrás & Radaelli, 2010). It was created in 2000 by the European Union administration during the Portugal Presidency. The process is set up as a non-binding, bottom-up initiative where the decision-making power lies in the hands of the member-states. The process is guided and facilitated by the European Commission, which analyzes the progress reports and disseminates recommendations for each of the member states (Van Vught, 2010). Its goal is to increase the effectiveness of the EU's policies and the transparency of its decision-making procedures through mutual learning (Van Vught, 2010). It is also seen as a tool for intergovernmental policy coordination without any legal intervention, and is designed to help member states progressively develop their own policies (Gornitzka, 2005).

According to the conclusions of the Lisbon Council (The Council of the European Union, 2000: §37)[5], this method involves:

[5] Document is available at http://consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/00100-r1.en0.htm

1. Fixing guidelines for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving the goals, which they [the Member States] set in the short, medium and long terms.
2. Establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world and tailored to the needs of different Member States and sectors as a means of comparing best practices.
3. Translating these European guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences.
4. Periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes.

These tools are set up for monitoring and evaluating the progress of policy coordination among the member states with the aim of achieving greater economic development in the region. The OMC process has a cyclical nature (typically yearly, sometimes in three-year cycles) where member states report to the European Commission on its achievements and progress.

One of the crucial dimensions of the OMC is policy learning. Learning from each other and considering best practices of others is expected to enhance policy coordination throughout the EU. The White Paper on European Governance (2001) articulates the aim of the OMC as follows:

> *"The open method of co-ordination is used on a case by case basis. It is a way of encouraging co-operation, the exchange of best practice and agreeing on common targets and guidelines for Member States, sometimes backed up by national action plans as in the case of employment and social exclusion. It relies on regular monitoring of progress to meet those targets, allowing Member States to compare their efforts and learn from the experience of others."* (European Commission, 2001, p. 20).

According to this statement the primary goal of the OMC is not only achieving a set of indicators determined by the National Action Plans but mainly facilitating discussions and enhancing cooperation among the member states, in a situation where knowledge exchange and policy learning are central. The OMC is regarded as a process, in which information and communication are used to shape a shared understanding of common policies (Van Vught, 2010).

The OMC has attracted considerable attention by scholars who have attempted to define this phenomenon, portraying the OMC as an instrument of "advanced liberal government" (Radaelli, 2003; Haahr, 2004), "experimental governance" (Szyszczak, 2006), "a new mode of governance" (Kohler-Koch & Eising, 1998) and "horizontal integration" (Borrás & Jacobsson, 2004; Olsen, 2004). It has also been described as "the most successful political stunt in the EU in recent times" in reference to the significant

media attention but somewhat unclear practical outcomes (Borrás & Greve, 2004). As participation in the OMC process is voluntary for member states and the agreements do not carry any legally binding obligations, it has been viewed as a 'soft law' instrument for policy coordination (Borrás & Conzelmann, 2007; Kröger, 2009b; Van Vught, 2010). Some authors describe the process as a considerable paradigm shift away from the EU's hierarchical decision-making style (see Radaelli, 1999; Wallace, et al., 2010) towards a more liberal, transparent, decentralized and inclusive approach. At the same time the approach attempts to overcome the limited decision-making style of the EU, especially in terms of the economic and social policies (including education and research), which are traditionally seen as policies of national significance (Szyszczak, 2006). Borrás & Greve (2004) point out that the efforts to align national policies in a flexible political space with procedures of a political (non-juridical) nature are its greatest novelty.

Borrás & Jacobson (2004, pp. 188-189) analyze the characteristics of the open method of coordination (in comparison to the traditional soft law procedures) and suggest the following features that make the OMC unique:

1) OMC is an example of the intergovernmental approach that follows a political logic as opposed to a legal logic where the Commission and the European Council in interaction determine the development and content of the OMC;
2) OMC features a high level of political participation. This refers to the policy formulation phase (input of the Council of Ministers and the European Council), as well as the monitoring phases (e.g. the European Council reports).
3) High-level political participation (including the monitoring phases) entail more mutual commitments and peer pressure mechanisms;
4) OMC involves a linking of policy areas and orientation of policies towards a common goal. The OMC seeks to bridge policy areas by linking national policies with each other, and by linking functionally different policies at the EU level.
5) The intention with the OMC is to integrate action at various levels of governance, which opens up the possibility for truly bottom-up political dynamics by combining common action and national autonomy.
6) The OMC seeks to mobilize the participation of a wide range of actors, public as well as private. The OMC involves non-state actors and is intended to foster cooperative practices and networking.
7) The OMC builds on, and encourages, mutual co-operation and exchange of knowledge and experiences. It also entails an element of mutual correction, through peer governance or 'collective self- coordination'.

These characteristics clearly emphasize the two opposite sides of the EU's policy-making: the national perspective versus the European perspective. The country experts and the representatives of the European political apparatus are the key figures in negotiating these two perspectives horizontally (across member states and policy areas) and vertically (between national and European levels) through mutual learning. The next

section examines research policy, focusing on how OMC has been adopted to enhance research cooperation among the EU's member-states.

2.3.2 OMC in Research Policy

The OMC was officially applied to research policy in 2003, a few years after the Lisbon Strategy was adopted. The diversity of the research systems across the EU member states has been a significant challenge in delivering the goals of the Lisbon Strategy. As noted by Kaiser & Prange (2004), the variations in legislative and budgetary powers lead to different research and innovation policies. The range of institutions and national co-ordination mechanisms and a remarkable diversification in research performance prevent achieving common European research policy. In addition, there is considerable resistance among the member states to allowing European interference in national research policies (Gornitzka, 2009). The OMC method was used as the main instrument to reach the Lisbon goals and the European Research Area, hoping to overcome the resistance and growing regional diversification of the national research systems. Learning from each other and considering best practices of others was expected to enhance policy coordination at the national level.

The early application of the OMC in research focused on developing quantitative indicators to allow cross-country comparisons and foster benchmarking. Gornitzka (2005) notes that a high level group was created with representatives from each member state nominated by the respective research ministers. Their task was to propose relevant indicators and elaborate the methodology on the strategic areas selected by the Research Council (human resources, investments productivity, RTD (Research, Technological Development) impact on competitiveness and employment). A set of 20 indicators was selected (e.g. financial expenditure on research, human resources in RTD, scientific productivity, RTD investment, indicators for RTD impact on economic competitiveness, publications, citations, patents) with the aim to supplement these with qualitative information and studies on the national contexts, allowing for a better interpretation of the indicators (European Commission, 2000).

Next, the Commission set up several expert groups to provide qualitative input and assist in the benchmarking process. The expert groups were expected to describe good practices for their thematic areas, analyze possibilities for transferring good practices to different national contexts and draw conclusions on implication for future policy (Gornitzka, 2005). Members of these groups were predominantly drawn from academic communities in relevant fields, some appointed by the Commission, some by member states. Yet their membership was on the basis of their expertise, not as representatives of national or social interests. The role of the European Commission was to monitor the process and draft reports. Van Vught (2010) notes that in practice the Commission influences agenda-setting significantly and persuades member states to increase their

efforts to reach agreed policy objectives. The OMC allows the Commission to use peer pressure and 'naming and shaming' practices to create stronger member state involvement in European policy processes.

The Scientific and Technical Research Committee (CREST) was put in charge of enhancing coordinated research policy through the OMC process. CREST, now the European Research Area Committee (ERAC), operates as a permanent advisory committee comprised with member states' representatives at the level of senior civil servants from national research ministries. At the beginning of the OMC, for achieving the 3% investment target, the Commission's representatives were important players in defining the themes and the methodology of OMC (Gornitzka, 2007). The OMC 3% target objective changed the participatory structure of the expert group: practically all the academic experts got practically all replaced with representatives from member states' ministries or implementing level such as national agencies, research councils, technological transfer offices. Each subject area or topic was proposed by the member states and headed by CREST members from national ministries that volunteered to take the lead in the organization of CREST's expert groups. In a way, the governance of the OMC was partially transferred away from the European Commission, even though the DG Research had the chairmanship of this committee. According to Gornitzka (2007) it was problematic for the expert groups to understand what was expected from them. Especially in the beginning of the process, the national participants who were sent to Brussels for working group meetings described the experience as sitting there with the OMC "landing in their lap", not knowing the direction the work was heading.

The process of policy learning through the OMC method was nevertheless carried out throughout six consecutive cycles with considerable participation from the country experts. The process has had a systematic focus on information exchange and collection of evidence on best practices. Table 1 illustrates the topics selected by the country experts to enhance the European research policy:

Table 1. The overview of the OMC topics in European research policy[6]

OMC cycle	Expert groups	Policy learning outcomes
First cycle 2003-2004	1) Public research spending and policy mixes (chaired by France); 2) Public research base and its links to industry (chaired by Sweden); 3) Fiscal measures and research (chaired by the Netherlands); 4) Intellectual property and research (chaired by	the establishment of networks of national policy-makers; the collection and exchange of information on national policies, providing an evidence base for future policy-making; identification of good practices; identification of key issues

[6] The information in Table 1 is drawn from the following websites http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/coordination/coordination01_en.htm http://www.ubst.dk/en/international-cooperation/eu-crest-peer-learning-activities-on-universities; that provide chronological order of the OMC cycles, as well as links to the final reports for the outcomes for each cycle.

	Ireland); 5) Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and research (chaired by Portugal)	and some recommendations for the future[7];
Second cycle 2005-2006	1) Effectiveness of fiscal measures for RTD (chaired by Norway); 2) Improve the design and implementation of national policy mixes[8] (Sweden, Spain and Romania); 3) Promote the reform of public research centres and universities in particular to promote transfer of knowledge to society and industry (chaired by Spain, Sweden and Italy); 4) Design measures to promote growth of young research-intensive SMEs and start-ups (chaired by Belgium and the Netherlands); 5) Intellectual property (chaired by UK)	new or strengthened networks of national policy makers, synthesis of a detailed evidence base on national policies and peer-review/mutual learning around this evidence base. In some instances specific recommendations to either Member States or the Community have been made or concrete deliverables in the form of policy guidelines or handbooks produced[9].
Third cycle 2006-2007	1) Framework Programme and the Structural Funds (chaired by Germany); 2) Internationalisation of R&D (chaired by Germany); 3) Policy mixes (Poland and UK); 4) R&D in services (chaired by Finland).	peer reviews, guidelines for policies, generic lessons and recommendations created on the topics.
Fourth cycle 2007-2008	1) Universities' research capacity (chaired by Belgium); 2) Industry-led competence centres (chaired by Ireland); 3) Policy-mixes peer reviews (Austria, Bulgaria)	mechanism for exchanging information and experience; the selection of topics has been positive as it has followed the interest of Member States; it provides a broader scope to policy-makers in their approach to issues of policy design.[10]
Fifth cycle 2008-2009	1) Policy Mixes (Netherlands, Lithuania, France, Estonia); 2) Peer Learning Activities on Universities (chaired by Denmark).	identified features for the success of funding schemes; focusing on performance and output when creating new funding models would helpful; EU funding and simplification (of processes, rules and requirements, etc.) are important.[11]

[7] CREST report on the application of the open method of coordination in favor of the Barcelona research investment objective (1.10.2004); http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download_en/crest_report_barcelona_research_investment_objective.pdf

[8] Policy mixes were country-reviews conducted on a request of a country. Position of a Chair was not allocated.

[9] CREST report on the Application of the Open Method of Coordination in favor of the Barcelona research investment objective (September 2006). http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download_en/crest_int-synthesis.pdf

[10] The Open Method of Coordination in Research Policy: Assessment and Recommendations. January 2009.
http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download_en/eur_23874_texte_web.pdf

[11] Final report ERSC's Peer Learning Activities on Universities (December 2010).
http://www.ubst.dk/en/international-cooperation/eu-crest-peer-learning-activities-on-universities/ERAC%20Final%20Report%2C%20incl.%20annexes%2007-12-2010.pdf

Sixth cycle 2009-2012	1) OMC-net programs within the 7th framework programs (partnering initiatives based on country proposals); 2) Policy Mixes (Latvia, Cyprus, Slovenia, Belgium, Estonia).	Development of national and regional R&D policies through mutual learning and peer review; identification and possibly transfer of good practices; development of concerted or joint policy initiatives between groups of countries and/or regions; identification of issues requiring Community action in support of actions undertaken at national or regional level.

Some researchers see OMC expert groups as a potentially useful mechanism in facilitating learning (Van Vught, 2010; McGuiness & O'Carroll, 2010). Dill & van Vught (2010) note that this type of mutual learning mechanism contributes to the search for more effective policies through a process of trial and error, combining application with analysis, and focusing on policy learning. Kaiser & Prange (2004) argue that OMC can be a valuable mode of governance only if national and regional specificities are carefully taken into account, including a variety of actors at each territorial level during the entire policy process and developing qualitative benchmark indicators that consider the diversities of national innovation systems and regional characteristics. De Elera (2006) points out that the OMC in research policy could lead to policies that enhance European identity through the creation of common values. However, the author notes that economic considerations have prevailed in developing the European Research Area and that the OMC has not been used to its full potential.

Zeitlin's (2011) study represents an example of recognizing the broader impact of the OMC process. His empirical research into the areas of employment and social inclusion shows that the OMC has been successful in many ways. First, it has contributed to the change in focus at the national level by introducing new ideas and concepts to the national policy debates that originate from the EU's policy discussions (e.g. lifelong learning, social inclusion). Second, it has contributed to better horizontal coordination and cross-sectorial integration of interdependent policy areas at the national level and enhanced vertical coordination between levels of governance (EU and country level). Third, the impact of mutual learning has led to the identification of common challenges and promising policy approaches at the EU level; statistical harmonisation and capacity building (at both EU and national levels); it has also induced member states to rethink established policy approaches and practices.

The OMC process of peer learning and best/good practice methodology has been the least well-established part of the OMC where there was not certainty on how learning should be facilitated and how to benefit from it (Gornitzka, 2007). The indirect and long-term nature of tangible outcomes has clearly made it difficult for the European Commission to justify the financial commitment related to the OMC. Lack of anticipated results in terms of increased European level policy coordination in the European Research Area has triggered discussions about abandoning this method and focusing on

a more integrated approach in the area of research and innovation. The suggestion is to make mutual learning practices an integral part of the policy discussions and discontinue with the format of the OMC working groups. The ERAC report from April 2011[12] concludes that a review and possibly a redesign of the OMC instrument should be undertaken if the decision to continue with this scheme would is made. The next section provides an overview of the main criticism related to the OMC approach in research policy.

2.3.3 Criticism Related to OMC

The absence of tangible results at the national policies' level has triggered most of the criticism. Kröger (2009a), analyzing the changes in social policy in France and Germany, could not detect any significant effects as a result of the OMC. The author notes that the actual changes in social policy in these countries were taking place before the introduction of National Action Plans. Morano-Foadi (2008), making reference to the Italian research policy, has illustrated how the lack of a powerful enforcement mechanism in relation to the transfer of best practices in Italy has served as a challenge in achieving policy change at the national level. McGuinness & O'Carroll (2010) see the potential impact of the OMC on national research systems in achieving convergence not instrumentally but in the form of developing common understanding as part of a long-term policy agenda.

Lacking in this debate is a consideration of less visible and measurable change, which is crucial in terms of longer-term policy effects. There is a lack of analysis of the primary goal of the OMC – the contribution to the common policy understanding and facilitation of policy learning that in the long run provide a foundation for stable policy results. There is a significant amount of literature on the OMC and its relation to mutual learning (Nedergaard, 2007; Radaelli, 2008; Hartlapp, 2009), but again it is often critical of attempts to measure learning in relation to the outcomes of policy change (e.g. Radaelli 2008). There are many scholars who admit that the specific outcomes of policy learning are difficult to identify and practically impossible to quantify (McGuiness & O'Carroll 2010; Zeitlin, 2011). The authors point to the methodological reasons. The challenge lies not only in managing the variety of government systems within the EU countries, but determining a causal relationship of policy learning based on collaboration between EU institutions and member state governments without any legally binding sanctions (Borrás & Greve 2004; Gornitzka, 2007). Kröger (2009b) concludes that the general challenges with the OMC include too much information and too many documents along with too little time for discussion, language barriers and an emphasis on governmental reports rather than strategic plans, a lack of political elites in the OMC processes, a lack of transfer of what was eventually learned into the ministerial hierarchy, and institutional differences between welfare systems.

[12] Document available at http://www.era.gv.at/space/11442/directory/11587/doc/23550.html

In spite of the criticism, the OMC process has not stopped. The most promising indicator seems to be the fact that all of the involved actors want to continue with policy learning, as they find it a useful, valuable and flexible means to harness the benefits of cooperation among the member states (Warleigh-Lack & Drachenberg, 2011). The European Commission assessment of the OMC's impact on research policy (2009) states the continuous need to focus in the future on facilitating learning and strategic policy coordination rather than only exchanging information. The need to continue with mutual learning exercises through policy monitoring and coordination is continuously expressed and emphasized in various new strategic policy documents (e.g. Europe, 2020, Innovation Union Communication).

The next chapter turns to theoretical considerations related to expertise and policy learning. This theoretical literature grounds the study conceptually, clarifying the terminology and examining diverse approaches on policy learning that dominate the public policy literature.

CHAPTER 3: Theoretical Considerations

This chapter outlines the theoretical literature related to the concepts of expertise and policy learning. The first section on expertise discusses the definition and its relationship to knowledge. By presenting three distinct types of experts, one section describes the evolution of the concept. Then it lays out several features of two distinct approaches to expertise. The section concludes by discussing the concept of epistemic communities, which helps to conceptualize the increasing influence of expert groups in policy making. The second section of the chapter focuses on policy learning. It presents the definition and rationales of policy learning, and provides insights on why participants engage in learning activities. Then the most influential theories related to policy learning are viewed. These theories are divided into two broad categories – the rationalist and social-constructivist perspectives. A conceptual framework emerges from these distinct perspectives. Literature on learning mechanisms is presented to clarify a theoretical approach on how relevant knowledge is gained. The section discusses factors that potentially influence learning. This chapter concludes by outlining two main perspectives on policy learning outcomes.

3.1 Experts and Expert Knowledge

3.1.1 Definition

Policy learning is understood as a process of social interactions leading to change, facilitated by knowledgeable individuals often referred to as experts. One can find experts operating in various positions and organizational environments, representing numerous knowledge fields. The term ‘expert’ typically includes a wide variety of stakeholders in the policy-making process such as policy analysts, scientists, consultants and researchers in government and nongovernment organizations (Weible, 2008). The sources of expert-based information include the social and natural sciences, policy analyses, government reports, consultations with stakeholders, research coming from universities, think tanks, and consulting firms (Nutley, et al., 2007; Boswell, 2009).

The growing demand for knowledge-based occupations and the diversity in sources of expert knowledge has led to pluralisation of expertise (Stehr & Grundmann 2011). Some call this phenomenon ‘Expertocracy’, the emergence of expert culture (Habermas, 1985; Bechmann, 2003), where the decision-making power has shifted increasingly towards people who claim to be experts providing advice for solving complicated policy problems. In such a complex setting, it is important to clarify what comprises expertise, because it provides a person with an access to important policy decisions.

In the scholarly literature there are several definitions of experts and expertise. Bechmann and Hronszky (2003, p. 7) define expertise as “a relationship between a party

with specialized knowledge and one lacking it." They see the expert as someone who provides knowledge-based services for others. Stehr & Grundmann (2011, p. x) define experts as "persons from whom it is assumed that, based on their routine contact with specific topics, they have accumulated experience in contexts relevant for taking action, and thus enjoy both trust and social respect." Clearly, the common denominator in these definitions is a particular **knowledge** that expert possesses and which is useful in informing decisions.

Brechnin & Siddell (2000) distinguish among three distinctive types of knowledge source:

1) Empirical knowing – the most explicit form of knowing, which is often based on quantitative or qualitative research study;
2) Theoretical knowing – uses different theoretical frameworks for thinking about a problem, sometimes informed by research, but often derived in intuitive and informal ways;
3) Experiential knowing – craft or tacit knowledge built up over a number of years of practical experience.

The boundaries among these categories are blurred and usually knowledge types in practice are mixed. Based on the dominance of a specific knowledge type, several perspectives on the concept of experts have risen. Three main views on expertise, as the concept has evolved, are discussed in the following section.

3.1.2 Types of Experts

The type of knowledge that is valued in policy-making has influenced the understanding of expertise and experts, as it has changed and evolved over the decades. Based on the literature, three expert types are distinguishable: experts as bureaucrats, experts as scientists and more recently, experts as mediators. Each category will be examined below.

Experts as bureaucrats

The emergence of rational administration and the widespread bureaucratization of knowledge in the early 20th century have shaped the concept of expertise. Experts are often viewed as bureaucrats operating in the government system (Bechmann, 2003). From such a rational perspective, technical and operational knowledge form the core of expertise. Weber's theory of bureaucracy has been influential in shaping the concept of the expert as bureaucrat. The theory argues that bureaucratic administration is the most efficient way of governing modern society, achieving legal control and authority over decisions (Weber, 1964). Bureaucratic administration exercises control on the basis of knowledge. Knowledge is produced through a system of rationally discussible 'reasons' and then departmentalized. Knowledge, according to Weber, consists on one hand of technical expertise but also experiential knowledge that has accumulated over

the years (Weber, 1964, p. 339). Such knowledge can be achieved through professional qualifications and/or specialized education certified by specialized examinations or diplomas on technical training and through years of experience operating in bureaucratic organizations. This view emphasizes the importance of certified knowledge that allows one to work in government organizations. Expertise is based on rational knowledge that produces efficiently operating organizations. Efficiency creates trust and legitimizes experts.

Some authors indicate that bureaucratic departmentalized knowledge might create dependencies in the decision-making process (Weber, 1978; Nutley, et al., 2007). As political leaders do not possess specialized knowledge themselves, there is a constant need to turn to bureaucrats for knowledge and advice. Several studies have demonstrated that policy-makers tend to rely on reports produced by government and specialist organizations (Percy-Smith, et al., 2002; Wilson, et al., 2003). Weber (1964) notes that such dependency on technical knowledge might potentially lead to a situation where experts realize how reliant their bosses are on their expertise and then begin to exercise their own power in that position. Overall, experts as bureaucrats are powerful individuals who can shape decisions through possessing and filtering knowledge. They are usually legitimized through certified technical knowledge.

Experts as scientists

Another stream of literature on expert knowledge views experts as scientists possessing primarily **scientific knowledge** gained through theoretical and empirical methods. Boswell (2009) sees expertise grounded strictly in academic knowledge, involving sound theoretical and conceptual coherence and appropriate educational credentials. Hellström's (2000) view is similar. He defines expertise as the systematic creation of scientific and technical knowledge, emphasizing the application of rigorous methodologies in generating this knowledge. Experts, according to this perspective, are scientists or researchers who are able to provide information and analysis in an empirically rigorous way. Others suggest a broader view where academic knowledge is related to the information gained through professional practices. For example, Weible (2008) defines expertise as a knowledge generated by professional, scientific and technical methods of inquiry. Davies (2004) emphasizes the evidence-based policy and practice agenda and notes that the best available evidence from research needs to be applied in policy-making. Nutley, et al., (2007) suggest 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. This perspective similarly recognizes the experiential component of knowledge creation in addition to academic knowledge as long as experience leads to well-informed decisions. In general, experts as scientists are authorized through knowledge that is valued for its methodological rigour associated with quality and trust.

Experts as mediators

Since 1990s, with the emphasis on knowledge-based societies, the understanding of the concept of expertise has changed. The concept has become broader and more fluid, the focus has shifted from knowledge production towards knowledge application. Experts have become mediators, knowledge brokers, who are transferring and applying relevant knowledge between knowledge producers and knowledge users (Stehr, 2003; Fisher, 2003; Lomas, 2007; Ward, et al., 2009; Michaels, 2009). In the era of massive knowledge production, the diverse contents of knowledge have increased the need for this new kind of expertise. The nature of expertise has shifted towards helping in orienting among a variety of knowledge sources, and guiding policy-makers towards relevant knowledge. Experience, specialized knowledge, social trust and experts' visibility have become crucial (Stehr & Grundmann, 2011). Experts can be individuals or organizations who filter and disseminate knowledge, creating a bridge between knowledge producers and knowledge users (Nutley, et al., 2007). An array of agencies has emerged that aim to support better use of research by practitioners. They use several mechanisms such as websites, seminars, workshops and training sessions, policy briefings and workshops to communicate better with knowledge users (Nutley, et al., 2007). In this perspective, experiential knowledge related to practices of knowledge mediation seems to be most valued. Experts' experience in filtering and providing relevant knowledge forms the foundation of being credible and trustworthy.

In conclusion, over the years experts have been viewed as bureaucrats, scientists and lately, knowledge mediators. Different authors emphasize different aspects of expertise. These accounts help to clarify who is regarded as an expert linking it to the knowledge type that is valued. Based on these three types, two distinct perspectives on expertise emerge. Distinct features for each are contrasted in the following section.

3.1.3 Two Distinct Perspectives on Expertise

Two distinct approaches emerge from the theoretical debate around defining experts and expertise. These approaches could be categorized as *the evidence-based approach* and *the value-based approach* (See Table 2). Both perspectives emphasize different aspects of knowledge production, and the ways expertise is used in the policy processes, recognizing that those might play out in more diverse ways in reality. These aspects include scientific knowledge versus experiential knowledge, neutrality versus subjectivity, knowledge production versus knowledge mobilization.

Table 2. Features of two distinct perspectives on expert knowledge

Evidence-based	Value-based
produced by using rigorous scientific methods	accumulation of experience, trust and social respect
neutral, value free	socially constructed interpretations
scientific knowledge production	knowledge mobilization, emphasis on learning

Scientific knowledge versus experiential knowledge

The emphasis on different knowledge types is a feature that differentiates these two approaches. The evidence-based approach highlights the importance of scientific methods in gaining objective knowledge, legitimizing experts (Boswell, 2009; MacRae & Whittington, 1997; Chubin & Hackett, 1990). It is the manner of study that gives scientific evidence a distinctive character. Culyer & Lomas (2006) state three characteristics that provide scientific evidence credibility: a formalized hypothesis or theory is tested; recognized and replicable methods are used to collect evidence; and/or evidence is analyzed and conclusions drawn. Head (2008) states that 'scientific evidence', validated by the standards of scientific methodology, remains a very significant input to contemporary policy development, especially in the fields of healthcare, medical and biological sciences. Davies (2004) argues that research-based scientific evidence helps people make well-informed decisions about policies, programs, and projects to enhance policy development and implementation. Through a process of theoretically informed empirical analysis, governments can learn from past experience and avoid repeating errors and as a result better apply new techniques to the resolution of problems (May, 1992; Sanderson, 2002).

The value-based approach does not disregard the importance of scientific research methods. However, this stream of thought looks at evidence from a broader perspective, focusing on social factors that influence expert knowledge. As the policy decisions have become complex, uncertainty is high and the need to draw on a variety of knowledge sources becomes crucial. For every scientific expertise there is a counter expertise available (Stehr & Grundmann, 2011). In such situations, experts' individual experience, trustworthiness and reliability become critical. Bechmann & Hronszky (2003) argue that with the increased knowledge production, there has been a shift towards non-codified experience based on tacit knowledge, long practical experience and familiarity of the subject. The new role of the expert lies in three pillars: *a cognitive pillar* that contains special knowledge, *a moral pillar* that emphasizes the obligation to follow expert advice and *a charismatic pillar* that creates trust and confidence in experts' worldviews (Bechmann, 2003). These aspects increasingly emphasize the social characteristics of experts instead of methodological rigor in knowledge creation.

Neutrality versus subjectivity

The debate about neutrality of scientific knowledge has evolved for decades (see Kuhn, 1970; Jasanoff, 1990; Proctor, 1991). As expertise is often formed on scientific research, the need and possibility of research to be neutral, unbiased and distanced from its subject is frequently highlighted (Glasby & Beresford, 2006). There is an assumption that expert knowledge should also be objective and value free. Emotional neutrality and impartiality of knowledge are strongly embedded in this view. By claiming to eliminate the subjectivity of the researcher, the credibility of the research and its findings are maximized. Several studies suggest that policy-makers tend to prefer quantitative research that claims to offer objective facts and statistical data (Barker, 1994; Landry, et al., 2001). In some organizations (e.g. think tanks, advisory boards) political neutrality is required from experts to maintain credibility and trust of their knowledge and advice (Weingart, 1999; Maasen & Weingart, 2005).

The value-based view focuses on the social interactions in knowledge exchange. Weingart (1999) and many others (e.g. Jasanoff, 1990; Bechmann, 2003; Maasen & Weingart, 2005) propose that neutrality of scientific expertise is a myth and that expertise reflects peoples' values. The 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. This view suggests that policy choices remain highly political despite the objectivity and value neutrality emphasized by scientific input.

As stated by Lindblom (1959) a good policy in practice is a policy upon which various analysts or policymakers can agree. A good policy in practice is not necessarily the most appropriate means to accomplish an objective. 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 pre-existing political preferences of high-level policymakers. 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 et al. (2007) claim that knowledge has a major role in shaping values not only for policymakers but for participating experts themselves and therefore should not be regarded as having a purely technical role. As expertise is always produced in a complex environment, the interaction with other actors impacts the outcome.

Knowledge production versus knowledge mobilization

Scientific knowledge production and technological innovations are highly important drivers in contemporary economic competitiveness (OECD, 2000; Asheim & Coenen,

2005; Bauer, et al., 2012). Scientific expertise aims to produce scientific knowledge to achieve new solutions to practical problems, and create better products and processes for the benefit of society (Nelson, 2004). As noted earlier, scientific knowledge production is often based on specialized knowledge, knowledge generation emerges from the application of scientific principles and methods, knowledge processes are more formally organised (e.g. in R&D departments) and outcomes tend to be documented in reports, electronic files or patent descriptions (Asheim & Coenen, 2005). Within such systems, cooperation is most likely to arise between people with the same occupational or educational background (e.g. among scientists), creating a void between those who do not possess such specialized knowledge. Pure scientific advisory bodies are often too detached from direct discussion with policy-makers (Braun, 2008). The superiority of technical rationality and the elitist nature of scientific knowledge have created a gap between scientists and decision-makers (Bechmann, 2003; Fischer, 2003).

The value – based view concentrates on purposefully bridging the gap between knowledge producers and users. Maasen & Weingart (2005) suggest that expertise must be transgressive, expert scientists must synthesize all available knowledge and transgress the boundaries of their discipline. Meyer (2010) notes that knowledge brokers translate knowledge from one world to another. But brokers also make knowledge socially, politically, and/or economically robust. The end result of these operations is the production of a new kind of knowledge—brokered knowledge. Such a role is powerful; experts not only transfer knowledge but also interpret it according to their world views, norms and values.

Several researchers point to the importance of translating the function of knowledge in this process (Ward, et al., 2009; Meyer, 2010; Stehr & Grundmann, 2011). As the transfer and application of knowledge is an active process, experts are constantly selecting, determining, organizing and altering knowledge based on their individual norms and values (Stehr & Grundmann, 2011). These processes evoke the practices of constant learning. Fisher (2003) points to the fact that not only experts themselves learn, but they are also educating the receivers of knowledge, bridging the gap between scientific expertise and laypersons. Nutley, et al., (2007) emphasize the importance of social learning where knowledge is transmitted through communications with peers and colleagues. The authors note that informal and formal policy networks, sometimes called epistemic communities, form a significant channel for knowledge mobilization.

3.1.4 Experts and Epistemic Communities

Several authors within the value-based framework have theorized on 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 with in 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 to 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 about public policy. They do not necessarily generate "truth", but rather articulate public concerns. That somewhat problematizes the effectiveness of consensual knowledge when it comes to implementation of expert advice. This type of knowledge might not necessarily lead to the best policy approaches but disseminate ideas that were easily agreed among experts.

This concept is important in several ways. First, it emphasizes the power of professionals (experts) who control knowledge and information in policy decisions. Members belonging to an epistemic community have the power of validating knowledge in the domain of their expertise. Second, the concept stresses the importance of policy learning as a central mechanism for policy change. As experts control knowledge production, they also guide the learning process of decision-makers (Dunlop, 2009). Third, epistemic communities play an important role in the generation and articulation of new ideas, helping framing policy-decisions and encouraging the search for solutions. Dunlop (2009) emphasizes the role of epistemic communities in providing area-specific knowledge and guiding the learning process of decision-makers and ultimately shaping the policy choices.

Researchers have pointed to some obstacles to epistemic communities' ability to exert expert influence. First, due to embedded political interests and pre-existing 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, allowing members of the epistemic community to have direct access to promoting specific policy ideas and framing issues for collective debate, exporting their policy projects globally.

These two approaches – the evidence-based and the value-based approach - focus on how (through which methods or practices) expert knowledge, that feeds the policy learning process, is created. Both approaches rely on particular evidence that demonstrate the legitimacy of expert knowledge: the evidence-based approach emphasizes the scientific research methods and the value-based approach stresses the values and professional beliefs that inform knowledge. The next section examines policy learning where these two perspectives are again apparent.

3.2 Policy learning

3.2.1 Definition

During the past few decades, policy learning has increasingly become a desirable tool for policy-making, especially in multi-level governance systems. While there is tendency to practice policy learning, there is no general agreement on what counts as policy learning. Learning is difficult to conceptualize and hard to measure because of the widely varying perspectives on learning (Zito & Schout, 2009). Academic fields such as education, psychology, sociology, political science, and organizational studies have all contributed to the concept of learning. The focus of this study is on learning in the process of policy-making and therefore literature from political science and public policy is examined.

There is no uniform understanding on the definition of policy learning. Scholars use a range of terms when referring to learning processes in policy-making - “learning in policy analysis” (Radaelli, 2009; Zito & Schout, 2009); “policy-oriented learning” (Weiss, 1977; Sabatier, 1986); “instrumental learning” (May, 1992); “social learning” (Heclo, 1974; May, 1992; Sanderson, 2002), “political learning” (May, 1992; Heclo, 1974; Radaelli, 2009), “policy diffusion” (Sabatier, 1987; Berry & Berry, 1990), “policy transfer” (Stone, 2001; James & Lodge, 2003; Bomberg, 2007; Dunlop, 2009), “lesson drawing” (Rose, 1991; Zito & Schout, 2009), “government learning” (Etheredge & Short, 1983), “organizational learning” (Huber, 1991; Common, 2004; Belkhodja, et al., 2007).

Each of those terminologies offers slightly different insights on learning in public policy, in terms of actors involved (e.g. governments, networks, organizations, individuals), rationales (e.g. environmental uncertainty, lack of policy results, need to respond to social pressure) and mechanisms (e.g. automatic knowledge accumulation; gradual inclusion of new knowledge; strategically focused activity). The one commonality across the definitions is that learning involves individuals and social interactions among them (Zito & Schout, 2009).

The current study adopts Radaelli's (2009) definition on policy learning, in which learning is "*a process of updating beliefs about key components of policy (such as problem definition, results achieved at home or abroad, goals, but also actors' strategies and paradigms)*" (p. 1146). This definition is useful as it focuses on individuals and emphasizes the social component of learning. Similarly, Bomberg (2007), views learning as an interactive process noting, "*policy learning occurs when policy-makers learn from each others' practices*" (p. 249). In an attempt to demonstrate evidence of learning, the concept of change becomes fundamental. It is assumed that learning leads to a certain alteration or change. The perspectives of how change occurs and what aspect indicates change depend on how authors understand the process of learning.

There are two broad perspectives on defining learning that differ on the locus of how change takes place. Some scholars view change in instrumental terms, where learning has led to changes in policies, programs or organizations (e.g. Etheredge & Short, 1983; Bennett & Howlett, 1992; Bomberg, 2007). According to Bennett and Howlett (1992, p. 289) learning is "a complex, multi-tiered phenomenon, which affects decision-making organizations and processes; specific programs and instruments to the ends to which policy is developed". The authors state that we may only know that learning has taken place because policy change has taken place. Bennett and Howlett (1992) view learning in terms of learning about organizations, learning about programs, and learning about policies. Bomberg (2007) supports the instrumental perspective, asserting that learning is a process by which actors acquire and use knowledge in decisions regarding the adoption or development of policies, principles.

Others see individuals as the key agents in learning (e.g. May, 1992; Belkhodja, et al., 2007; Radaelli 2009). May (1992) notes that beliefs and ideas are important elements in policy learning. Belkhodja, et al., (2007) emphasize that the concept of learning is associated with other concepts such as knowledge, cognition, analysis, and conscience, which are individual characteristics (Belkhodja, et al., 2007). Deutsch (1966), a scholar who is regarded as the first to emphasize learning in policy processes, sees learning as changes in goals and values that depend on material resources. Sabatier (1987, p. 672) argues that policy-oriented learning involves *"relatively enduring alterations of thought or behavioral intentions that result from experience and that are concerned with the attainment or revisions of the precepts of one's belief system".* May (1992) notes that learning involves improved (reaffirmed) understanding about policy tools, problems, objectives or interventions. Learning can also be about political feasibility of a given idea

or prospects of advancing a certain problem. Such knowledge provides a foundation for developing new tactics for advocating for a policy idea (May, 1992).

Overall, policy learning is a concept in the public policy literature that has provoked many different perspectives on learning. As each have their individual nuances, the commonality among the definitions is that learning emphasizes individual interaction that leads to change. Change is understood in two broad terms – instrumental change translated into policy change and fundamental change translated into change in individual policy beliefs about a policy issue.

3.2.2 Rationales for Policy Learning

In order to understand the essence of policy learning, it is important to consider what are some of the motives that trigger various stakeholders to engage in learning activities. Some earlier scholarly work sees learning as a gradual accumulation of knowledge without specific conscious effort (Heclo, 1974; Etheredge & Short, 1983). More recent literature views learning as a focused and deliberate effort. Rose (1991) has noted that people do not want to learn when they are satisfied. There are four main threads in the literature that describe what makes policy-makers become engaged in learning: 1) uncertainty in political environment and a need for adaptation; 2) crisis and dissatisfaction with current policies; 3) societal pressure for change; 4) the need for coordinated policies.

In dynamic, technology-driven economies, policy makers are increasingly making decisions under conditions of uncertainty and systemic complexity (Common, 2004; Paasi, 2005). The diversity of knowledge sources makes it difficult to determine what information should one apply for effective policies. In addition, knowledge is often kept departmentalized within the scientific fields creating barriers for accessing relevant information. The effectiveness of adaptive policy making depends on how well policy makers learn to react to changes and adapt in such changing conditions (Heclo, 1974; Haas, 1992; Lundvall, et al., 2002; Paasi, 2005; Dunlop, 2009). Learning helps them with the way to actively search for innovative ideas, best practices and transfer knowledge that might work in one's own particular environment. Haas (1992) argues that control over knowledge and information is an important source of power that helps in adapting to uncertainty. The forms of uncertainty give rise to particular types of knowledge, in which scientific and technical expertise becomes prominent. Zito (2009) has analyzed how EU environmental organizations adapt to uncertainty and pursue policy innovation. He describes several strategies such as management changes, lesson drawing, networking, and building reputation to advance organizational aims.

Crisis and dissatisfaction with current policies have been seen as an inherent trigger for learning (Zito & Schout, 2009). Dissatisfaction is evidence that something has gone

wrong, but it does not tell policymakers about what they ought to do (Rose, 1991). According to Rose (1991) most traditional way to respond to dissatisfaction in to search for approaches on what has worked before, or been effective elsewhere. Sabatier's (1986) work ties the issue of dissatisfaction with a variety of policy beliefs that interest groups hold and try to advocate for. In his view learning occurs when interests groups intentionally gather new knowledge on the issues that are important to them. They also learn about opposite views when preparing counter-arguments. Policy failure serves as a trigger for considering policy redesign, search for new ideas leading to policy learning (May, 1992). Hall (1993) suggests that policy experimentation and policy failure are likely to play a key role in the movement from one policy paradigm to another. Experiments to adapt might result in policy failures that gradually undermine the authority of the existing paradigm and its advocates even further.

Societal pressure to produce results serves as another rationale for policy learning. Hall (1993) views social learning as a deliberate attempt to adjust the goals or techniques of policy to respond to a certain societal pressure. Hall demonstrates how monetary policies in Britain shifted partly as a result of broader policy debates in the media and financial circles. However, pressure to produce results and adopt certain policies can lead to mimicking and masking learning. Toens & Landwehr (2009) state that engaging in policy learning can become a survival strategy for policy-makers to stay in power. When governments aim to demonstrate accountability and regularly display their learning results in comparative assessments and rankings, they intend to demonstrate permanent willingness to learn and thereby conceal their actual lack of capacity for self-determination and self-regulation.

A new stream on the rationales of policy learning has emerged in relation to EU integration studies (Kaiser & Prange, 2004; Bomberg, 2007; Zito & Schout, 2009; Egan 2009). Policy learning is increasingly viewed as a governance method. It is argued that in order to govern and coordinate policies in a multi-level governance system, legislative practices are less used. Focus is needed on more flexible policy-making methods. Schout & Jordan (2005) note that the focus of the European Commission on governance issues means less central control and more network-led steering, relying more on learning practices. Involving networks, expert groups and various advocacy groups in policy-making, expands access to decisions and power. Egan (2009) suggests that policy learning across countries alters traditional modes of governance, reduces transaction costs, enhances efficiency and eventually creates new norms and values.

Rationales for policy learning influence learning type and the use of expert knowledge. Radaelli (2009) and Boswell (2008) argue that an organization under pressure to deliver results will care primarily about *instrumental uses* of knowledge and therefore learns instrumentally. Several other authors have also documented this type of learning (e.g. Whiteman, 1985; Amara, et al., 2004; Weible, 2008). The aim is to improve existing policies or produce new policies that work (Oakley, 2000; Sanderson, 2002; Nutley, et al., 2002). The instrumental use occurs when expert-based information directly affects

policymaking directly. This occurs in problem-solving situations where rational decisions need to be made. Amara, et al., (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).

Societal pressure for policy learning can lead to *the political* use of knowledge. This type of knowledge-use is practiced when decision makers rely selectively and strategically on expert-based information to legitimize previously made policy decisions. The aim is to seek legitimacy, not to improve policy. According to Radaelli (2009), political learning can lead to three different usages of knowledge: 'strategic' (i.e. to increase control on the regulators), 'substantiating' (i.e. to support a position for or against regulation), and 'symbolic' (i.e. to send signals or for blame-shifting purposes). In cases, when there is pressure to become or remain a respectable member of international environments, *symbolic* learning is expected. 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.

3.2.3 Theories of Policy Learning

The literature is rich in suggesting theories for policy learning. Several authors have offered approaches to conceptualizing policy learning, examining conditions, subjects and focus of learning, explaining who learns, what and to what extent (e.g. May, 1992; Bennett & Howlett, 1992; Grin & Loeber, 2007; Zito & Schout, 2009). Each author has a distinct approach to learning.

There are two main theoretical streams on conceptualizing policy learning (See Table 3). The rationalist stream of theories looks at policy learning as a process of policy change using the lens of a political organization (e.g. Sanderson, 2006; Nutley, et al., 2007). These rationalist theories focus on presenting research-based evidence to explain how organizations learn and how policy change occurs. The approach is characterized by a linear view where certain inputs lead to new policies. Thelen (2003) critically notes that such radical changes can be only expected in times of external shocks and crises that fundamentally question the efficiency and legitimacy of existing policies.

As noted above, policy learning cannot always be explained in terms of change and clear evidence of the policy learning leading to a specific modification in policies. The social-constructivist approach of policy learning challenges the linear view. It suggests that

knowledge is socially constructed and is a product of human interpretations shaped by the interactions of knowledge, environmental conditions and political actions. According to this view, policy learning is not always a matter of a certain output in policies but rather should be viewed as a process that emphasizes professional development and growth in knowledge. Table 4 presents a framework that synthesizes the main features of both perspectives and will be used to analyze research findings.

Table 4. Main characteristics of two distinct approaches on expertise and policy learning. (Author's conceptualization).

Characteristic	Evidence-based approach	Value-based approach
Level	Organizational	Individual
Role of expert	knowledge producer	knowledge mediator
Mechanism	presenting evidence for change	updating one's policy beliefs
Driver for change	policy problem	social interaction
Outcome	instrumental change in policies	gradual shifts in policy paradigms

3.2.3.1 The Rationalist View

The rationalist view of policy learning is a goal-oriented, evidence-based approach that studies learning processes leading to more effective policies at the organizational level (Bennett & Howlett, 1992; Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Grin & Loeber, 2007). This perspective argues that policymaking and practice should be ideally based on research evidence presented in the form of systematic reviews, incorporating syntheses of the findings from all relevant studies that are conducted in a methodologically rigorous ways (Hammersley, 2005). The ideal form of knowledge is derived through empirically tested and validated methodology (preferably quantitative). Four theories of rational explanations on policy-learning are examined below – political learning, learning government, social learning (*punctuated equilibrium*), and policy transfer.

The Political Learning theory by Heclo (1974) explains policy change in terms of conflict and rivalry between governments. Political uncertainty triggers the need to learn and improve. Heclo defines learning as "a relatively enduring alteration in behaviour that results from experience; usually this alteration is conceptualized as a change in response made in reaction to some perceived stimulus" (Heclo, 1974, p. 306). The main actors are "policy middlemen" in the government who have the access to information, ideas and as a result, have the power to disseminate these ideas and influence policy process leading to change. Learning occurs through behavioural adaptations that take place automatically as a result of accumulation of experience. The primary learners, however, are the organizations (governments) that consume the knowledge provided to them by policy brokers (e.g. experts). As the environment changes, policy-makers must gain knowledge from experts and adapt their policies accordingly. This approach is relevant to the EU, as experts are seen as political brokers operating between a government

apparatus (EU government) and society (member states), they possess knowledge and can advocate for preferred policies beneficial to their governments. According to Bennett and Howlett (1992) the main criticism of this theory involves an absence of the criteria by which one gets to be selected as political middlemen (expert).

The Learning Government theory (Etheredge & Short, 1983) focuses on government as a unit of analysis and understands learning as a collective endeavour by which government enhances its intelligence and effectiveness in operations. Learning takes place only if there is clear evidence of increased sophistication of thought and increased effectiveness of behaviour. This theory ignores the influence of societal actors in the policy process, recognizing the role of administrative officials at both senior and junior levels of public service. The expert is viewed as a bureaucrat within a government apparatus that has a great influence over various policy changes. It recognizes the role of knowledge in learning processes, but indicates that knowledge is considered only if there is a conflict or a problem that drives government officials to conduct research on how the particular problem could be solved. Etheredge & Short distinguish between three levels at which learning might occur: the level of the individual decision maker, of a team and of the collective. This approach is useful for considering various levels in which learning can happen. The weakness of this approach lies in describing the learning process only within the government and not taking into account any external factors (e.g. societal actors) that might shape the process.

The Social Learning (*punctuated equilibrium theory*) (e.g. Hall, 1993; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993) represents a shift away from the approach where power and conflict were seen as main drivers for change. This theory sees the interface between society and bureaucracy as a factor leading to policy learning. Hall (1993) believes that learning and policy change is largely triggered by societal developments where an adjustment is made in goals or policy techniques as a response to past experiences and new information. Hall (1993) sees ideas as the main trigger for change. Ideas emerge through societal debate that eventually transfer into political elections. Change in government policies occurs as a result of this process, sometimes seen as a revolution or punctuated equilibrium. The principal agents of learning are the experts operating in a given field of policy (Hall, 1993). Knowledge that is acquired involves specific information about programs, techniques and instruments, but profound changes occur when ideas influence policy paradigms.

Table 3. Main theoretical perspectives on policy learning. (Author's summary)

	Policy Learning Theory	Goal of Theory	Nature of experts	Type of knowledge used in learning	Outcome
RATIONALIST/EVIDENCE-BASED VIEW	**Political Learning** (Heclo, 1974)	explain policy change in organization	political brokers	practical knowledge (e.g. analogy, lessons learned, past experiences)	policy change driven by environment
	Learning Government (Etheredge & Short, 1983)	explain government learning	administrative officials (senior and junior level) within government	scientific knowledge, verbal information (intuition); creativity, applied practical knowledge, good judgment	policy change driven by a conflict or a problem
	Social learning (*punctuated equilibrium*) (e.g. Hall, 1993; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993)	explain the role of society (social ideas) in policy change	field experts	revolution as a result of advocating social ideas and power struggle	policy change driven by shift in ideas or paradigms
	Policy transfer (e.g. Bennett & Howlett, 1992; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Stone, 1999; 2004; Berry & Berry, 2007)	explain program transfer	societal actors	utilization and transfer of knowledge	evidence-based policy change
SOCIAL-CONSTRUCTIVIST/VALUE-BASED VIEW	**Policy-oriented learning (*advocacy coalition framework*)** (Sabatier, 1986, 1988)	explain policy change	state and non-state actors who form epistemic communities	technical knowledge; professional knowledge that is expressed through shared values and beliefs	change and adaptation in secondary values
	Communities of practice (e.g. Wenger 1998, 2000; Brown & Duguid, 1991, 1998; Carlile, 2002)	explain learning and knowledge generation	people involved in social interaction sharing a concern or interest towards a certain topic	tacit knowledge, situated learning	mutual developed knowledge that helps to operate in a community
	Collaborative Governance (Connick & Innes, 2003; Innes & Booher, 2003; Ansell & Gash, 2008)	explain collective decision-making through learning practices	state and non-state actors who form networks	local, contextual knowledge that variety of experts bring along	restructuring policy networks, change in policy discourse, emergence of social capital, collective learning, increased capacity for action

Policy transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Stone, 2004; Berry & Berry, 2007) is a framework developed to explain policy import. Policy transfer is defined as a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, p. 344). It is a term closely related to lesson drawing, diffusion and emulation, where the goal is to adopt an effective policy. This framework suggests that agents for governmental policy change are a large group of societal actors including policy entrepreneurs and experts, but also inter-governmental organizations, think tanks, transnational corporations, non-governmental institutions and consultants. Knowledge involves instrumental expertise but also norms, attitudes and ideas that can be transferred (Stone, 2004). Policy transfers are made based on experiential knowledge about past policy experiences. Dolowitz & Marsh (1996) note that the more specific information agents have about how a program operates in another location the easier it is to transfer.

Dill & Van Vught (2010) propose the *mutual learning* strategy that relates closely to the policy transfer concept but is developed in the context of research policy. Capacity to learn serves as a focal point in the transition to the knowledge-based society. The authors see mutual learning as promising policy strategy enhancing effectiveness and improving benefits to society. Dill & Van Vught (2010) note that there are currently two dominant public policy approaches that are employed by the national governments in research policy: prioritization and competition. According to their view there is a third, presently underemployed strategy that could be seen as a powerful instrument for contributing to the economic development of countries in a more sustainable and prolific way - the approach of mutual learning. Mutual learning emphasizes improvement of policies by learning from the best practices of others. Van Vught (2010) suggests that national governments that take the global competition process seriously have recognized what strategic advantages contain the ability to learn and obtain new knowledge. Technological change is not just an economic success but also a social process involving complex processes of learning, competence development and the acquisition of new skills. The weakness of this strategy is its limited applicability only to closely similar political contexts. In addition, it assumes that learning is based on a continuous search for improvement, which might be an overly idealistic assumption.

As demonstrated above, the location of the agency of power is also a complex matter and can be interpreted differently. Experts, individuals with specific knowledge and professional experience, can be persons located within the government apparatus (learning government), outside in the society (policy-oriented learning, policy transfer) or bridging these two spheres (political learning, policy-oriented learning, social learning). The main focus in rational policy learning is demonstrating that a measurable change in policies within an organization has happened and can be documented. Knowledge is viewed as a means leading to policy change not something that is an aim in itself, leading to new ideas and innovation.

3.2.3.2 The Social-Constructivist View

The social-constructivist approach problematizes the issue of what counts as reliable knowledge. According to this view knowledge is socially constructed and culturally and historically contingent (Sanderson, 2002). The central factor driving learning is active participation and engagement of individuals in social interaction. This approach focuses on individuals who share the same concerns and interests. As a result, policy-making becomes a complex phenomenon, where scientific knowledge cannot claim unique and sole objectivity. Policy learning involves a socially conditioned process of developing cognitive frames, which question the goals, and assumptions of policies (Sanderson, 2002). May (1992, p. 333) notes that policy learning is based on gaining knowledge, which is manifested in the capacity to draw lessons from the experiences and problems associated with certain policy content, goals, and interventions. Pemberton (2003) suggests that learning may not lead necessarily to changes in policy but may provoke new policy debates that change the dominant policy paradigm. Capano & Howlett (2009) describe changes in the process; policy actors' relationships; basic policy values and policy goals. All these changes are different from each other and do not always translate into changes in particular policies.

These changes are not always clearly identifiable and therefore difficult to examine. As noted by Toens & Landwehr (2009) policy learning is bound to contextual circumstances, which are not guaranteed in every actual situation and learning environment. It is often the political actors' trust in the willingness to learn and change and their ability to compromise, that facilitates learning. In addition, policy learning is aiming for the common good based on democratic processes that may vary depending on the country. Three theories that represent social-constructivist view – policy-oriented learning (*advocacy coalition framework*), communities of practice, theory of collaborative governance - are examined below.

Policy-oriented learning (*advocacy coalition framework*) (e.g. Weiss, 1977; Sabatier, 1986, 1988) features policy networks and policy communities formed around shared policy beliefs. Learning, according to Sabatier, is viewed from the behaviourist perspective in enduring alterations of thought or behavioural intentions which result from experience and which deal with the revision of one's belief system (Sabatier, 1988). The goal is not strictly to change policies but to support and advocate for one's values. According to Sabatier there are three structural categories of policy belief systems: the *deep core*, the *policy core* and *secondary aspects*. The deep core reflects basic personal philosophy (e.g. priority of basic criteria such as freedom, love, knowledge, health, beauty) and is very resistant to change. The policy core suggests basic fundamental policy positions and strategies (e.g. environmental protection versus economic development). To change a policy core is difficult but can occur as a result of some external changes in the coalition. Secondary aspects are seen as instrumental decisions (budgetary allocations, administrative rules) to implement policy cores.

Weiss's (1977) work lays the foundation for the advocacy coalition framework. Weiss suggests that the learning happens slowly through the accumulation of knowledge. This indirectly affects policy by altering decision makers' beliefs about the causes of problems and preferred solutions. The argument is that a single research study or report rarely has a significant impact on the beliefs of political actors or on any single policy decision but policy is affected indirectly by accumulating, and gradually altering the belief systems of the actors involved in a policy process.

According to this view, experts who share the same belief system form an advocacy coalition. Advocacy coalitions can be composed of a variety of state and non-state actors. Membership is defined by two main criteria: knowledge and interaction. The expert's position in the organization or institution is not important - it can be a government official or somebody situated outside in the society (e.g. media, researcher). Learning involves improving one's understanding on the core beliefs, refining one's understanding of causal relationships between values and responding to value challenges. The nature of knowledge is primarily experiential, sometimes scientific (to find sources for confirming values). Knowledge is used for the drive to realize one's belief systems by better implementation of public policies.

Communities of Practice is a learning theory that was introduced by Lave & Wenger (1991) and developed further by Wenger (1998) that views engagement in social practice as a fundamental process that shapes the learner. The primary unit of analysis is not the individual or social institution but rather the community that people form and participate in as they pursue shared initiatives over time (Wenger, 1998). The Community of Practice concept does not focus on the result but analyzes the process that shapes the learner. Wenger defines the communities of practice as "*groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by integrating on an ongoing basis"* (Wenger, et al., 2002, p. 4). These are loosely connected, informal and self-managed units, even when they are highly institutionalized. It is the social community of learners that is the unit of analysis in this theory. Communities of practice connect people from different organizations as well as across independent fields. The primary purpose of communities of practice is to develop knowledge. According to Nutley, et al., (2007) this approach highlights the importance of tacit knowledge, situated learning and situated action in understanding how knowledge and expertise are nurtured in a practice context. Cultivating communities of practice is a strategic way to manage and enhance knowledge. Gaining new knowledge takes place through active social engagement that enhances learning. Communities of practice function through mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared contributions to the knowledge (Wenger, et al., 2002).

There are power differences among community members (Lave & Wenger, 1991). An experienced expert has more power than a newcomer. The power derives from the ability to contribute to the knowledge of the community, rather than formal authority to control resources, give orders or grant promotions. The criticism of this theory involves

limiting views on knowledge construction. According to the theory, individual knowledge construction is not primary, as long as one becomes part of a community and learns to function in that community (Brown & Duguid, 1998). That approach would be too narrow to explain innovative approaches to knowledge creation.

In the *Theory of Collaborative Governance,* policy-making is facilitated through dialogue in a consensus-oriented decision-making process (e.g. Connick & Innes, 2003; Innes & Booher, 2003; Ansell & Gash, 2008). The theory describes the process of collaborative policy-making focusing specifically on learning. Connick & Innes (2003, p. 9) understand collaborative governance as a process that includes "representatives of all relevant interests" and "engages various participants as they learn and interact". Experts in this theory represent variety of stakeholders who come from both private and public sectors. By participating in collaborative policy-making, experts establish new networks through which they disseminate knowledge. Innes & Booher (2003) emphasize the importance of local contextual knowledge that stakeholders bring to the policy process. Ansell & Gash (2008) indicate that as knowledge has become increasingly specialized and institutional infrastructures become more complex and interdependent, the demand for collaboration has increased (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Learning is seen as central to this process. Experts must seek mutually useful policy solutions that can satisfy all interests. Learning happens through authentic dialogue. The theory proposes *diversity* and *interdependence* as two crucial conditions in establishing an authentic dialogue among participants. Each stakeholder brings diverse interests and competing policy agendas to the process. At the same time participants are dependent on each other, as the policy agenda cannot be taken forward without relying on each other's knowledge, financial resources or access to information (Innes & Booher, 2003). Such negotiations lead to learning, which translates to restructuring of policy networks among participants and change in policy discourse, the emergence of social capital, empathetic relationships among participants, collective policy learning (what has been learnt) and increased capacity for innovation.

In conclusion, policy learning is thus seen as a complex, multi-tiered phenomenon, which can affect decision-making organizations and processes, specific programs and instruments, but also values and ideas that are used to implement policy. There are two main streams of policy learning theories – the rational (evidence-based) approach that emphasizes policy change in the organization (e.g. government) and the social-constructivist approach that looks at policy process and analyzes individual knowledge enhancement. Each of these approaches provides important insights for analyzing and understanding the role of the individual in the OMC policy approach.

3.2.3 Policy Learning Mechanisms

Policy learning is a part of the interactive process of policy-making. The literature describes numerous strategies that participants use in order to learn and gain new knowledge. Some of the most frequently described strategies, such as comparing/benchmarking, imitation, lesson-drawing, active participation and value acceptance are examined below. There are two additional behaviours that have been associated with policy learning - non-learning and blocked learning. Those are explained as well.

Comparing/benchmarking

Literature suggests that comparing and benchmarking are methods that facilitate policy learning (Kaiser & Prange, 2004; Paasi, 2005; Kerber & Eckardt, 2007). Policy comparison occurs when governments map and learn from practices that are seen to be better performing than one's own. This approach focuses essentially on identifying best practices in policies. Mapping best practices is the core activity of the OMC process, therefore scholars studying European integration processes have increasingly focused on examining this method. Paasi (2005) argues that the exploitation of policy knowledge from other countries through benchmarking reduces the search costs and provides significant sources for policy improvement. Smith (2001) notes that cross-country comparisons are very important because they offer one of the few ways in which policy-makers can assess performance outcomes. Borrás & Conzelmann (2007) see a political undertone in such an approach. They suggest that peer reviews and policy dialogues, such as seen in the OMC initiative, seek to gradually to re-orientate domestic policies. It creates the possibility for governments to advocate for certain reform agendas. Similarly, Morano-Foadi (2008) suggests that benchmarking strategies are used to enhance the European dimension in policies, spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU integration goal.

Scholars note that the application of knowledge gained through best practices is very risky because comparisons need to take into account the context and diversity of individual countries (Smith, 2001; Kaiser & Prange, 2004). There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution and any overarching single 'guide' or indicator for performance ought to be tailored for the specific policy context.

Imitation

Imitation is largely a copying or mimicking strategy where a country adopts a program without any changes. Imitation takes place when policy makers consider a variety of policies that have been proven successful elsewhere, and choose to adopt examples that are most appropriate for their own circumstances (Thun, 2004). Some view imitation strategies as a desire for efficiency, focusing on improving policy performance (Jacoby, 2000; Kerber & Eckardt, 2007). Some see imitation processes as leading to

policy innovation (Lundvall, et al., 2002; Kerber & Eckardt, 2007; Toens & Landwehr, 2009). The authors argue that when an individual country takes risks to test entirely new policy strategies, it might abandon routinized patterns of behaviour, cultural path dependencies and established power structures leading to innovative policy adaptations. Some authors are quite critical regarding imitation practices. Toots (2007), for example, notes that imitation can lead to the neglect of one's own experiences, if entirely new strategies taken from a different context are adopted. In addition, Toens & Landwehr (2009) argue that imitation is frequently aimed not so much at promoting a common good, but to increase the prestige of governments that seek quick success by introducing best practices (Toens & Landwehr, 2009). They further argue that imitation for prestige only might limit inherent improvement-oriented learning.

Lesson-drawing

Lesson-drawing is a particular type of learning in which policy-makers learn from both positive and negative experiences of others (Rose, 1991). Lesson-drawing allows policy-makers to draw useful examples of how to deal with policy problems, guiding actions (Rose, 2002). Lesson drawing is applied when policy-makers are confronted with specific problems, which makes them specifically look for solutions and study how others have responded to similar problems (Rose, 1991). As stated by Bennett (1997, p. 228) "*lesson-drawing is rational, calculated and voluntary learning*". Compared to imitation, this type of learning mechanism is more strategic, focused and area specific. It is often aimed at direct application. Zito (2009) views lesson-drawing as a way to explain how programs change. This type of learning involves a more instrumental form of policy learning where actors and organisations seek to improve their performance over time without changing fundamental values and perceptions. Rose (1991) has proposed three phases in lesson-drawing – scanning programs, collecting empirical evidence of the programs and then evaluating prospective success.

Views on the applicability of the lesson-drawing approach differ. Rose (1991) is quite critical about lesson-drawing, noting that there is no assurance that a lesson drawn will be both desirable and practical. Ambiguity emerges because lesson-drawing reflects policy-makers' goals at a certain point in time and those goals can easily change. Also, politicians' views differ on what lessons are desirable, leading to instability across time. In his later work, Rose (2002) views lesson-drawing in a much more positive light, indicating that it is an efficient and evidence-based approach to improve national policy. Radaelli (2004) views criticism of lesson-drawing positively. He argues that because in lesson-drawing all limitations are so clearly articulated, these limitations can be avoided by being more context-sensitive and analytic. He notes that compared to the benchmarking approach, lesson-drawing recognizes different pathways to success. In his analysis of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) for policies Radaelli (2004) demonstrates how for some countries impact assessment means production of good cost-benefit analyses, while other countries aim for initiating institutional reform, greater legitimacy, improving state-society relations or administrative cooperation. Rose (2002) concludes

that lesson-drawing is based on empirical observations on what works and the capacity to apply it to the domestic contexts.

Active participation

Active participation is a mechanism that is a central in education literature, which states that people learn the best when they are actively involved in the learning process (e.g. Pratton & Hales, 1986; Johnson, et al., 1991). Active participation in public policy literature is featured in the communities of practice approach. Lave and Wegner (1991) describe those as groups of individuals who work, learn, or socialize together by sharing insights and developing a shared knowledge as a consequence of participation. Active engagement implies two-way communication and mutual influence between stakeholders (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Through active participation, individuals develop a common understanding of belonging and they enhance area-specific expertise (Wenger, 1999). Ansell & Gash (2008) note that when some stakeholders do not have the capacity, organization, status, or resources to participate, or to participate on an equal footing with other stakeholders, the stronger actors will dominate the learning process. Incentives to participate depend in part upon stakeholder expectations about whether the collaborative processes will yield meaningful results, particularly against the balance of time and energy that collaboration requires (Schneider, et al., 2003; Warner, 2006). Ansell and Gash (2008) note that broad participation is not simply tolerated but must be actively sought because exclusion of critical stakeholders is a key reason for policy failure.

Value acceptance

In policy discussions, there are usually a variety of policy beliefs and values represented. In value acceptance, behaviour policy-makers learn about different worldviews, become more aware of the reasoning behind those diverse views and gradually start accommodating those views. Policy-making in value acceptance is oriented towards a common good, and in the transparent management of conflicts over goals. Toens & Landwehr (2009) describe “deliberative learning”, noting that such learning strategies promise broader incorporation of different interests, values and belief systems. The authors see the results of deliberative learning strategies as becoming considerate of differences in the form of conflicting interests, perspectives and value systems. Sabatier (1986, 1988) describes “policy-oriented learning” where individuals exercise their policy beliefs – core beliefs and secondary beliefs. He recognizes policy learning when members of various coalitions seek to better understand the world in order to further their policy objectives. They will tend to resist information suggesting that their basic beliefs may be invalid and/or unattainable, but they will use formal policy analyses primarily to elaborate on secondary beliefs. Value acceptance refers to revising belief systems by incorporating some new elements into the system such as aspects of opponents' beliefs.

Other behaviours associated with policy learning

Non-learning is a mechanisms in which learning faces obstacles before application. It indicates that individual learning has not taken place. There are several reasons for non-learning. According to Heclo (1974) policy-makers and institutions may be unwilling or unable to adapt to new information. Dunlop (2009) analyzes reasons for non-learning and suggests organizational culture and the decision-makers' cognitive capacity to revisit policies as main factors in non-learning. He cites an example of organizational culture dominated by scientists that does not recognize the value of different knowledge. A second example describes decision-makers who are not willing to enter into a dialogue with policy actors. Zito & Schout (2009) note that in non-learning, decision-makers could be satisfied with the current policy situation and are not looking to initiate change.

Blocked learning is defined as a situation in which there is strong resistance to the adjustment of cognitive and behavioural changes (Leroy & Ramanantsoa, 1997).
In blocked learning, cognitive change in an individual occurs but structures, interests or current worldviews block organizational change (Zito & Schout, 2009). In addition power struggles, organizational resistance or simply a lack of resources might provoke blocked learning (Leroy & Ramanantsoa, 1997). Blocked learning acknowledges that individual learning is not enough. It must infiltrate the thinking of key decision-makers of the group or organization to trigger policy change while busy policy-makers tend to adhere to routine (Rose, 1991). Zito & Schout (2009) conclude that there is a time dimension in blocked learning. Learning may translate into policy change, but this process may take time to occur and influence broader changes.

Overall, these learning mechanisms help to understand how knowledge is gained and implemented. While some learning mechanisms are focused more on instrumental application (e.g. lesson-drawing, imitation), others embrace individual knowledge exchange based on policy beliefs (e.g. value acceptance, active participation). Some help to determine useful policy approaches (e.g. comparing/benchmarking). Blocked learning and non-learning mechanisms provide insights into why in some cases knowledge translation into policy change is limited or might take additional time. The next section focuses on examining additional factors that influence learning and learning outcomes.

3.2.4 Factors that Influence Learning

Learning does not happen in isolation from a particular context and surrounding environments. As noted above, there are several rationales that motivate people to learn – environmental uncertainty, crisis and dissatisfaction with existing policies,

societal pressure to improve the need to coordinate policies between different levels of governance to solve policy problems. In addition to these drivers, the literature suggests that there are several factors that might help enhance individual learning experience, or serve as a hindrance to learning.

The learning environment is seen as an influential factor to individual learning. Jervis (1976) and Blatner, et al., (2001) emphasize the importance of creating a *supportive learning environment* for participants. He describes a situation where cognitive and behavioural processes fail due to a learning environment that is either too comfortable or too hostile with the result that no learning takes place. Hedberg (1981) suggests that rapidly changing environments with information overload create poor conditions for learning. Innes & Booher (2003) state that learning emerges when the topic under discussion is *interesting and directly relevant* to the individuals. For learning to occur participants need to be engaged in a task. They describe a situation where meetings were well attended if there were discussions directly related stakeholders' interests, problems and strategies. Other meetings with long agendas and formal presentations were not well attended.

Wolman (1992) observes that policy learning is based on patterns of *information flows*, *geographic proximity* and *linguistic or cultural similarities*. Toots (2007) examines the role of Finland as a policy learning base for Estonia in education policies. The geographic and linguistic proximity played a crucial role in transferring best practices from one country to another. Toots (2007) also noted the importance of *ideology* as a factor in policy learning. The neoliberal way of thought in Estonia compared to the social-democratic approach Finland took towards liberal market economy in early 2000s, made Estonian policy learning practices from Finland selective. The EU became a new learning base for Estonia because of ideological proximity. Johnson (1992) asserts *that institutional norms, habits and rules* play a major role in determining how people relate to each other and how they learn and use their knowledge. Lundvall, et al., (2002) follows this line of thought and states that the institutional setting has a major impact upon how stakeholders behave and perform as a whole, impacting innovation potential. Common (2004) takes a different perspective on learning factors and cautions against making any generalizations. He indicates that policy learning is very *country-specific*. He suggests that countries are highly individualistic in their approaches to policy learning, and there are varying degrees of formality in the ways in which the search for the 'best policy' is conducted.

Sabatier (1988, pp. 155-156) has suggested several hypotheses in which policy learning is most likely to happen. According to his view, policy-oriented learning across belief systems is most likely when there is an *intermediate level of informed conflict* between the coalitions where each coalition has the technical resources to engage in such a debate; and that the conflict is between secondary aspects of one belief system and core elements of the other or, alternatively, between important secondary aspects of the two belief systems. He also suggests that policy learning is related to the *prestige of*

the topic. Prestigious topics are likely to trigger the interest of professionals to participate and share the norms and their professional knowledge among participants. These interactions enhance learning. In his view, problems for which accepted *quantitative performance indicators* exist are more conducive to policy-oriented learning than those in which performance indicators are generally qualitative and quite subjective. The last point he makes relates to the scientific field of the topic: problems involving *natural systems* are more conducive to policy-oriented learning than those involving purely social systems because in the former many of the critical variables are *not* themselves active strategists and because controlled experimentation is more feasible. According to Sabatier, it is important to consider these factors in understanding the phenomenon of policy learning.

3.2.5 Policy Learning Outcomes

There is no uniform understanding in specifying whether or not learning has occurred. The understanding of learning outcomes is grounded on whether an author supports an evidence-based or value-based perspective on policy learning. Zito & Schout (2009) summarize both perspectives in stating that over time social exchanges and learning generate changes in information, goals, values, behaviours, structures, policies and outcomes.

In an evidence-based perspective, the learning outcome is translated into policy change. Bennett & Howlett (1992) assert that we may only know that learning has taken place because policy change has taken place. The authors distinguish between learning about new ideas (leading to policy change), learning about processes (leading to organizational change) and learning about programs (leading to program change). May (1992) takes a more fluid approach and argues that recognition of the limitations of a particular policy instrument or implementation approaches constitutes policy learning. Etheredge & Short (1983), explaining the learning government phenomena, state that government learning can be defined by two specific criteria: the growth of intelligence, and the (related) growth of policy effectiveness. Policy effectiveness is emphasized in Paasi's work as well. The author notes that the induced policy learning results in better policies and better performance (Paasi, 2005). Wyatt & Grimmeisen (2002) describe two broad stages in policy learning that culminate in policy transfer. First stage learning involves scanning, selecting and understanding so as to identify policy innovations from a range of developments in different countries. Learning is demonstrated by an improved understanding of comparable policies. A second stage of learning attempts to learn from the experience of others, followed by a decision to copy or reject a certain policy.

The value-based perspective takes a process-based approach and focuses on individuals. Zito & Schout (2009) note that learning emphasizes change at the level of individuals whereby human interaction leads to group/organization understanding. The authors

note that in order to evaluate learning, a cognitive change must occur in an actor's understanding, as well as a behavioural adaptation to this new knowledge. Egan (2009) notes that just because policy change is not evident it does not mean that deliberation, learning and assessment did not take place. May (1992) suggests that if learning is defined as alteration of policy beliefs, measuring causal beliefs and its change over time is very difficult. Innes & Connick (2003) suggest the need to follow the change in policy discourse, as evidence of learning. As noted by Haas (1992), ideas are influential in policy discussions, and collaborative learning practices where ideas get translated might help to shape values that translate into shifts in policy discourse over time. Several authors suggest looking for the establishment of new policy networks or "epistemic communities" among policy actors that have not been in close contact before (Haas, 1992; Wenger, 1998; Innes & Connick, 2003; Nutley, et al., 2007). Professional networks and "epistemic communities" can serve as an important outcome of policy learning by facilitating ideas, knowledge and innovation and contributing to better information flow between various actors. Several authors assert that learning has happened when policy preferences have changed. For example, May (1992) describes social learning and states that learning has taken place when policy beliefs have been altered or reaffirmed in light of policy experience. Specific evidence includes redefined policy objectives, changes in target groups, changes in interest group alignments, and alterations in rights associated with the policy. Similarly, Eising (2002) suggests that as a result of these learning processes, member states' basic policy preferences can change.

Some authors supporting value-based approach are critical of the expectations of effective policies resulting from policy learning. Egan (2009) and Radaelli (2009) assert that learning should not be correlated with policy improvement. There are differences in understanding what counts as improvement based on one's values and policy beliefs and those might change often.

In conclusion, the outcomes of policy learning are not easily detectable. The process is not linear, in which clear distinctions can be made where a certain piece of knowledge translates into policy change. There are several factors influencing the path of knowledge. Schout's (2009) research on the EU's policy-making indicates that different levels of policy-making and different stakeholders (e.g. regional, national, supranational) with different policy preferences and normative beliefs complicate the process. He asserts that it is one thing to set the agenda in one stage of the EU decision-making chain, but how one sustains learning and change across a number of levels is a fundamental EU challenge. Zito & Schout (2009) note that there is a need to consider how well the policy ideas fit with domestic institutions and interests and into the configuration of the broader national institutions.

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature review that is presented in Chapters 2 and 3 provides a contextual background to the current study. Chapter 2 focuses on outlining the key aspects of the European Union's research policy and the Open Method of Coordination initiative, setting a stage for the case. Chapter 3 explains the theoretical perspectives on expertise and policy learning, developing a conceptual framework for analysis.

Policy-making in a contemporary society is characterized by complexity (Wallace, et al., 2010). The state no longer has the monopoly in governing process. Scholars have documented the emergence of expert networks that increasingly influence policy decisions (Sabatier, 1986; Newman, 2003; Veiga & Amaral 2009). However, the prevailing tendency to engage in evidence-based policy has left the process of policy-making itself in the shade. Policy conversations are largely dependent on the participating individuals, their policy beliefs, values, interests and attitudes while they engage and learn during policy debates. This study addresses the gap by focusing on the policy learning process, collecting empirical evidence and analyzing how individuals engage in learning and as a result, shape policies. The Open Method of Coordination initiative in the European Union's research policy provides a formal setting for examining policy learning.

Today, research policy in the European Union has become of utmost importance in achieving economic competitiveness in the region. This has been declared in various policy documents (e.g. Lisbon Strategy, Europe 2020, Horizon 2020, Innovation Union), strategic initiatives (creation of European Research Area, 3% Action Plan) and monetary commitments. There are three phases during which research and technological advancement have served as the building blocks for gradual regional integration. During the industrialization era (1950-1970) research cooperation was organized casually among a few wealthy European countries. The emphasis was on nuclear energy research and technological development. Between 1980-1990, active region-building began by introducing the Framework Program to centrally fund research projects from the EU's member states. Several legal initiatives (official declaration of the EU, common currency) further enhanced political and economic integration. Starting in the 2000s, coordination of research policies has become a top priority for the EU, while member-states' governments still hold the legal authority and decision-making power. In order to enhance policy coordination, "soft policy" approaches of expert groups composed of the member-states representatives are increasingly used. Expert groups do not formally make political decisions, but feed the decision-making processes by giving expert advice, providing scientific knowledge, sharing practical experience and serving as forums for the exchange of information.

The Open Method of Coordination is a non-binding bottom-up policy initiative where member-states' experts engage in thematic policy debates for mutual learning purposes.

The OMC in research policy started in 2003. The process was coordinated by the Scientific and Technical Research Committee (CREST), which was renamed ERAC in 2010. Since 2003, six yearly cycles of OMC have been carried out, discussing a variety of policy issues such as fiscal measures in research, internationalization of research cooperation, intellectual property issues, research links to industry, creation of research intensive small and medium enterprises (SME) and university research excellence, among others. While there has been emphasis on best practices in policies using quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure achievement, the initial goal of the OMC is to facilitate discussions and enhance cooperation among the member states to shape a shared understanding of common policies (Van Vught, 2010).

The effectiveness of the OMC method has been primarily examined in terms of instrumental policy change at the national and European level. Lacking in this debate is a consideration of less visible and measurable change, which is crucial in understanding longer-term policy effects. In order to clarify the impact of the OMC, the author has created a theoretical approach that focuses on an evidence-based approach and a value-based approach in policy learning. This framework allows for addressing diverse views, mechanisms, drivers and outcomes of the process.

This framework emerged as a result of reviewing the theoretical literature on expertise and policy learning. The evidence-based approach focuses on policy change at the organizational level. It views policy learning in terms of instrumental outcomes that are measured by clear evidence proving effectiveness of the method (e.g. policy adoption in national policies based on examples in other countries). This approach views the expert as a scientist or a government bureaucrat who produces and owns knowledge necessary for policy decisions. The driver for policy learning is a particular policy problem that drives governments to seek out new effective knowledge, learn from it and change policies accordingly.

The value-based approach views learning as a social process that involves individuals and their policy beliefs. Learning is seen as a process in itself, concerning cognitive behaviour and exchange of experiential knowledge. Knowledge is transmitted during social interactions that lead to updating one's knowledge on worldviews, norms and policy beliefs. Experts are viewed as mediators of knowledge that allocate, translate and disseminate relevant information to decision-makers. Based on shared policy views, experts form policy networks -'epistemic communities' – through which ideas are advocated to policy-makers. Based on one the theories in a value-based approach, indicators for productive policy interactions involve shifts in policy discourse, creation of new policy networks and facilitation of collaborative policy learning (Connick & Innes, 2003; Innes & Booher, 2003; Ansell & Gash, 2008). The framework involving two distinct views on policy learning provides an analytical tool for examining the study results. The next chapter describes the methodology and research design for the study.

CHAPTER 4: Research Design

The overarching goal of this study is to examine experts' individual policy learning experiences and to gain a better understanding of how these experiences have shaped the EU's research policy. In order to investigate the nature of policy learning and examine the individual experiences of member-states' experts and the European Commission policy-makers, a qualitative case study approach has been adopted. The research design involved several interlinked steps that focused on obtaining relevant information from the policy documents and key informants interviews from three OMC expert groups.

In order to answer the main research question - **How do experts' individual policy learning experiences relate to the EU's research policy?** -, the following sub-questions inform the study: i) Who has access to the OMC working groups in the EU's research policy?; ii) What are the participants' rationales for participating in the OMC policy learning initiative?; iii) In what ways does the OMC process contribute to individual policy learning experiences?; iv) What impact has the OMC policy learning initiative had on the EU's research policy?

The study focuses on experts' experiences of policy learning, clarifying how policy learning occurs and what are the factors that influence the learning process. Therefore, the emphasis is on the process and the specific meaning that is created through a particular social experience. The exploratory nature of these research questions shaped the methodological approach of the study – a qualitative case study. The unit of analysis for this study is the OMC participants' individual experiences in policy learning. Policy learning is viewed as a cognitive and interactive process during which participants update their policy beliefs and experts are viewed as mediators of knowledge. Thus, an in-depth exploration of those processes can significantly clarify our understanding of policy change. It helps to investigate personal values of the experts and to gain an understanding of the knowledge types used, learning strategies applied and group dynamics witnessed. The qualitative case study method suits this type of research because it helps to examine narratives provided by the informants without manipulating their behaviour (Yin, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 2009).

4.1 Data Collection Methods

The research design to analyze the data followed several interlinked steps: 1) document analysis; 2) pilot study with the participants of one OMC expert group; 3) in-person and telephone interviews with participants in other two OMC expert group; 4) data analysis. Each of the methods and their relevance to the study will be discussed below.

4.1.1 Document Analysis

The first step in the research design involved conducting document analysis. Relevant documents were obtained through publicly available websites (e.g. Council of the European Union Resolutions, OMC group reports, CREST reports, CREST guidelines, European Commission green papers) and by personal contacts by email (e.g. experts *Curriculum Vitae*, minutes of meetings, templates of questionnaires, answers to questionnaires, group basis papers, group discussion papers, group draft agendas, group draft reports, experts' PowerPoint presentations). The complete list of documents analyzed is available in Appendix 1.

A content analysis (Budd, Thorp & Donohew, 1967; Krippendorf, 1980) was carried out to assess the content of these documents. This analysis offered insight relating to the general role of experts and served as a basis for the following research steps. Document analysis was first used to identify informants - country experts and the EC representatives involved in the OMC work. In addition, content analysis helped to reveal the detailed composition of the OMC groups - who were the leaders of the group, which countries decided to participate, which Units from DG Research were involved. It also helped to understand the nature of the policy recommendations – what were the main strategic directions and how much policy change was anticipated. Finally, content analysis was useful in examining the essence of the best practices - what practices were featured by whom, what knowledge was seen as relevant by the group. This information was vital when preparing for the interviews and most importantly in a later phase when analyzing findings.

4.1.2 Pilot Study

A pilot study with the OMC expert group (Group 2: "Internationalization of R&D expert group") was conducted in spring 2011. The primary goal of the pilot was to test if the focus of the research – individual policy learning experiences - is truly relevant and speaks to participants' actual experiences. The nature of the interview questions was intentionally broad, not automatically assuming that learning had occurred. The results confirmed the appropriateness of the study focus. Learning had taken place; the participants' experiences were rich and diverse. Informants were enthusiastic about sharing their experiences, providing specific examples of new knowledge related to their OMC topic. Several experts had changed their job-related positions since the OMC group work, and that allowed them to talk freely, without any constraints. The results indicated that learning experiences seemed to be related to the group leadership (how the work had been administered, the results achieved), experts' work-related knowledge (most came from government sector, very little diversity, easy to come to an agreement) and the nature of the topic (relevant to member-states, but a direct policy change was not expected). These factors were the main criteria for selecting the other

two OMC groups for the study. It was decided to include groups where there was more diversity in group composition (Group 1 & 3) and a group where the topic had more urgency in terms of direct policy change (Group 1). The literature suggested that learning across policy paradigms triggers learning (Sabatier 1986, 1988), having academics and a diverse pool of EC policy-makers among the informants was expected to provide a more nuanced picture about policy learning. In a similar vein, the urgency of policy results is a criterion that affects learning (Common 2004), hence the conscious choice for including a group with more urgency for policy results.

The pilot also helped to strengthen the interview protocol. The questions for the other two groups were exclusively directed towards describing how experts understood policy learning, asking to compare specific knowledge contributions (e.g. ministry officials versus academics versus Commission representatives), unfolding potential biases (e.g. representing national interests versus providing individual expertise), probing on examples of arguments in the group. Specific questions on describing experts' academic background and area-specific expertise were also included to clarify the foundation of one's expertise and rationales for choosing a particular individual to represent one's country.

The pilot study also indicated that more perspectives from the Commission side were needed (pilot included only 2 Commission representatives) for more balanced opinions. During the pilot, the Commission representatives were difficult to get in touch with. Many had moved to different positions since the OMC group and their email addresses were not publicly available. A research trip to Brussels was undertaken, to interview policy-makers at the European Commission DG Research, preferably those who had been involved in the OMC process and had been working in the Unit for several years.

4.1.3 Experts' Interviews

The third step of the study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with Group 1 and Group 3 informants. As the total number of group participants was relatively small (each group listed average of twenty-five (25) experts in their reports), an attempt was made to contact all country experts and invite them to participate in the study. A total of sixty-eight (68) invitations were sent out by email, including the pilot study (See Recruitment Letter in Appendix 2). Thirty-four (34) interviews were carried out, twelve (12) in the spring of 2011 (pilot study) and twenty-four (24) in the summer of 2012 (See List of interviews conducted in Appendix 5). Telephone interviews were conducted with total of twenty-six (26) country experts and two (2) European Commission representatives. In-person interviews with six (6) European Commissions' representatives were conducted in Brussels in the spring of 2012.

Experts indicating a willingness to participate in the study received an individual consent letter by email (See Appendix 3 & 4). As part of the consent letter, participants received nine open-ended interview questions about the OMC policy learning process. (For the list of interview questions please see Appendix 3 & 4).

Informants were first asked to describe their individual and country-specific rationales for participating in the OMC process. Then they were asked to elaborate on the knowledge that was provided by them and compare to what got actually used in the final policy document. The purpose of these questions was to learn what knowledge got valued and used in the policy learning process. The following question asked for a description of the group dynamics. This information helped to identify specific policy learning strategies but also was intended to detect the relationship between professional values and political interests that might determine the policy outcomes. Finally, the informants were asked to describe their views on the strengths and weaknesses of the OMC. This information was useful to identify potential factors that shape one's individual policy learning experience.

4.1.4 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed and interpreted following several phases, as suggested by Creswell (1998): 1) preparing data; 2) reading data; 3) detailed data analysis; 4) describing data and 5) interpreting data.

The first phase, data preparation, involved transcribing all the recorded interviews. Translation was needed once. One interview with a country expert representing Estonia was conducted in Estonian (researcher's and informant's mother tongue). The researcher translated the interview into English.

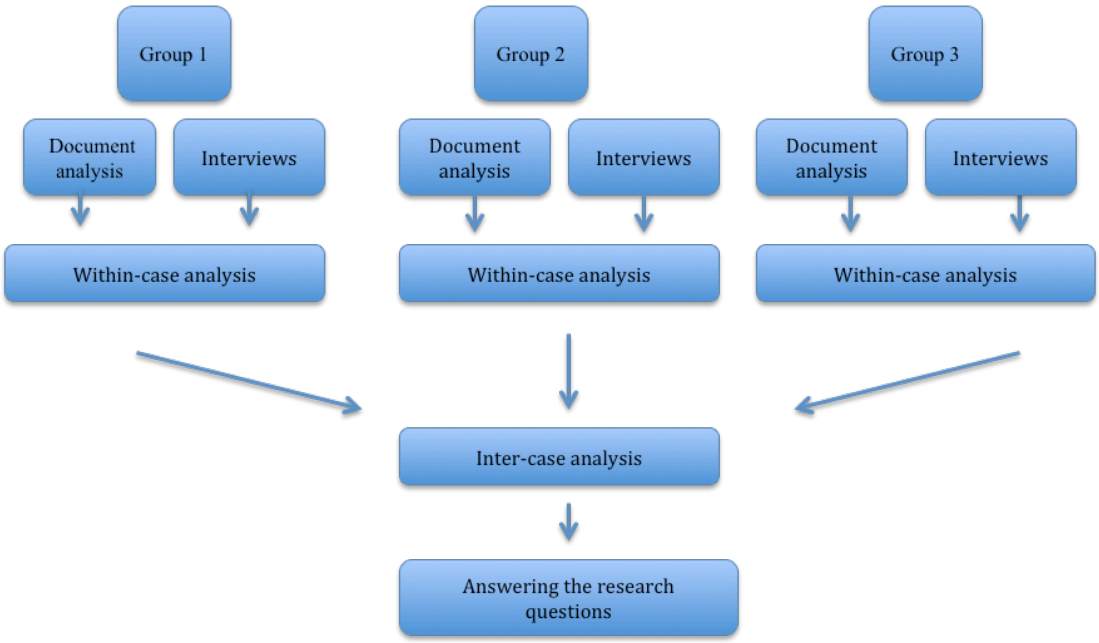
The second phase involved reading carefully through all sorted information. The aim was to obtain a general sense of the collected information, potential differences and similarities across the groups, and the main ideas emerging from the data. Attention was paid to the tone of the interviews, recalling participants' attitude towards the interview, openness to provide information, mentioning of (country/participants') names, attention to details towards the OMC process and enthusiasm towards mutual learning. Notes were taken about the context-specific particulars regarding group work and the initial themes that emerged from the reading.

Then a detailed data analysis was conducted. In this third phase, data was read once again and assigned a specific code. Codes were assigned freely according to the ideas represented by informant (open coding). For example, information regarding experts' selection criteria was coded using the following labels: content-specific expertise, process-specific expertise, collaboration-specific expertise, work responsibilities, authority and trust. These open codes were organized into categories: experiential

expertise, bureaucratic expertise. After open coding, axial coding was performed where the relationship between categories (e.g. expertise, motivation, learning outcomes) and sub-categories was established (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Creswell 1998). As the set of research sub-questions served as the main framework for the study, the themes corresponding directly to these questions were sorted out (selective coding), creating an analytic framework for presenting the findings.

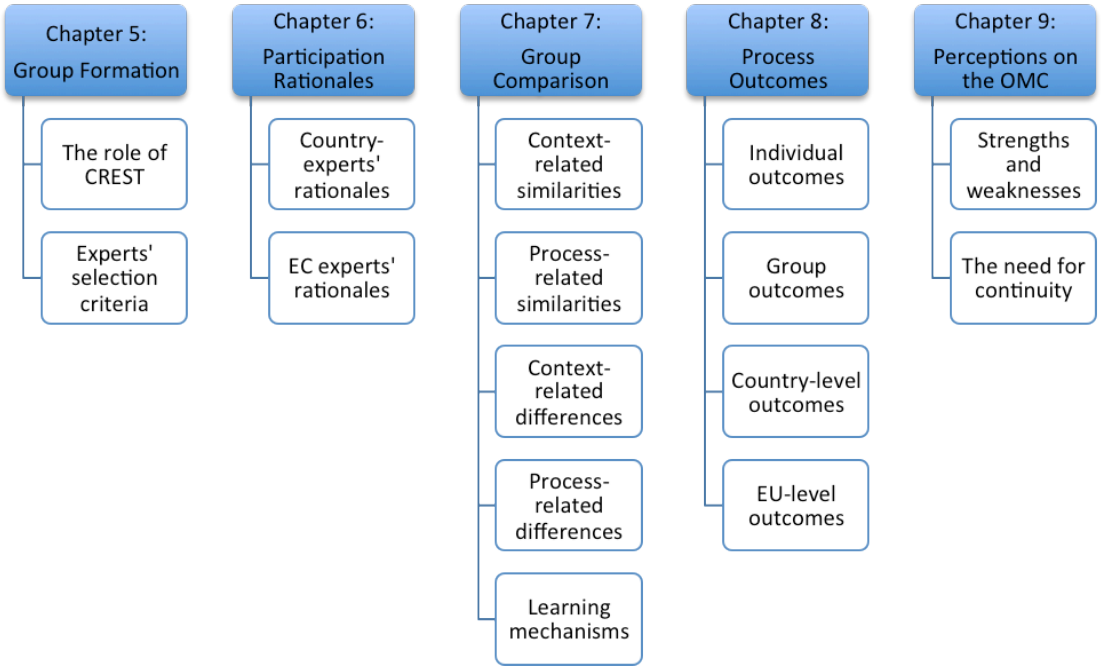
For each group, a within-case analysis was conducted first. The analysis aimed at identifying unique patterns and thematic categories within one group. Then, an inter-case comparison was performed across the groups where related themes as well as unique features were identified. A matrix for within-case and inter-case comparison was composed for analysis to clearly document patterns across the groups (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. Moving from data collection to analysis.



The next phase of analysis involved presenting and describing the data. Findings are presented following the schematic framework that emerged from the analysis, responding to the research questions. The findings of the study are presented in four chapters (Chapter 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) each focusing on a different aspect of the process – group formation, individual participation rationales, overview of the process and learning outcomes. The structure for the findings is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. The structure of findings



Finally, interpretations from the findings were performed (the conclusion and discussion section, chapter 10). The conclusion presents answers to the research question and sub-questions, linking those to the theoretical framework described in the literature review and attempting to reveal causal relationships between emerging themes and categories.

4.2 Description of Participants

The following three OMC working groups were chosen for the study. Each of those groups was composed to discuss particular topics in European research policy:

Group 1 (GR1): "Framework Program and the Structural Fund" expert group (3rd OMC cycle 2006-2007);
Group 2 (GR2): "Internationalization of R&D expert group" (4th cycle 2007-2008);
Group 3 (GR3): "Mutual learning on approaches to improve the excellence of research in universities" expert group (5th cycle 2008-2009).

The rationale for selecting three distinct OMC groups is based on the similarities and differences that these groups feature (See Table 5). First, all three expert groups focus on policy areas that contain complex and diverse national interests, making the relationship between the professional values and political interests in policy learning especially apparent. As noted by Gornitzka (2009), scientific knowledge production in

Europe is historically embedded in the nation state aiming for enhanced national competitiveness. Yet, Kok's progress review on the Lisbon Strategy (2004) identified a crucial need to strengthen horizontal policy coordination among the member states. These two contradictory perspectives create a certain tension that has been addressed by the "soft" governance method. This sets the OMC mechanism onto center stage to produce policy results for European integration. Second, the time frame of all three groups provides an opportunity to analyze the experts' perceptions on impacts of those recommendations. Also, the context of these three groups (Treaty of Lisbon, signed in 2007) set the research policy in the forefront of European policy-making. The Treaty 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. Third, by choosing working groups over three yearly cycles, it allows for identifying potential changes in the mechanisms of OMC learning over the years.

Table 5. Summary of the main characteristics in three OMC groups

Characteristics		**OMC1**	**OMC2**	**OMC3**	**EC group**
SIMILARITIES	policy areas	complex topics, diverse national interests represented			
	political pressure	Lisbon Strategy (2000), Lisbon Treaty (2007) - pressure to produce clear results in research policy			
	time	allows examining the impacts on current research policy			
DIFFERENCES	composition of groups	Ministry reps; diverse EC units; core + smaller countries	Ministry reps; core + smaller countries	University reps	EC experts
	urgency for policy results	high	medium	low	high

There are also important differences across the groups such as group composition and urgency to produce policy results. These differences are expected to impact policy learning. While all three groups were largely composed of the Ministry representatives, Group 1 had the highest number of Commission participants. In addition to the representatives from the Directorate General (DG) Research (the leading unit), the group participants included representatives from the DG Employment and DG Regional Development. The third OMC group included university administrators and faculty members in the pool of participants. This difference makes it possible to analyze and compare policy learning mechanisms and knowledge use when different types of experts are involved. Also, in Group 1 and 2 the smaller players in research policy such as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Hungary were present, allowing to focus on the perspectives of the country representatives not always on the forefront of European research policy. The core group of participating countries has remained the same throughout these three cycles involving primarily Germany, France, Italy, Norway, Austria, Finland, Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain.

Second, each of these groups differs in the level of urgency in producing policy outcomes at the organizational level. The first group with the focus on developing strategies on merging two funding mechanisms (Framework Program and Structural Funds Program) had the highest urgency to produce quick tangible results to avoid duplication and reduce administrative costs of the two programs. The second group on internationalization had less urgency in coordinating policy approaches. The topic of internationalization was important among member-states, but most of the countries had already a national-level internationalization strategy in place (or were in the process of developing one). Creation of a European level strategy would have not changed the nationally agreed objectives. The focus of the third group was primarily on peer-learning activities (universities learning from each other), so the pressure to produce European level results was the least. In addition, there are differences at the individual expert level to produce results depending on the level of urgency of the particular issue in the member state. These differences make it possible to examine and compare policy learning processes in different contexts, revealing factors that might influence policy learning experience in individuals. Last, the differences in the groups allow for an elucidation of who gets to decide what type of knowledge is valuable and what should be disseminated among member-states.

The experts in the three OMC expert groups fall into three broad categories. The main and most influential group are the *country experts (26)*, people representing member-states, determining the content and the overall structure of the process. The second group are the *EC policy-makers (8)* working in various units of the European Commission, DG Research. They mainly provide administrative support but have an opportunity to shape the outcomes of the process. Finally, technical support in data analysis was in some cases needed due to time-constraints. The *external/independent rapporteurs* provided such analytical help. Because independent rapporteurs had little influence over the outcomes of the process, they are not included in the pool of study informants. The country representation is presented in Table 6. Most informants came from the old Western states including Germany (5), Belgium (3), Italy (2), the Netherlands (2), Norway (2) and Sweden (2). Experts from several smaller countries, including the newly joined EU states representatives were also willing to participate in the study.

In the consent letter the study participants were promised anonymity and therefore steps have been taken to ensure that the identity of the informants remained undisclosed. In reporting the findings, a case-by-case decision has been made for each quote used, to provide basic information about the individual (e.g. position, country or group) but without enough detail so that the person could not be identified.

Table 6. Overview of the country representation

Countries	Number of experts interviewed	Number of experts listed in the 3 final reports
Germany	5	9
Belgium	3	8
Italy	2	3
Netherlands	2	5
Norway	2	3
Sweden	2	4
Hungary	1	1
Ireland	1	2
Austria	1	3
Czech Republic	1	1
Estonia	1	2
Greece	1	5
Lithuania	1	3
Portugal	1	3
Romania	1	5
Spain	1	5
Bulgaria	0	2
Denmark	0	1
Finland	0	1
France	0	7
Iceland	0	1
Latvia	0	1
Malta	0	1
Poland	0	3
Slovenia	0	1
Switzerland	0	1
Turkey	0	3
UK	0	4
Total	**26**	**88**

The total number of people interviewed was 34, including the country experts and the EC representatives (See Table 7). Among the country representatives there was quite comparable gender representation: 14 men and 12 women across the groups. All eight EC informants were men.

Table 7. Breakdown of the interviewees by groups

Groups	GR1	GR2	GR3	EC	Total
Number of interviewees	9	10	7	8	34

The country experts were predominantly individuals who were working as administrators within the system of their national governments. Several nominated country experts held high administrative positions in their everyday work (See Table 8):

Table 8. Overview of the interviewed country experts by position

Position	Number of experts
Head of Unit/Department/Division within a Ministry	4
Director/Executive Director of a Bureau or Agency	6
Senior level administrators, policy advisors within a Ministry	4
Administrators	10
Senior researcher/faculty	2
Total	**26**

Four experts worked as the Head of Unit/Department/Division within their Ministries dealing with topics related to science and technology (S&T), 6 experts served as the Director/Executive Director of external national research agencies (funded by the Ministries), four people were (senior) policy advisors working in the Ministries. Eleven interviewees were working as administrators within Ministry departments or Bureaus related to national governments. Only two interviewees noted that they do not have a direct relationship with the Ministry – one worked as a university administrator and the other worked as the Director of a think tank dealing with higher education issues. The rest of the interviewees were all working as administrators in Ministries or nationally funded research agencies.

The topics of the selected OMC themes determined what specific departments within national government systems were represented. Group 1 was dealing mostly with issues around national level research and infrastructure funding. The experts participating in the first OMC groups were therefore working mainly in the institutions directly dealing with coordinating national research and innovation policies. The following organizations were represented: Innovation Agency, Agency of Economy (Structural Funds Unit), Ministry of Education and Research (unit for research), Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Federal Ministry of Education and Research (European Research Area), government agency for Research and Innovation, National Office for Technology and Research, Ministry of Economic Affairs (EU cohesion/regional policy).

Group 2 was established to discuss the international dimension of research coordination, therefore the majority of the experts interviewed held a position within their governments in the areas dealing with international cooperation. Experts were working in the following area-specific Ministries: Federal Ministry of Education and Research (international relations bureau), Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (department of international cooperation), Ministry of Education and Research (department of international relations), Ministry of Education and Science (international research unit), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (department of EU policies), Foundation of Science and Technology (department of bilateral, multilateral and European relationships), Ministry of Economic Affairs (agriculture and innovation), Ministry of

Science and Innovation (international cooperation) and public research agency dealing with energy and technology.

Group 3 focused on discussing ways for increasing university excellence. This group had potentially the most flexibility in terms of where the participants worked. However among the interviewees the Ministry representative still dominated: National Research Council (research policy), government agency responsible for higher education, Ministry of Education and Research (department of higher education, division of higher education), Federal Ministry of Research and Education (Bureau of European Affairs). Only two experts were outside of government structure – a representative from a large research university and a high official from think-tank, The Center for Higher Education.

The academic background of the experts revealed high-level scholarly achievements before starting to work in government administration. Eleven experts had PhD degrees (fields such as physics, biology, geology, applied mathematics, microbiology, mathematics were represented), six had a master level degrees (in education, public management, geography, engineering, European Studies). Several people with law degrees were included.

A total of eight interviewed European Commission policy-makers, were working in the various Units of the DG Research: ERA policy (2), skills (1), economic analysis and indicators (2), international cooperation (2), universities and researchers (1). Two of the interviewees served as the Heads of Units. Four representatives had been personally involved as the Commission representatives in the work of the OMC expert groups. Other four were involved indirectly – providing pre-process support in setting up the experts groups, providing data, analyzing reports, disseminating data to the Council. Most of them had several years of experience in working in the Commission. For example, one interviewee noted having 18 years of experience in working at the various Directorates in the Commission. Their academic background was secondary to the work in the Commission. Only one interviewee had an academic background in governance and policy coordination. Other mentioned having degrees in fields such as sociology, German philology and physics.

4.3 Methodological Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of the study involves the composition of informant groups. First, the perspectives of interviewed informants might have influenced the overall balance of the study results indicating more learning than was experienced by an average participant. As the invitation was sent out to all experts listed in the final report, the ones most active, contributing most to the policy report, were willing to participate and share their views. Some less active experts refused to participate, noting that even if their name was on the list, they did not contribute to the process and therefore would not have

much to say. It was very difficult to get less active experts to participate and provide their perspectives on the OMC process.

Second, the difficulty of determining contact email addresses of the experts might have influenced the overall composition of the informant group. As the timespan of the OMC group was around five years, experts' email addresses had changed and in several cases (n=26) it was impossible to track individuals down. Searches within a government structure proved difficult, as the names and the contact emails are not publicly available and inquiries to the organizations' general email address often did not yield results.

Third, the geographic distribution of the informants might have served as a limitation. It was mainly experts from the old Western states who served as informants. More balanced perspectives, including more individuals from the newly joined EU member-states, might have created an even more diverse picture of the overall policy learning experience than is currently described.

While the English language was the everyday operational language for most of the informants, it was not the mother tongue for most, including the researcher. On one hand using English as a medium for communication created a situation where interviewer and interviewee stood on equal ground. On the other hand, the language might have caused a situation where some meanings might have been lost or not articulated/understood properly. This factor might have influenced the study findings. However, every attempt was made to clarify the information received by asking additional questions. Two research papers that were produced based on the pilot study and the informant interviews with the Commission representatives were sent to all informants asking them to verify the factual information and provide corrections if necessary.

Finally, the information collected involved people's personal perceptions on their learning process. As noted by May (1992), it is very difficult to measure learning. This information is highly subjective and there is no secondary data to validate the information. This limitation was addressed by asking specific examples on what was learnt and how new knowledge might have been used later in one's work. Information provided on group dynamics (events that occurred years ago) was compared against the accounts provided by other group participants.

Despite of these limitations, the current data collected is unique and serves as a first attempt to include individual expert perspectives on policy learning in the area of research policy. The data provides first hand perspectives from the wide range of participants that help to clarify learning processes through the OMC initiative.

CHAPTER 5: Findings. Group Formation

Chapter 5 examines the findings on the group formation process. This chapter addresses the first sub-question - *Who has access to policy-making in the OMC method?* - by clarifying who participates in the European level policy debates, how the topics are chosen for policy coordination and what are the specific considerations behind choosing experts to participate in the OMC working groups. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section explains the role of CREST in proposing the OMC topics and the second section discusses the country-specific rationales for choosing a certain individual to participate in the group's work.

5.1 The Role of CREST

The decisions to form an OMC group are currently made by the ERAC (European Research Area Committee) advisory body. The Committee was called CREST (The Scientific and Technical Research Committee) until 2010. I will be using the CREST acronym to explain the process because all of the selected OMC groups have been established during the operation of CREST.

CREST defined itself as a strategic policy advisory body whose mission was to assist the European Commission and the Council of the European Union in the areas of research and technological development[13]. CREST was composed of the European Commission and the EU member-states' representatives. Representatives from the EU's associated countries have the opportunity to observe the meetings. The exact information on CREST membership (organizational structure, names of the representatives, the period of their mandate) is not publicly available. According to the EC policy-makers, CREST members were high-level policy-makers, typically people in leading ministerial positions in their countries (Director or Head of the Scientific/Research unit). The leadership of CREST was shared between the EC and the member states. CREST was chaired by an EC representative (policy expert from the DG Research) and co-chaired by the Presidential member-state representative. CREST policy perspectives were provided in the form of recommendations and were not legally binding for the member states. CREST recommendations were forwarded to the Council of the European Union and the Council could make binding decisions involving member-states.

Since the late 1990s, CREST gradually expanded its role in shaping the EU's research policy. Through several renewals of its mission statements in 1995 and 2000, as an attempt to be more aligned with the economic competitiveness and employment

[13] ERAC website: http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/partnership/process/crest_en.htm

strategies of the European Union, CREST increased its authority in policy coordination. The first renewed mission statement provided a direct mandate for CREST to focus on policy coordination and policy learning:

> *"CREST is an advisory body whose function is to assist the Council of the European Union and the European Commission in increased coordination of national and EU level research policies. The specific activities of the CREST involve identifying and comparing research policies used in the member states, promoting coordination and consistency among these policies, contributing to the formulation of community strategy in international cooperation of research and setting up programme committees to learn useful lessons from the member states.*" (Council of the European Union, 1995)

In light of moving towards fulfilling the ambitious goal set in the Lisbon Strategy, the European Commission officially articulated the need to use the open coordination method to increase member-states' investments in research and development towards 3% of GDP by 2010:

> *"An open co-ordination process, as called for by the Spring 2003 The Council of the European Union, will facilitate mutual learning between Member States in their efforts to increase and improve research investment. It will also help increase the effectiveness of Member States' actions by ensuring, on a voluntary basis, greater consistency with each other and with related Community actions."* (European Commission, 2003, p. 8)

The CREST advisory body, whose original mission was to facilitate learning, was given the authority to operate as an organizational interface between the member-states and the European Commission in the Open Method of Coordination (Council of the European Union, 2003). A recently renewed CREST/ERAC mission statement clearly states the authority to establish the groups for policy learning. According to the document:

> *"In addition to its main mission, the Committee shall also stimulate the voluntary evaluation of national policy mix and promote mutual learning exercises relevant to the ERA. For these activities it may arrange for the set-up of voluntary ad-hoc temporary groups which shall carry out their work under the guidance of the Committee."* (Council of the European Union, 2010, p. 4)

The OMC group formation was anticipated to have a bottom-up nature. The suggestions to set up an OMC learning group on a particular theme were made by the CREST member state representatives and approved by the European Commission. An EC policy-maker explains: "*the member states request to set up these groups in which they think they have to discuss or elaborate on a specific topic*." A country expert, who has

been involved in CREST operations, also confirms the freedom to choose the topics by the member-states:

> *"When we chose certain topics at CREST, this was kind of a brainstorming exercise where countries were allowed to propose whatever they thought was fit. A very short synopsis was given and then, at the CREST meetings, the topics that received the most support, with most common issues of interests, were selected."* (country expert, Hungary[14])

Only topics with the largest number of countries interested were chosen for the OMC initiative. To propose engaging discussion topics required considerable knowledge on the joint policy problems faced by all member states. With the enlargement of the EU in 2004, ten new member states joined the EU[15], which increased the CREST membership and diversified the pool of issues in research policy. The enlargement complicated the situation in the EU's research policy arena. The number of distinct research systems increased. The newly joined member states had less experience and knowledge regarding EU level decision-making. Their concerns and needs regarding research policy were different from those of the older member states. As a country expert explains:

> *"With the enlargement CREST became very big in the beginning of this decade. There was a need to go deeper into certain areas such as international cooperation with Third countries[16]. CREST started to work more and more through the working groups because the DG administrators did not have enough time or expertise on a single theme."* (country expert, Portugal)

Those countries that had gained a long-term experience in EU level policy-making and were able to steer the process. CREST reported to the Council of the European Union, where each member-state holds a six-month Presidency on a rotating basis. The older European countries were serving as the leading countries at CREST and/or at the Council of the European Union. As a result, these countries tended to propose the policy topics and were potentially guaranteed an uptake of their ideas. Taking a leadership role during the CREST meetings, the older member states, especially Germany, actively proposed topics, shaping the process and its outcomes. Several experts across the groups commented on that:

> *"I think Germany was the leading partner in this process. They really wanted to use this study also as a legacy of their Presidency. I think by far they were the most active country involved."* (country expert, the Netherlands)

[14] On a case-by-case basis the identification of a group or a country name is omitted, not to reveal the identity of the individual.

[15] Those were Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Malta, Cyprus and Romania in 2007.

[16] "Third countries" is a term used by the EU to indicate countries that are not members of the Union.

> *"The first part of 2007, the Presidency of the Council of the European Union was held by Germany. So the start of the discussion about excellence in research and universities was a German discussion. So the initial idea of organizing all of this was mainly German and strongly supported by the German Minister of Research*." (country expert, Germany)

For the newly joined member states, any discussion topic provided them a unique opportunity to gain new knowledge and learn. They were happily willing to support ideas proposed at CREST meetings and take part in the OMC groups. According to the informant from the newly joined member-state: *"one of the reasons we took part of it, was to learn. We didn't have anything of that sort. It was a totally new world for us."* (country expert, GR1)

While the ideas at CREST were mainly proposed by the member states, it is important to note that the European Commission had a significant role in the advisory body as well. CREST was co-chaired by the EC representative who had a say in the final decision-making. According to EC policy-makers, the Commission used CREST as a means for engaging the member states in policy coordination. An EC policy-maker comments:

> *"With the 3% Action Plan the Commission put on a table a policy document which covered a very vast array of policy issues. /…/ We went to the member states through the CREST Committee and we said to them: ok, here we have to set up a process involving mutual learning, exchange of best practice for all of these issues that had been identified in the 3% Action Plan."*

In conclusion, the CREST advisory body played an important role in determining the policy learning agenda for the European research policy. Co-chaired by the member-states and the European Commission, it facilitated policy discussions and established the themes for mutual learning. A country's participation activity in CREST influenced which ideas were taken up for policy learning, often favouring the older European member-states.

5.2 Experts' Selection Criteria

Experts were selected and nominated by high level government officials in their home country. Participation at the OMC groups is voluntary and it was typically the CREST country representative who informed one's Ministry of the CREST decision to create a new OMC group. It was then decided, at a high political level, whether or not to participate in the group work. While the Commission representatives were involved in the OMC process due to their direct work responsibilities, the individual country representatives were selected based on their individual abilities that supported country-specific interests. Participants were typically proposed and nominated by a CREST

member. On some occasions it was a high-level Ministry administrator who made the nomination. In one case, the CREST member himself decided to participate:

> *"I could nominate myself because I was the lead of the German Chairmanship of the Council Presidency."* (country expert)

As noted in the literature, experts get legitimized by the specific knowledge that they possess, thus generating trust and social respect (Stehr & Grundmann, 2011). Knowledge can be grounded in technical bureaucratic expertise, scientific expertise or experiential knowledge facilitation (Weber, 1964; Nutley, et al., 2007; Boswell, 2009). The interviews revealed the dominance of bureaucratic expertise among the experts' selection criteria (See Table 9), followed by content-specific expertise. Political rationales were discussed three times in relation to experts' nomination criteria. The informants did not view scientific expertise to be important in the selection process.

Table 9. Overview and examples of the themes in experts' selection criteria

Theme	Examples:
Bureaucratic, process-specific knowledge (9)	*"I am a Program Director of the cluster program we have. /…/ I have been **involved in those groups and committees** of the FP for many, many years. /…/ Most of the time I have been involved, for 20 years, in the national innovation systems in different sections of the program."* (country expert, GR1) *"I did have **experience with EU projects** and FP, because I had ... I spent 4 years in Brussels before that. From 1996 to 2000 and I was with EURECA [European Research and Educational Collaboration with Asia] and I had a lot of experience on how EURECA and the Framework Program worked together."* (country expert, GR1) *"we [the country] had the presidency of the OMC group on another topic, namely on the role of SMEs [small and medium-size enterprises] in research use, and of course I was the secretary of that OMC working group where my formal boss was both the Head and the President, so **I was also a bit aware of what is OMC, how is this working** and what could be the expected outputs."* (country expert, GR1) *"I was the Attaché for research at the Permanent Representation of [country] in Brussels and as such I was an alternate member of CREST. I **knew how the CREST works** and how this committee proceeds regarding the OMC."* (country expert, GR2) *"I was working at the European Commission at the issue of research from 2002-2006, so I worked within the Commission in Brussels during that time and I had a lot of contacts within the Commission. And I already had some expertise in the issue of international cooperation. So when I returned to [city]**, it was more or less because of my experience in Brussels**, so almost automatically I became a member of this group in international cooperation."* (country expert, GR2)
Bureaucratic, job-related knowledge (6)	*"It was me who dealt with this topic within the Ministry. It was exactly the **topic that I was [recently] hired** to administer within the Ministry."* (country expert, GR1)

	*"At the **time I was a policy advisor** at the Ministry of Economic Affairs, **responsible for cohesion policy and negotiating** the new SF back in Brussels. I had the knowledge on that matter and my colleague [name] had the same role for the FP program, so together we could combine [name of the country] expertise on the response, trying to come up with the ideas on strengthening the energy between them [these two programs]."* (country expert, GR1) *"**it's my direct responsibility to work with** bilateral agreements and international research programs within the Ministry, so, this is why I was appointed to this group."* (country expert, GR2) *"Well, I was working at the [name of the country] Ministry of Education and Research at the time and these expert groups mainly consist of people from various Ministries around Europe. So the Ministries in various EU countries seem to have representation in these groups and it just became **my duty** to be in the group."* (country expert, GR3)
Expert knowledge, (5)	*"I am a **practitioner** and therefore the Federal Ministry of Education and Science knew that I am one of the few experts in the [region in the country] who has a lot of experience in the field and therefore they asked me already in 2005 whether I would be willing to make a presentation of our experience in funding of the SF."* (country expert, GR1) *"I have a **lot of experience in international cooperation**. /…/ So, I started from the beginning in the establishment of the Department of International Relations and so I have knowledge on the early situation in [name of the country], I know very well the research actors in [name of the country] and also being in charge with bilateral programs."* (country expert, GR2) *"I was quite well-known by the Ministry as an **expert in that area**. And then they asked me if I would like to do that, and then I agreed. /…/ But I'm very experienced in that field and the topic. I think it was more the experience regarding the topic, than the experience in the European context."* (country expert, GR3)
Collaboration-specific knowledge (4)	*"I was asked by the [OMC group] Chairman who then came from [name of the country] and **we had been partners in a networking project** of the EU and it was a very interesting and good partnership and since I am the Head of the Department of International Cooperation and he has been the Director of the International Bureau of [name of the country] Ministry of Research it was decision quite logical in his eyes to ask me to join this group."* (country expert, GR2) *"I don't know why he asked particularly me but **I was interacting with him a lot before** therefore I knew who he was… I don't know why he asked me to do that. Perhaps he didn't have time and he knew that I was interacting with these topics. /…/Perhaps he was thinking I was the right person."* (country expert, GR3)
Political rationales (3)	*"Believe me, this [nomination] was as well a **political decision**. You have several choices as a Ministry. You can say I don't attend at all. I will not support this working group. I will not be present. Then, you can send a very weak person, a very specialized person. A person with a very small expertise so, just to weaken the group and its outcomes; that's a political decision. Or you can select a really*

	international heavyweight and those are present in all of the countries. /…/But if you select them, you'll have an output and this output might have a stronger impact on your own system. If you want to weaken it, you select someone who no one knows in their own country. I mean, that's how they used to play such games, yeah? And sometimes they select such people who are acting more of a kind of observers, you know. They are very, very passive. They take a lot of notes. They carry them back into the Ministry, but they are not active. And they are not investing information that could be useful for their own Ministry, so the impact of the results are very low for their own country." (country expert, GR3) *"some of them [experts] don't say anything at all during the whole process. And I always…I mean, I guess they are there because they are sent there and their ministries just want representation in the group more or less. Perhaps they are there sort of to watch certain questions,* ***certain issues that could be sensitive to the single member state*** *and as long as that issue is not threatened then it's fine so their vote can be about anything. So they keep quiet and if this potential sensitive issue is never on the table well then they don't say anything then." (country expert, GR3)*

Selection criteria 1: Bureaucratic expertise

Bureaucratic expertise was a theme mentioned most frequently by country experts when discussing their perspectives on being selected as a group participant. Fifteen informants mentioned this as the main selection criterion. Three sub-themes emerged from this theme: 1) process-specific expertise; 2) job-related responsibilities and 3) collaboration-specific expertise. Experts are authorized through technical process-related knowledge acquired by years of working in bureaucratic organizations (e.g. government, councils, international organizations) (Weber 1964). The majority of the participants across the groups were government officials, possessing that type of knowledge.

Knowledge of navigating within the EU comitology system was especially highly valued. Egeberg, et al., (2003) note that EU committees link national administrations and the EU level policy-making at all stages of the EU policy process. Experience on how to operate in the EU committee system is crucial for the best representation of a country. In nine cases experts had previous working knowledge of EU level policy-making. A majority of interviewed country experts had a link (direct or indirect) with CREST. Out of twenty-six country experts, five had been directly involved in the work of CREST before. They noted having an experience in serving as either current or former (associate in one case) member of the CREST advisory body. Two mentioned being a participant in another CREST OMC working group. A few participants reported having previous working relationship with various other EU level administrative institutions such as the Framework Program, European Union Research and Educational Collaboration with Asia (EURECA) or multinational organizations such as Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), all involving close operational knowledge on European level administration. They had the confidence and knowledge on EU level debates in research policy and potentially had the advantage of influencing the direction

of the OMC discussions. This finding emphasizes the importance of bureaucratic knowledge in European level governance processes and supports the view in the literature whereby experts are viewed as knowledge mediators and not necessarily knowledge producers (Stehr & Grundmann, 2011).

Six informants mentioned work responsibilities as important criterion for OMC group participation. Three individuals were recently appointed to a certain position in their governments and the topic of the OMC group overlapped with their area of responsibility. The OMC was a great opportunity for them to quickly gain information and familiarize themselves with the policy area. Others had worked in that area for some time, they were responsible for it and therefore had to participate. These experts were selected based on their position in the government structure.

Four experts viewed *collaboration-specific expertise* as important factor in being selected. Those individuals had previously worked in international projects and developed good contacts with high-level decision-makers. Such productive networking and positive personal experience paved the way for being selected again for the OMC process.

Selection criteria 2: Expert knowledge and collaboration-related expertise

Five informants described their extensive *expert knowledge*, which they had obtained throughout the years working on related topics. Content specific knowledge was mentioned in relation to being well-informed on strategies in national research policy, funding structures and international collaboration initiatives. These experts were long-time practitioners in the field, known to their ministries through the quality of their work. These individuals also possessed rich network of contacts, which allowed them to obtain and mobilize knowledge quickly as the need arises.

Selection criteria 3: Political considerations

Experts' selection criteria for OMC participation where primarily related to one's experiential expertise, however, the political rationales were also mentioned. Three experts noted that the nomination of experts is a political decision where individual personalities are also taken into consideration. As experts have the potential to influence policy agendas by filtering relevant knowledge (Stehr & Grundmann, 2011) and advocating for policy issues (Haas, 1992; Sabatier, 1986), it could be viewed as a political decision whether to nominate a person who has the capacity to influence policy debates or someone who is expected to be less influential. The most active participants, who led the process, came from the old Western states (e.g. Germany, France, Italy). One informant noted the presence of several individuals who did not contribute much to the discussions. He asserted that they were sent to observe the discussions and

report results back to one's country. As the group discussions and policy recommendations did not contradict with country's own policy directions, no specific action was required and those participants remained quiet.

Overall, policy-making in the EU's OMC research policy has a bottom-up nature. Country experts from the member-states identify policy issues for mutual learning activities. The CREST advisory body, composed of member-states' representatives and European Commission policy-makers, serves as the arena for identifying OMC topics. It is typically the mid-level government staff from the Western European countries that influence the uptake of the OMC topics.

The selection criteria for the individual experts tend to have a bureaucratic nature. The most valued is previous European-level policy experience, followed by the job-related responsibilities to participate in the OMC policy debates. Expert knowledge that is related to the specific OMC topic was also important, but mentioned less frequently than the process-specific knowledge. Political rationales to choose a specific individual with the particular expectation to either influence the process or observe the debates were also apparent. The experts' selection criteria influence the types of knowledge contributions and participation activity. People who have extensive knowledge on the EU level policy-making might have useful knowledge on how to negotiate ideas in a productive and appealing way. Others with extensive content-specific experience have a lot of knowledge to contribute and enrich the discussions. Yet, the questions becomes whether the individual experts have the motivation and willingness to share the knowledge they possess. The next section examines the rationales that were driving experts' interest providing a foundation for learning.

CHAPTER 6: Findings. Participation Rationales

This chapter analyzes the motivations of individual participants for engaging in the OMC mutual learning activities. The chapter addresses the second sub-question - *What are the participants' rationales for the OMC policy learning initiatives?* Identified rationales are discussed in relation to policy learning. The chapter starts with an examination of the country experts' rationales, followed by an analysis of the rationales of the European Commission experts.

6.1 Country Experts' Rationales

This section presents findings on the country experts' rationales for participating in the OMC working groups. As seen in Table 10, country experts referred to a variety of reasons for being involved in the expert groups. Overall, the direct rationale to learn and gain new knowledge was most frequently mentioned, a total of fourteen times. The specific learning focus was related to groups' discussion topic. Experts were eager to learn about how to better coordinate funding programs (Group 1), what are the best ways to organize research cooperation (Group 2) and gain knowledge about policy instruments to enhance research productivity at higher education institutions (Group 3). Several additional motives besides learning emerged as well. For example, teaching others as opposed to learning was an important rationale for some experts representing the older Western countries. Sometimes motives had a political undertone, as the OMC work was expected to provide access to EU level policy-making and influence policy decisions. These initial rationales do not necessarily overlap with the actual learning experiences experts had during the process.

Table 10. Overview of the country experts' participation rationales

Main rationales	**Focus on learning**	
for participation	**YES**	**NO**
To gain new knowledge (14)	X	
To influence policies (5)		X
To enhance policy coordination (5)		X
To share and teach (4)	X	
To gain visibility and representation (4)		X
To compare and benchmark (3)	X	
To contribute one's expertise for EU policies (2)		X

6.1.1 Rationales Related to Learning

Learning and gaining new knowledge was the primary reason identified by several country experts for participating in the OMC groups. The literature suggests that policy learning can be driven by several distinct intentions. There could be a genuine drive towards improving policies, finding "what works" and increasing the effectiveness of policy approaches (Etheredge, 1981; Huber, 1991; Radaelli, 2009). The rational approach suggests that learning allows governments to collect policy-related evidence for decision-making (May 1991). The value-based perspective proposes that learning helps governments to find ideas and innovations that they can adapt according to a specific context to face environmental uncertainties (Sabatier, 1987; Common, 2004). As learning is often viewed as a desirable and appropriate approach for policy change, there is also a social pressure to be engaged in activities related to learning (Common, 2004).

In this study, the direct intention to improve policies was not mentioned as a rationale for learning. Experts primarily talked about **gaining new ideas and knowledge** about policy approaches that would allow enhancing personal expertise in the field. Fourteen informants across the groups mentioned this. A diverse range of specific learning aspects emerged. Experts wanted to gain a better overview of the overall policy trends in other member-states and in Europe (*"It was important for us and rather useful to know the broader tendencies of EU politics in this field."* (country expert, Lithuania)). As participants typically lead busy working-lives, time dedicated to observing policy developments outside of one's country is often limited. Therefore the OMC participation was appreciated as an opportunity to take time and get better informed about recent policy developments in the area.

One of the learning goals for study informants was to understand new policy approaches other countries have adopted, and to gain knowledge on "what works". This finding supports the argument whereby experts use learning to collect policy-related evidence (May, 1991). The **learning focus was related to the groups' discussion topic**. For example, three experts from Group 2 discussing international research cooperation were eager to gain knowledge on particular best practices and examples of cooperation programs that other member states have used for research collaboration activities with Third countries. The aim was to learn about the mechanisms of those programs and determine if this is applicable in one's own country. Experts, particularly from smaller European countries, indicated their lack of experience in the area:

> *"the idea was to have knowledge on the good practices and what other countries, other EU countries with more experience than [name of the country], have applied for the cooperation with countries outside Europe. Because it was a new field for us."* (country expert, GR2)

> *"since [name of the country] is only a small player on the international stage. We don't have any access to the sea. We never had colonies, so we are in a very so to say unique position among only a few other European countries and, therefore, the approach to join this group and to get more information, better information on country specific practices was quite clear."* (country expert, GR2)

Experts from the other OMC groups related learning to their group topic as well. For example, country experts from Group 1 indicated an increasing concern over policy coordination**.** Navigating between two funding schemes was problematic, causing fragmentation and uncertainty on how to best benefit from these funding opportunities. The experts were clear in aiming to clarify the operations of these schemes:

> *"I think it was important for the agency and for us to participate, to learn how we could better coordinate between the SF and the FP."* (GR1, Belgium)

> *"It was important for us to learn from the other partners how to better coordinate these two instruments. /…/ we wanted to clarify exactly how can we use these two instruments in a coordinated way without being against the European regulations."* (GR1, Greece)

Group 3 members, gathered to discuss issues around university excellence, were motivated to learn about instruments that could be useful to enhance research productivity at home. The following quote is illustrative:

> *"...even though we'll have the research policies as national responsibility, we do not operate in a vacuum, and it's always interesting to learn how other countries develop instruments and what kind of instruments they've used in their research policy./…./ in a way to get the best understanding of policy in other countries and to see if there would be anything to learn."* (GR3, Norway)

Operating as experts in their respective policy areas, they were curious to study what new initiatives were emerging across Europe and what policy approaches seem to be useful. This finding is similar to Freeman's (2007) argument that suggests curiosity as the driver for learning. Experts find it interesting to see how others are operating and what could be potential choices for policies.

An intention to contribute knowledge rather than to learn was a unique finding that has not been mentioned much in the policy learning literature. Learning was seen as important, but from a teaching point of view. This perspective was characteristic among the participants from the older Western states. Four experts asserted that their overall goal to participate was to **teach and share experiences** with other experts. As a result of having extensive experience in the field, those country representatives felt a certain

responsibility to distribute their knowledge to others who were eager to learn and improve. The following quotes are representative of this perspective:

> *"So, I don't think the [name of the country] Ministry ever expected us to gain something. It was more to give. Yeah. They had introduced some changes before and they wanted to share … or to show up and explain to the other countries what they did and why this happened."* (country expert, GR3)

> *"Because the idea of this group was to exchange the information and we had done different reports on the bilateral agreements that [name of the country] has with different countries which we could share."* (country expert, GR2)

The literature suggests that **benchmarking** is a useful mechanism for policy learning (Paasi, 2005; Freeman, 2007). The learning potential is argued to be much greater if international comparisons are involved (Paasi, 2005). An interest to compare and benchmark policy approaches was evident in the informants' comments across the groups. Comparing practices allows for mapping one's own achievements and providing reassurance that a country is doing well in comparison to its counterparts. The following quotes are characteristic:

> *"At the same time Norway has very well developed internationalization strategy, so it would be important for us to be able to benchmark ourselves in relation to internationalization policy of the other European countries."* (GR2, Norway)

> *"in fact we already had a specific operational plan for strategic initiatives developed. We had put all the things in there that this new OMC guide included. It [OMC] allowed us to compare our own document with that."* (GR1, Estonia)

> *"But on the other hand, there was a feeling, that there are so many things going on, and we don't know exactly. We want to know a bit more about what is the difference between the approaches. Because for example, France takes a quite different approach in promoting research excellence, because they focus more on the regional context than Germany, for example. And these were the points that we found out in the study, these differences in approaches." (GR3, Germany)*

Overall, the main rationale for the country experts to participate in the OMC group was knowledge-related. Experts intended to learn about general research trends and new innovative policy approaches that other countries have adopted. Learning emphasis was often topic-related. Some experts were focused more on teaching others and sharing policy-relevant knowledge. Others were interested in benchmarking and comparing policies against other countries, thus gaining new knowledge that way.

6.1.2 Other Rationales

Besides the main goal of learning, several experts expressed additional political and personal motivations for their OMC participation. Gaining increased visibility for one's country and having an opportunity to influence policies were most frequently mentioned political rationales, as related by four and five experts. Personal motivations included contributing one's expertise to European level policy-making experience and possibly increasing one's authority as an expert. Two experts implied that rationale. Geographic convenience to join the group was mentioned by one expert.

As noted by Egeberg, et al.,(2003) and Schout (2009) participation in the European level committees allows one to represent one's country and make one's national policy positions visible at a European scale. The current study partially confirms the argument. The experts felt they represented one's country, however, the active advocacy agenda for national interests was not evident. None of the experts indicated having a clear government mandate to promote specific viewpoints or policy approaches. Experts had the freedom to discuss what was seen as relevant and useful. The non-binding nature of the OMC policy recommendations contributed to such an open agenda. The OMC work provided experts with an opportunity to be present and observe the policy developments and to make sure one's country is not left out when important decisions are made. Four experts mentioned that participation was expected to bring **visibility and representation** to a country whenever there is a new European level initiative involved. Learning in those cases was secondary; the topic seemed to be less important. As the experts comment:

> *"First of all, [name of the country] maintains the position by which it wants to be involved in general in the initiatives that come through the European level. We are very positive in thinking that we can learn from the others. So any new initiative it would have the involvement of [name of the country]."* (country expert, GR2)

> *"First of all, there is a need of presence, of being present in these kinds of groups."* (country expert, GR3)

> *"Well, in fact, the most important reason is that we were curious about this, what was going to happen and what is going to be proposed by this group. /…/ So it was more out of reasons of curiosity, that we wanted to be part of this group. And not that we took a very active role or not in the start anyway."* (country expert, GR2)

According to several authors (e.g. Fouilleaux, et al., 2005; Marier, 2008), expert groups provide privileged access to high-level decision-making. Marier (2008) suggests that

experts have the potential to directly translate discussion results into concrete policy proposals. The current study results indicate similar intentions by the country experts. A hope to **influence policies** was mentioned by five country experts. The focus on influencing **domestic policies** through the EU level decisions was present in three cases, primarily from Group 1. As the EU level policy directions impact domestic funding procedures, participation was a key to have access to the EU level policy-making and eventually also impact the domestic funding policies. In the case of other groups, the topic had less potential for immediate impacts at the national level, so expectations for direct policy change were less anticipated. Experts from Group 1 asserted:

> *"Our research capacity in [name of the country] has been in a relatively good level. Our scientists had a great potential but they were totally lacking infrastructural capacity. The state itself did not have money. /.../ So the aim was to influence the scheme, so that the SF money could be used to fund the research projects."*

> *"So more and more the European programs on the innovation policy on one hand and the cohesion policy on the other hand sort of overlap. And also in the national policy we were in the midst of the paradigm shift towards helping regions to catch up, towards policies more directed on supporting strong regional clusters. And the program we had at the time was an example of that paradigm shift. /…/ So the exercise between these two programs, very much reflected also the policy change we had in our national policies. That [OMC recommendation] would have helped us to strengthen the case. /…/ We tried to make the use of SF from the EU very much to support that national policy goal."*

In two cases, the impact of collective knowledge and expertise was anticipated to increase the current research capacity at the expert's home country. It was felt that the opinion of one person could hardly have as much influence as a mutually designed European level policy document. Such a document incorporates the expertise of several member-state policy experts and would have had a stronger effect domestically. A representative from a newly joined member-state describes:

> *"20% of population lives in one city, [name of the city] and 80% of our research capacity is in [name of the same city]. But [name of the same city] could not get a penny from the SF, so we had to spend the money in places where they had no research capacity ever. And that was a very big problem. /…/ I wanted to influence that. I had to get on board somehow, so that's why I was acting. Because I tried to put those problems that they were telling me, on the table. I wanted the group to come up with something that I could use."* (country expert, GR1)

Safeguarding European level policies for an overall benefit to a country was articulated in one case. One Group 3 expert noted that the broader aim was to keep an eye on

European level policy-making, so that these policies are aligned with the national tendencies. The following comment indicates the motivation to participate in the OMC work to **influence and control European policy developments**:

> *"Also try to influence, to some extent at least, the way in which policies will be shaped in the future, because, you know, OMC process are mainly devoted to not only to learning process, but also to consensus-building process towards new policies. And, in this case, the influence was very important, not only from the point of view of [name of the country] but also being there, influencing, controlling some kind of European decisions, which can be, let's say, imposed by more strong countries, that does not fit with our [country's] schemes or interest."* (country expert, GR3)

Increased policy coordination at the European level was another goal for the OMC work. The hope to influence **EU level policy coordination** was mentioned by five experts across the groups. Increased policy coordination among countries was seen to enhance the efficiency of policy directions and help to avoid fragmentation of EU funding. Three experts from Group 1 felt that due to a lack of sufficient policy coordination within the European Commission, research funding is often problematic for the member states. As the experts commented:

> *"So the problem was more at the European level between the SF and the FP. There were some overlapping things and both policies did not know how they were working. There were two separate worlds. And sometimes an enterprise or a university participates in both - SF and FP but for 2 different things."* (country expert, GR1)

> *"This is a very important [issue]. We are spending a lot of money with this SFs and also with the FP. But those different policies are not really connected. And what can you do to connect these different perspectives? That was very important for [name of the country]."* (country expert, GR1)

Discussing internationalization strategies, Group 2 experts expected to draw attention to the overlap of diverse national cooperation efforts. Working together as a region for one agenda was seen as beneficial and served as a motivation for the OMC participation. As an expert describes:

> *"We felt that it was time for a more systematic approach on the EU level to avoid the duplicity and segmentation regarding the relations with the Third Countries in R&D. Because there were some activities at the members states level and others at the European Commission level and nobody in fact knew what the other side was doing."* (country expert, GR2)

The OMC exercise with the involvement of the Commission representatives provided a direct access to articulate such concerns at a higher level.

The rationale to **contribute one's individual expertise** for the EU policies (not for the other group members) was mentioned twice. Egeberg, et al. (2003), suggest that as Commission expert groups have the focus on sectorial issues, the area-based individual expertise becomes crucial. Putting one's knowledge to practice helps to increase experts' authority and gain experts' credibility (Stehr & Grundmann, 2011). Yet, the motivation to increase one's authority was never mentioned directly but rather as a way to guide the Commission towards better-informed European level policy-decisions:

> *"The aim was to come up with the recommendations and sort of do or give these recommendations back to the European Commission so that they know what the respective countries think and can use within their own policy making at the European level."* (country expert, GR3)

Geographic convenience served as a factor for increased participation. One expert asserted that it was comfortable to participate as the group met primarily in Brussels and it was geographically easy and financially less burdensome to take part in such activities. In such cases, the need for content-specific knowledge was inferior:

> *"I don't think it was so important for [name of the country] to participate, that on the other hands most of these meetings are in Brussels.../…/ I can say it is not the most important topic for [name of the country] but nevertheless, you can always learn something."* (country expert, GR1)

Additional political and individual rationales sometimes accompanied the main emphasis on learning. Experts were motivated by the opportunities to benefit one's country, either by increasing its political visibility or contributing to the policy discussions in ways which would help a country's research policy. Individual rationales to increase one's authority by OMC participation were also present. Participation rationales determine what kind of policy ideas gets to be shared among the participants and how the results of the policy process are perceived.

6.2 European Commission Policymakers' Rationales

The OMC policy instrument was brought to life by the European Commission to enhance policy coordination among the member-states. As research policy is an area where the competence (policy and practice) lays primarily in the authority of the member-states, formal policy coordination is not possible (Veiga & Amaral, 2009). "Soft policy" approaches such as the OMC provide a less intrusive way for the Commission to organize diverse policy systems and encourage national reforms (Dehousse, 2002). The rationales for participation, as expressed by the EC informants, support the

Commissions' political agenda (See Table 11). The informants saw learning essentially happening among the member-states' representatives. The Commission representatives saw their role mainly as a facilitator and supporter of the learning process from which member-states should benefit. The Commission experts' own need to learn about the policy issues was not essential.

Table 11. Overview of the EC experts' participation rationales

Main rationales for participation	**Focus on learning**	
	YES	**NO**
To coordinate and develop research policy (6)		X
To support member-states		X
To create learning spaces for others		X
To overcome resistance		X
To establish new contacts		X

The most frequently mentioned rationale for the EC participants was the expectation to **coordinate and integrate EU level research policy**. Six EC informants out of eight expressed that view. The Commission officers felt that they "*have a responsibility for ongoing development in research policy*" and were therefore committed to delivering tangible outcomes that would translate into more aligned research policy in Europe. As noted earlier, the structural reform in research policy suggested that all member-states needed to coordinate reforms at the EU level. The 3% Action Plan stated the commitment of the member-states to raise overall R&D investment to 3% of GDP by 2010 (Keeling, 2006). Clearly, there was a strong political pressure among the Commission representatives to deliver results. This process was not happening by itself. A major shift and active agenda setting was needed in order to overcome those weaknesses. As one Commission policy-maker reflects:

> *"What it really was all about was basically changing gear, in the way we were working with the member states. /…/ you need to put a lot more emphasis on the adaptation processes that the member states can undertake by themselves. /…/It [OMC] goes into areas where the EU is not competent, it [OMC] became a necessity. The more we look at the European problems, the more it becomes apparent that more needs to be done in terms of European integration, economic integration, political integration."* (EC expert)

The trend to increase European level influence and transfer power over from the national level to the supranational level is frequently mentioned in the OMC literature (e.g. Trubek & Mosher, 2002; Borrás & Conzelmann, 2007; Warleigh-Lack & Drachenberg, 2011). This research provides more nuanced perspectives on this argument. While the political imperative to achieve better coordination was mandated from the Commission, it was not only the Commission experts who were interested in the OMC initiative. The member-states themselves were interested in enhancing the

policy approaches in research and gradually came to seek activities that would enhance their research policy. During the interviews, the Commission representatives frequently brought up the issue of responding to the member-states concerns related to the need to increase collaboration (which aligns with the statements made by the member-state' representatives). The Commission informants frequently viewed their role as the facilitators of the process (and not the leaders) that was led by the member-states. Especially those EC officers who had participated in the OMC group work themselves viewed the OMC as an opportunity to **support the policy efforts** of the member-states. The rationale to encourage the member-states' learning initiatives was mentioned three times. The following quote is illustrative:

> *"But it was clearly, an area where European policy is not particularly well-coordinated. /…/I think there was a sort of general realization in the member states that perhaps this was not such a good way of going forward. So I think it was obvious that many of the member states had programs addressing the similar kinds of issues and they thought it was a good time to see whether there was any benefits in putting those efforts together and acting more as a coherent European interface which served countries rather than as it had been before, when the national policies were very much focused on purely national interests, historic connections, cultural ties, that kind of thing."* (EC expert)

Another EC representative indicates the importance of **facilitating policy discussions** among the member-states. He notes that there was no opportunity for the member-states' experts to discuss various policy issues before. Creating a formal space where the experts could meet and start a dialogue has been an important step towards increased collaboration. Referring to the ERA-NET schemes[17], an EC expert reflects how the Commission helped to establish such spaces where ideas and practices could be mutually shared:

> *"We established ERA-NETs as a way to help public authorities to discuss among themselves, not at the level of diplomats, but at the level of the program managers in the member states, they actually never met before, these guys! The ERA-NETs were quite successful because they allowed people to share practices, how do you design, how do you implement, how do you evaluate programs, how do you launch a proposal, what criteria do you use? And this whole thing at a very working level broke ice and allowed to converge practices."* (EC expert)

[17] ERA-NET (European Research Area Networking Scheme) was launched in 2002 as part of the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6). It was designed to step up the cooperation and coordination of research activities carried out at national and regional level in the member states and associated states, through the networking of research activities (EC 2006).

As noted by several authors the resistance by the national gatekeepers toward EC initiatives is continuous (Kaiser & Prange 2004; Eberlein & Kerwer, 2004). As learning arises out of communication, trust and open argument in a problem-solving environment (Hartlapp, 2009), exercises that enhance learning would potentially break the ice and generate close relationships among the countries. The rationale for **overcoming the general resistance** was mentioned by one Commission policy-maker. According to this informant, the OMC initiative provided a space for initiating communication and growing trust towards the EC policy initiatives. Taking these steps in cooperation with the member-states, participation was expected to move slowly towards gaining the mutual understanding of policy directions and the ownership of policy decisions. As the EC policy-maker explains:

> *"The role of the Commission would be to organize this sharing of information, trying to make sense out of the diversity of situations, possibly identify best practices /…/ that you should take inspiration from. And that is the basic stage of the OMC. What the Commission can then do is to say, ok, now that you have accepted to discuss this, we have commonly identified different options and possibly the best option that we at Commission can spread and codify this best practice into a document. Then we are going to monitor what is happening, if anything is happening. Of course such a monitoring has absolutely no impact, no legal impact, if member states do not do anything with this recommendation."* (EC expert)

In addition, the rationale for **establishing a network** of country-specific contacts was seen as important for one EC policy-expert. Such contacts were seen to be useful for providing up-to-date information on the current situation in the country. The experts also provided the Commission administrators an access to the most recent country-specific data related to research policy. Motivation to develop a network of experts in order to get information from the member states was commented as follows:

> "*I think my colleagues are trying to organize these mutual type of activities just also to stay in contact with research Ministries and to get information in order to fulfill that more heavy role in European semester*[18]*."* (EC expert)

In conclusion, the rationales of the Commission policy-makers to participate in the OMC process tended to have a political nature. On one hand, the Commission experts were pressured to enhance policy coordination as agreed in the Lisbon agenda. OMC as a "soft policy" tool was hoped to enhance coordination among member-states and decrease the country level resistance towards EC policy-making. On the other hand there was an understanding by the country experts that more collaboration was needed

[18] European semester - a yearly cycle of economic policy coordination measures. Each year the European Commission undertakes a detailed analysis of EU Member States' programmes of economic and structural reforms and provides them with recommendations for the next 12-18 months (Europe 2020).

in order to enhance research policy. Country experts themselves were interested in participation in a dialogue where the Commission experts served as facilitators and supporters.

Overall, the participation rationales among the member-states' experts and the EC policy-makers had a different nature. The participation rationales for the country experts' were primarily value-based. The member-states' experts were mostly interested in updating their knowledge and expertise through learning. They were eager to learn about the policy trends, best practices and to gain knowledge on policy debates in the region. Some were looking forward to sharing their knowledge and teaching others. Only a few times were evidence-based perspectives expressed. In those cases, experts were aiming to influence policies and enhance policy coordination in Europe. On the other hand, the Commission informants had mostly an instrumental approach to policy learning. They were eager to coordinate policies, organize learning spaces for the member-states, and establish new contacts among the countries. As these findings demonstrate, the expectations of participant groups for policy learning did not align. Disparities in participation rationales are likely to influence the overall learning process – what ideas get to be discussed and what type of policy recommendations are proposed. The next chapter will focus on the process of learning in detail, focusing on the similarities and differences across the three OMC experts groups.

CHAPTER 7: Findings. Group Comparison

This chapter describes the learning process, examining what kind of knowledge gets used in the OMC work and how the experts are involved in the process. The chapter addresses the third sub-question - *In what ways does the OMC process contribute to individual policy learning experiences?* The chapter starts by comparing the three OMC groups, identifying the main similarities and differences across the groups. From this comparison a matrix emerges that distinguishes between the context-specific and the process-specific similarities and differences. Each category is then separately analyzed, highlighting the factors that influence learning. The chapter ends by examining the individual learning mechanisms that experts use in the process.

7.1 The Process - Overview

The process differed in each of the OMC working groups. According to the EC policy document that states the regulations for the OMC in research policy, *"each work module for future cycles will have its own context specific structure, method and scope. The lead country(s) will play a lead role in defining an appropriate structure"* (European Commission, 2004). This policy document suggests having some freedom in the OMC process. However, three stages must be followed: 1) mutual learning has to take place through comparing and benchmarking policies in all participating countries; 2) guidelines needs to be developed by mapping best practices and agreeing to key elements for guidelines; 3) the group needs to identify areas for reinforcing community action (proposing policy recommendations for policy coordination) (European Commission, 2004).

The goals of all three groups were similar in nature – to collect and analyze policy approaches of the participating countries and to propose recommendations for all member-states. The differences were related to the specific topic:

- Group 1 had to collect and present policy approaches related to coordinated use of the two funding schemes - nationally distributed Structural Funds and the European funding through the Framework Program (CREST, 2007);
- Group 2's mandate included collecting and analysing policy approaches on research cooperation with Third Countries and setting up criteria for evaluating the impacts of activities (CREST, 2008);
- Group 3 aimed at identifying national policy approaches on improving research excellence in universities (Group 3) (CREST, 2009).

The process for each group was quite similar. All groups had to engage in data collection, debate over the best practices and reach an agreement in terms of policy recommendations for the member-states. Nevertheless, each group had some specific

characteristics that made them distinct. Table 12 presents the main similarities and differences across the three groups. As the OMC process is influenced by its particular context, it is useful to distinguish between context-related and process-related factors that shape the learning experiences. These categories form a matrix that provides the framework for the following sections in the chapter. Each of these categories is explained in detail below, starting from the similarities and continuing with the differences.

Table 12. Process comparison across the groups

	Similarities	**Differences**
Context-related	- nationally important policy-areas - political commitment	- political tension - urgency for policy results
Process-related	- group Chair - knowledge contributions - knowledge application and dissemination	- timeframe - steering type - group composition - reaching agreement

7.2 Context-related Similarities

Similarity 1: Nationally important policy areas

The OMC groups are formed by CREST based on the interest expressed by the member-states towards a particular topic. As the Commission representative notes: "*the member states request to set up these groups in which they think they have to discuss or elaborate on a specific topic."* The topics discussed by the three expert groups – research funding, research collaboration and research production – were important policy areas that the majority of member-states were hoping to benefit from.

The domestic policy debates increased the interest to learn. For example, five experts across the groups indicated having observed a national policy debate that was taking place before or concurrently at the time of the OMC expert group. The informants felt that there was an excellent opportunity to learn something that was relevant, and potentially helpful to inform policy decisions at home. Some felt that their national policies had some significant weaknesses, which could be overcome by learning from the others. The following two quotes illustrate the point:

> *"we didn't have any recent policies for international cooperation in research and development. And we only had a small part in [name of the country] National Research and Development Policy, which was valid in 2004-2008. There was a chapter in international cooperation but in fact without any detailed specifications, so that's why we wanted to know how others are approaching the policy of international cooperation in R&D."* (country expert, GR2)

> *"In [name of the country], first and foremost, this is an important policy topic, hot topic related to university reforms, which took place when I joined this OMC expert group."* (country expert, GR3)

Overall, the need for learning is related to national policy contexts. As noted by Kingdon (1995), sudden openings in the policy process (policy windows) create possibilities to influence the direction and the outcomes of that process. Experts from the countries, where the relevant policy debates took place, saw the potential opening for contributing their expertise. They saw the practical applicability of that new knowledge, which enhanced their participation activity and interest in learning.

Similarity 2: Political commitment

All three groups were supported by a political commitment that enforced learning. As noted before, the OMC learning initiatives are a way for the European Commission to achieve political objectives. Experts across the groups were guided by government expectations to participate in these learning activities. The political commitment was exercised through several policy documents agreed to and approved by the member-states' politicians. The strategic goal of the Lisbon Strategy (2000) – to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world - created a significant pressure for using decentralized methods for encouraging national reforms. Kok's (2004) report on the Lisbon achievements reinforced a firm stand on the member-states' performance and the use of a "naming and shaming" approach on member-states that have not achieved certain performance indicators. The Lisbon Treaty (signed in 2007) gave further legal power to the European Union over certain policy fields by the division of competences (distinguishing among exclusive, shared and supporting competences). Research policy fell under shared competence, which gives the EU a potential right to adopt binding acts for the member-states if clear evidence supports the need for action. Such a political environment made learning of the utmost importance for delivering outcomes. The instrumental outcomes were primarily important to the Commission. As an EC expert comments:

> *"the member states would be in a position under the European influence, not to say European pressure, all objectives commonly established, in some instances complemented with targets. It would create a level of change, a level of adaptation, basically a structural reform at the level of the member states."*

Political commitment and pressure was experienced less at the member-states' level across the groups. One country expert from Group 1 indicated alternative motives for the OMC process. According to his comment, participation was needed so that the Commission would not have an excuse to practice legal means for policy coordination:

"We set up these member states groups because they show to the Commission that we [member-states] are active and that they are always invited to intervene, and tell member states what they should do more or even less…" (country expert, Germany)

Other country experts across the groups were similarly less worried about the policy results. They supported the non-binding approach of the OMC initiative. Several experts across the groups noted that OMC supported freedom in debates, which was important for learning. The following quote is illustrative:

"That is very important that recommendations are not binding because when they are not binding, there is a creative element in this process. And I think the creative element is very important./…/If you make the recommendations of the OMC process very binding, what happens then, is that there will be hardly any discussion then, because then you have to make arrangements that you defend your national position and that would be the death of the learning process." (country expert, GR2)

While all the participants were operating under the environment of political commitment, the expectations on process outcomes were different for the two stakeholder groups. The EC experts were anticipating fulfilling the political commitment. The country-experts were not so pragmatic. They saw the benefits of the OMC in freedom of decisions, creativity and the non-binding nature of the recommendations. In the case of the OMC, political commitment was not a hindrance to learning. The OMC structure supported a more flexible approach, as gaining of power was not relevant. Furthermore, the overall political commitment added an importance to the OMC process, offering additional encouragement for participation.

7.3 Process-related Similarities

Similarity 1: Group Chair

The group Chair led the OMC process. In all three cases, the Chair came from Germany. The Chair was responsible for guiding the groups' work; he served as the main contact person for the Commission and was accountable for completing the work. The fact that the Chair came from Germany was related to the German Presidency at the Council of the European Union and CREST. A country expert from Group 3 asserts:

"*The first part of 2007, the Presidency of the European Council was held by Germany. So the start of the discussion about excellence in research and universities was a German discussion. So the initial idea of organizing of all this was mainly German and started by the German Minister of Research."*

As Germany proposed the OMC topics and held a leadership position in the OMC, it is likely that the process largely reflected German interests. However, the other country experts did not view the domination of Germany as a limiting factor to learning. On the contrary, as Germany has been one of the leading European country in the area of research and innovation, the OMC was viewed as a great opportunity to learn from them. Differences were raised on the basis of the steering style and individual personalities, as discussed later. This finding is interesting in two ways. First, it indicates that the member-states' experts' emphasis was on learning as opposed to engaging in political power-struggles. Second, the acceptance of the German leadership supports the value-based perspective, indicating the importance of individual personalities over a country-specific dominance.

Similarity 2: Knowledge contributions

According to the CREST guidelines, mutual learning takes place by comparing and benchmarking policies (European Commission, 2004). This takes place through individual knowledge contributions related to policy and practice. Knowledge that was shared during the process fell into two broad categories: 1) empirical knowledge collected through the questionnaires; and 2) experiential knowledge shared during the discussions. These two categories are analyzed below.

The **empirical data collection** methods in each of the three expert groups were similar. Typically, questionnaires were used for data collection. The questionnaires were composed of both multiple choice and open-ended questions. The aim of the questionnaires was to capture the individual country-specific situations as well as get a better understanding on the future policy developments in the country. For example, one of the Group 1 questionnaires was divided into two parts - questions regarding the country-specific best practices on the Structural Funds and the Framework Program and suggestions on further anticipated developments in the area. The Group 2 questionnaire was very detailed, asking specific questions about research mobility, national funding mechanisms, government strategies for research collaboration, the impact of the Framework Program on the enhancement of research collaboration with Third Countries, examples of best practices, and explanations of why these practices are perceived to be helpful. The second questionnaire asked to provide information on government strategies and examples of research cooperation with Brazil, India, Russia and China, countries identified as priority research partners for the European member-states. The Group 3 questionnaire contained a set of open-ended questions on general strategies, steering models and instruments for enhancing research quality and a set of specific questions on funding approaches to university-based research.

The experts' role in knowledge contributions was crucial. The requested information was country-specific, often available only in the native language and not easily

accessible to the general public. Experts tended to consult with colleagues to verify data or acquire specific information. Participants across the groups commented on discussing with their colleagues in order to provide accurate data. Here is an illustrative example:

> *"Sometimes I got help from my colleagues, namely when it was about existing bilateral agreements. So I had to check with colleagues and departments on some details, so I benefited from the help of my colleagues."* (GR2, Portugal)

In four cases the collection of the country-specific empirical data was the responsibility of the participating expert only: *"I worked on it by myself. Sometimes I, of course, discussed a special item with colleagues but, in general, I was on my own."* (GR2, Austria)

Several domestic databases and information sources were used for obtaining information as expressed in the following quote: "*As a state employee, I had access to internal databases of the government and so on.*" (country expert, GR2). In addition to domestic databases, European level statistical databases such as the Eurostat and ERAWATCH were used. These regional level databases served as the quality mechanisms to secure the validity of the data, allowing information comparisons between the local and the European sources.

The empirical data was usually gathered only from the participating countries. In case of Group 2, an attempt was made to collect information from all of the EU member states and associated countries. As full representation of all the EU countries was not possible, input from the majority of countries (18 countries in Group 1; 22 countries in Group 2 and 20 countries in Group 3) was seen as sufficient to provide a general overview on the situation in Europe and to inform a final report. Collected information was then examined, analyzed and discussed during the group meetings.

Group discussions where content-specific knowledge was shared provided an important addition to the empirical information. An exchange of experiences, peer reviews and the dissemination of good practices serve as the foundation of the OMC process (Morano-Foadi, 2008; De Bruijn & Lagendijk, 2005). An EC policy-maker comments on the importance of always having two - quantitative and qualitative - methods employed:

> *"I think that, again, it's very difficult to say one was more important than the other. The questionnaire activities were pretty good at making sure that we got kind of a more standardized survey-type of information and brought in more people than those who were necessarily involved in the working group. But the discussion brought together the people who were knowledgeable, who were interested, who were experienced. So it gives much richer information flow than a questionnaire."*

During group discussions practical country-specific experiences were shared. Providing examples on the best practices on policies and programs served as the main focus of activities across the groups. Such experiential knowledge was rooted in the experts' own individual experiences in the field. Here are two illustrative examples:

> *"I think we gave some practical examples on how synergy was already reached within our regions in the Netherlands. There were some best practices on research internationalization that were of use to the rest of the group."* (GR2, the Netherlands)

> "*So mainly it was about practical experiences, where those programs have met in real life. It was more our own experience in the field of how the SF and FP could work together on the local level."* (GR1, Sweden)

Some participants highlighted particular aspects, which they brought to the discussions. The perception that their knowledge was taken into account and was seen to be important during the decision-making process, was expressed in six cases:

> "*I think [I contributed] basic knowledge on SF because there were more experts on innovation and on FP than there were of SF. So, there was a little bit of lack in understanding of the SF, so I could bring that in.*" (country expert, GR1)

> "*Initially Brazil was not in the package, so I proposed Brazil and we added that and it was accepted by all colleagues.*" (country expert, GR2)

Some experts commented on a **specific phase** in the process to which they contributed more than others:

> *"I did a lot of the analysis of the surveys. I myself analyzed two or three of the surveys that we did and if I remember well, wrote specific chapters in the reports, which were the analysis. I was a Rapporteur of this group and also involved in the editing of the report, of course."* (country expert, GR2)

> *"We had to focus on one thing and not several things, my added value was more at the beginning, after it was more political and I was a little bit left when they were thinking about more political things."* (country expert, GR3)

In a few cases, country experts emphasized the importance of sharing policy failures during discussions. A representative from Group 3 recalled initiating analysis on policy problems. In their group, a discussion exercise was organized where policy problems were presented and group members suggested solutions. That type of knowledge triggered interest among participants and provoked analytical thinking on why a certain policy approach has failed. Comparisons with one's own country were made. Three experts expressed the critical importance of learning from the policy failures:

"I was particularly happy when somebody told about their failures. Because sometimes you can learn more from the failures than from the successes. /…/ Certain people, the [name of the country] for instance, they talked about how things didn't work and why it didn't work. It is very different when you listen to what are countries' best practices. But all the conditions that make it work, we are not aware of that. It is very complex. And then when you want to introduce it to Hungary, suddenly it doesn't work at all. And you don't understand why it doesn't work. In a way negative experiences sometimes are more useful. But usually, I must admit, that most of the people there wouldn't talk about that kind of things." (GR1, Hungary)

"Now, I think what was very helpful, they [country experts] actually did share problems that they faced and [provided] approaches to solve those problems. You know one second they let their guard down a little because you know they're competitors, as well, they then started speaking freely among themselves and you got an extremely positive interchange with people, you learnt things from the other people." (GR3, Ireland)

During group discussions academic research was generally not used to strengthen one's argument. Participants across the three groups confirmed this point. Experts noted that the topic resulted in discussing more practical examples related to policies and initiatives. The following quotes are illustrative:

"This data were more or less available in agencies, public agencies, dealing with research funding, with mobility schemes and so on. So it was quite a different bundle of information and data that we needed. And mainly I got it from our ministerial agencies or from my archives, but no academic research was needed." (GR2, Austria)

"No. No, academic literature wasn't used at all. /…/ But it was my job to know what people have written and to check also a little bit of the European discussion. But I did not do this just for the purpose of this working group." (GR3, Germany)

The role of the EC participants in the process of knowledge sharing was also important. Their knowledge contributions involved mainly administrative support but they also provided procedural knowledge, based on their experience on how the European level policy-process works. The EC experts offered advice on how to best formulate group objectives; they contributed statistical data, made sure that the objectives were in line with the Commission policy directions and helped with the drafting of group documents. Sometimes the Commission representatives provided legal advice regarding the European regulations.

Overall, the knowledge contributions across the groups were similar. The country experts' input involved empirical knowledge, country specific experiential knowledge and in some cases sharing of policy failures. The use of empirical data collection methods together with the experiential knowledge creates a certain consistency in the knowledge base. The attempts to include the perspectives of as many countries as possible, including those not present in the meetings, helped to legitimize the policy recommendations and create trust in the work. The European Commission representatives provided administrative support but also factual knowledge regarding terminology and legal facts. The emphasis on experiential knowledge as opposed to academic knowledge was evident.

Similarity 3: Knowledge Application and Dissemination

Knowledge application took place through the list of best practices and policy recommendations. The overall nature of the recommendations was quite similar – all groups proposed suggestions broad enough to be applicable in diverse research systems. In addition, all groups suggested developing increased EU level governance mechanisms for the member-states. Such a recommendations represents a step towards increased policy coordination, initiated by the member-states themselves. All three groups also emphasized the importance of continuing with the mutual learning exercises. The diversity of recommendations was apparent in the best practices section, where some countries had more representation and visibility than others. This was often related to the level of experience a country had in a specific topic.

Group 1 developed fourteen policy recommendations that emphasized the need for strengthened governance and the coordinated use of the two funding mechanisms (SF and FP) in order to increase resources for research performance. Each specific recommendation was followed by a practical component – a detailed explanation on how a particular recommendation has already been followed in a certain country. Examples of the potential scenarios on how to utilize a particular recommendation were also provided. These practical examples make the policy document useful if a country decides to adopt a certain policy approach. The country-specific examples were drawn from a small set of countries that represented the group. The most frequent examples of the best practices came from Germany (8), followed by Greece (4), Italy (3) and Estonia (2). Slovenia, Ireland, Spain, Lithuania and Romania were mentioned once.

Group 2 presented its policy recommendations in two separate documents. First, an extensive 195-page analytical report was developed containing policy recommendations, accompanied by practical examples. Second, a short summary publication was generated where only policy recommendations were featured. As a result of the work, twenty-four policy recommendations were proposed. The nature of these recommendations was similar to Group 1. A need for a wider community strategy for research internationalization was proposed, preferably incorporated into the other

areas of EU policies. Distinct from the other groups, Group 2 suggested an organizational change as one of its recommendations, specifically, setting-up a strategic forum on international cooperation with high-level representatives from the member-states, associated countries and the European Commission. This group presented country-specific examples quite evenly, allowing visibility to each participating member-state. Germany still held a most prominent place in the report (7) but the examples from the range of other countries– Ireland (5), Norway (4), Netherlands (3), Finland (3), Czech Republic (3), Belgium (3), Romania (3), Austria (2), Portugal (2), Greece (2) were also available. Twenty-two countries were featured in the report.

Group 3's report provided a total of nine general recommendations, suggesting ways for increasing research excellence among the member-states. The report had the most balanced approach regarding the policy recommendations. It featured at least two best-practice examples from all of the seventeen participating countries. The recommendations included the strategic orientation of the policy efforts, specific instruments that could be used in the European context and suggestions for further steps in mutual learning. The examples were provided together with the analysis of the strengths and challenges encountered in the process, providing recommendations for the policy improvements. The report concluded with the lessons learned. That section has a practical value for policy-makers and provides relevant information for general learning purposes.

Getting country-specific examples into the report was important for the experts. This type of knowledge application was seen to increase country's visibility. Gaining a formal acknowledgement from the group of international experts added a certain value to the best practice. As an expert notes:

> "*Everyone of us tried to have his own country as visible in the report as possible. /…/ I also managed to put in some good practice from the [name of the country]. /…/ So everything was used*." (country expert, GR2)

As the countries research systems were diverse, it was difficult to suggest a specific practice applicable to every country. Therefore the proposed recommendations tended to be broad, including examples of country-specific best practices. Most experts felt that their contributions were taken into account and included in the final reports. Many (sixteen) experts across the groups noted that most of their contributions and comments were accepted by the group and were incorporated into the final report. The fact that their contributions were valued created a sense of mutuality and **ownership of ideas.** The ease with which the policy ideas were accepted, resembles to the concept of operating in a "epistemic community" (Haas, 1992). In an "epistemic community" where people possess recognized expertise in the policy area, it becomes easy to connect to each other, provide relevant information and get support for ideas. The experts felt that the discussions tied several ideas together, provoking new fresh approaches: "*I couldn't tell you what was my idea because when you start talking with people, sometimes your*

ideas come through the others." (GR1, Hungary). An expert from Group 3 emphasized that all experts got an opportunity to shape the policy report. As participants were all area experts, each opinion was considered, discussed and accepted (or rejected) by the group. Eventually, the final report was seen to incorporate an approach upon which everyone could agree.

Knowledge dissemination across the groups involved activities where results were distributed to a larger public, including one's government, after the OMC work had ended. Experts often mentioned that they were requested to summarize the outcomes of the OMC work and were asked to make formal presentations at his/her home organizations. The fact that these presentations were expected and encouraged, demonstrates an organizational interest towards the work of the OMC groups. The experts assert:

> *"I did a debriefing and then I distributed the policy paper within my unit to my colleagues and also discussed with [name of the unit Head] what recommendations we could take from this."* (GR1, Flanders)
>
> *"Yes, I shared information, I have an obligation to write a report after these meetings and I share it within the Ministry, not in detail but the main things."* (GR2, Lithuania)
>
> *"I do remember that I did present to my colleagues at the Division of Higher Education of the outcomes of this report, so I shared the result of the whole OMC expert group with my units back at home."* (GR3, Sweden)

Group 1 experts decided to organize an in-country workshop to publicize the main results to the group members and to other individuals. Through such activities, experts were able to inform colleagues on the latest developments at the European front, and contribute new ideas and concepts to policy circles within one's own organization.

Active knowledge dissemination is seen as a way for the Commission to bolster its credibility and to pursue its policy goals, especially in the areas where it needs to establish its authority (e.g. research, security)(Boswell, 2008). As noted by Morano-Foadi (2008), the Commission cannot directly pressure member-states to adopt uniform policies. Nevertheless, the Commission experts can actively promote and disseminate good practices to achieve consistency across national policy approaches. In the current cases, the Commission published official reports (ranging from 32 to 128 pages), which were disseminated to the representatives of all member-states through CREST and the European Commission. These reports were also made publicly available on the European Commission OMC website.

Overall, knowledge application included incorporation of mutual policy ideas into the final report. Experts formed an "epistemic community" where policy ideas were easily

accepted. Such environment led to openness to new policy ideas and ownership of the decisions. The country experts and the Commission experts disseminated the policy results among the member-states' governments. Such broad distribution of new policy ideas presents a small step into potential policy change.

7.4 Overview of the Group Differences

An overview of the differences across the groups is presented in Table 13. There were six themes that distinguished the groups. Context-specific differences (political tension and urgency for policy results) emerged from the group topic. Group 1, that discussed financial matters, stood out as a group with the highest political tension and urgency for policy results. Process-specific differences (timeframe, steering type, group composition and tension in reaching an agreement) were influenced primarily by the particular group organization. Again Group 1 was different from the other groups. Group 1 had the shortest timeframe to operate. The steering style was directive compared to the other groups. The tension in reaching an agreement was also most apparent in Group 1. Group 1 and 3 had a diversity of participants compared to Group 2. These differences influenced policy learning, as analyzed below.

Table 13. Overview of the main differences across the groups

Differences	**Group 1**	**Group 2**	**Group 3**
Political tension	high	Low	low
Urgency for policy results	high	Medium	low
Timeframe	2006-2007 less than 6 months	2007-2009 2 years	2008-2009 1 year
Steering type	top-down	bottom-up	bottom-up
Group composition	-country experts (20 ministry admin); - EC experts (DG R&D policy officers (2); DG Regional Policy policy officer (1); DG Employment policy officer (1)); -external experts	-country experts (over 20 ministry admin); -EC experts (DG R&D policy officers); -external experts	-country experts: (ministry admin and university representatives (17); -EC experts (DG R&D policy officer (1)); - external experts
Reaching consensus, tension in the group	high	Low	low

7.5 Context-related Differences

Difference 1: Political tension

Political tension emerged within a group and was not related to any pressure created by the national governments. As noted above, the political tension was most apparent in

Group 1. Surprisingly, the heated debates were witnessed not among the country experts but among the Commission representatives. The source of these tensions was the distribution of the funding schemes. The Structural Funds program was administered by the DG Regional Policy and the Framework Program was operated by the DG Research. The OMC group was established to discuss ways in which the Structural Funds could be allocated to establish research infrastructure. There was an obvious resistance from the DG Regional Policy against this idea, as it would have ultimately lead to the decrease in their operational funds. As a country expert summarizes: *"I think especially the colleagues from the DG Regio were very anxious that we wouldn't have the chance to get their money for research."* (country expert, GR1)

The DG Research saw the OMC as a way to bring country experts together and demonstrate their interest in changing the situation. As a bottom-up process, the OMC results were seen to serve as a powerful evidence for this policy change. As a country expert describes:

> *"the initiative [OMC] was started by the DG Research because they tried to get the SF for the FP activities. There was a great rivalry between these two DGs as I learned during the work of our expert group."* (country expert, GR1)

The country experts supported the general idea of changing the program requirements. However, witnessing the internal power struggle within the Commission departments was not expected. The country experts felt that they were pulled into the internal battle between the two Commission Directorates: *"European Commission said that we are independent but they tried to use us I have to say very clearly for their political interests."* (country expert, GR1)

These political tensions within a group **provoked a different kind of learning**. The focus of Group 1 participants was not only on the country-specific policy approaches but was shifted towards learning about the relationships between the Commission Directorates and their mutual coordination attempts. Four experts from Group 1 commented on learning about the relationships between diverse stakeholders and mentioned gaining a better understanding of how big bureaucracies such as the European Commission operate. The following quote is representative:

> *"we learned a lot about the decision mechanisms in the EU Commission concerning the EU funding. And it was also interesting to know about the different cultures in the EU Commission." (*GR1, Germany)

The other groups did not experience such sharp political tensions during their OMC work. A few experts observed a slight power-play between the country experts and the Commission, but it wasn't significant enough to create any resistance or difficulties. The learning focus of the other experts was primarily on the content - policy approaches and best practices related to the theme.

In conclusion, political tension affects the learning focus. It draws the participants' attention away from policy content towards the decision-making style, organizational culture and the diverse interests of the stakeholders. This finding supports Radaelli's (2004) point, according to which learning under political pressure can be sometimes viewed as hindering to the experience. He asserts that learning in a political context is largely about gaining power and not area-specific knowledge. The current findings provide empirical evidence on how political tension can shift the learning focus away from the acquisition of area-specific information.

Difference 2: Urgency for policy results

There was a difference among the groups regarding the expectations for a policy change at the European level. The urgency for Group 1 was especially high, as some of the participants saw the immediate need to change the current funding policy. The money from the Structural Funds was increasingly spent on building roads and establishing other infrastructure in less developed areas of Europe. This focus was not of direct interest to the older Western states. For them financial support for research and innovation infrastructure was more relevant. Four experts representing the old European countries were critical of the way the money was currently spent. The following quote from a Group 1 country expert demonstrates the viewpoint:

> *"We saw the need to make better use of the SF. So it [the money] was always invested in renewing of harbours, another freeway, another road, another parking-place, another shopping-center, but this is not investment in future! It is investment in future if you are in Romania, in a countryside, then it makes sense. But not in old Europe. That's crazy. And that was the reason we said we would like to use our Presidency to better organize taxpayers' money in terms of future investment."* (GR1, Germany)

The experts from the old Western states felt that as taxpayers they contributed significantly to the overall EU's budget, but they did not get investments in return. They saw that the money was increasingly given to projects, which would not generate sustainable benefits for Europe.

The urgency created a situation where there wasn't enough time for policy learning. The focus of Group 1 was to finish the policy report as quickly as possible to shape the funding criteria for the next round of the funding cycle. DG Regio reinforced this urgency, as it was in their direct interest to re-examine the funding criteria for the Structural Funds. The policy learning debates at the group were cut short and the experts were not engaged in policy learning debates as profoundly as the other groups.

The expert from Group 2 and 3 commented on having less urgency for creating policy change. For Group 2, a secondary aim to the overall learning was to initiate the development of a European level research collaboration strategy with Third countries. Such a formal document was important for aligning policy directions among the member-states. However, this policy document did not really call for any profound changes in the national initiatives. As a country expert from Group 2 explains:

> *"At the end of the day the objective was not to reach some kind of binding agreement, I would say, for the future strategic themes of the European Research Area. So what we did was, we developed recommendations which could be taken up by individual member states or by the European Commission to shape national strategies or the European strategy."*

From the Commission perspective, the group enhanced their work on drafting European level cooperation strategy – "*It provided that first push towards a re-examination of our international cooperation policy."* Clearly the topic was important for the member-states and more importantly for the European Commission representatives, but the burning urgency in providing solutions to a policy problem such as for Group 1, was not present. Group 3 experts were collecting and analyzing country-specific best practices on university research excellence. The urgency for developing European level policy change was not a focus. The learning was focused on content specific policy approaches.

Overall, current findings indicate that in situations where there is an apparent urgency for policy change, learning tends to be hindered, as other rationales (e.g. political) become more important. Compared to other experts, Group 1 participants brought very few examples on gaining new knowledge regarding policy approaches. Their focus was more on clarifying program administration rules and influencing European level policy administration. Compared to other groups, the main focus for Group 1 participants was on achieving the outcomes rather than the learning process itself.

7.6 Process-related Differences

Difference 1: Timeframe

The timeframe of the process had an impact on the participants' perceptions about their learning experiences. The shorter the operational time the group had, the less engaging the learning experience seemed to be. Group 1 had the most urgency in producing policy results and therefore had the shortest time to operate. The kick-off meeting for the group took place on Nov 30, 2006 in Brussels and the final draft of the guidelines had to be delivered to CREST by April/May 2007[19]. This schedule left less than six

[19] CREST Working Group "How to make better co-ordinated use of Structural Funds and the Framework Programmes to support R&D", Minutes (07.12.06)

months for the actual work of collecting data and sharing knowledge. OMC work on top of the domestic job responsibilities did not leave enough flexibility for the country experts to engage in discussions. Experts hesitated to slow down the process by requesting additional time for discussions. A country expert reflects:

> *"The process went very very fast. The first meeting was in November. In March-April it had to be finished. It had to be totally finished in May when we had a big conference. The real job was done very fast in December-January, only two months. And most of the member states … people like me, we had other jobs to do. It was difficult for us to say, wait, for other people who were working full time on it."* (country expert, GR1)

As the process was rushed, the overall learning experience was not as rich and satisfying for Group 1 participants as for the other groups. Some of the quotes by the Group 1 participants demonstrate modest enthusiasm towards the OMC process: "*The method in itself I think could be improved*."; "*I think it is useful, but it depends very much on the expert group*."

Group 2 was operating for two years, which was unusually long. Typically an OMC life-cycle continues for one year. In this case, the group work seemed to be very productive, results were relevant to all participants and it was decided to continue with the work for a second year to elaborate on the policy approaches on selected target countries (Brazil, China, India, Russia). The structure of the process was flexible and the learning process was not rushed. More time was available to discuss ideas and collect opinions from the participants. This led to a more fulfilling OMC experience. A country expert reflects: *"We had the time to comment on this paper, to add something, to contribute new information so on and then finally we all agreed."* (GR2, Austria)

Eight Group 2 participants were satisfied with the final policy document. They experienced a sense of ownership of the group decisions. The examples experts brought on regarding what was learned were detailed. The experts frequently emphasized the importance of their learning experience. This quote is typical: *"I learned a lot and everybody learned a lot, it was a mutual learning"*. (GR2, Portugal)

Group 3 had a year to complete the work. As the group members felt it was important to leave additional time for debates, the release of the final policy report got delayed. As a result, the final document seemed to be acceptable to all participants and ownership of the report was apparent:

> *"I mean the final report was delayed for three or six months. I'm not sure. But it was delayed because we spent a lot of time on the initial discussions on the concept. Overall, I think the process was very transparent to everyone."* (GR3, Germany)

Overall, the timeframe seems to have an important impact on the individual learning experiences. Groups that had more time to share knowledge and exchange views (Group 2 and Group 3) expressed ownership of the results and clearly seemed to be satisfied with the process. When the time was limited, Group 1 participants seemed to accept the proposed drafts, avoiding the issues that might have led to in-depth and time-consuming group discussions. Operating under time pressure and facing political tension in the group raise questions about whether learning was experience in a meaningful way.

Difference 2: Steering Type

The group Chair established the steering type for the working group. The Chair determined the overall working environment and the way the OMC process proceeded. In all three cases, the Chair was selected very early in the process. In one case an expert recalls how the Chair was putting together a mandate for the rest of the group before the group was fully composed:

> *"The leading country in this case was Germany. They had a great interest in such a work. So Germany in fact drafted this mandate and then it was approved by the CREST. So the mandate was prepared by Germany, of course with some other countries but I was not involved in drafting the mandate."* (country expert, GR2)

The Chair had an influence over the general structure of the process. He had a working relationship with the Commission policy-makers, and also had an opportunity to advocate for or against specific policy directions related to the group's work. For Groups 2 and 3 there was a small core group formed from the most active members who were responsible for analyzing the specific aspects of the topic. As a country expert from Group 2 describes:

> *"So it was always a Chair of the working group plus Commission plus two or three other members that were involved in analysis. For instance, when it came the time for Brazil I was part of that group but I didn't work on the Russia report, for instance. So it was more two or three persons that volunteered to really check on that, on the conclusions."*

The group Chair also heavily shaped the content of the working documents in consultation with the Commission officers. Often it was the Chair who prepared a first discussion document, drafted the questionnaires and/or the final reports. The influence of a group Chair on drafting the policy documents was especially noticeable for Group 1 and Group 3 members. As one Group 3 expert comments: *"After having agreed on the structure and having agreed on the overall concept, most of the texts were written by the Chair and his Co-Chair."* An EC policy-maker confirms the perspective:

> *"And then they had the questionnaire. /.../ It was designed mainly by the Chair of the group [name]. He was a driving person behind this [the process]. And he always consulted Commission on this."* (EC expert)

In case of Group 1**,** the first draft of the initial ideas for the funding guidelines was presented to the participants even before the first meeting took place. As the group Chair himself explains, the draft provided a starting point for more focused discussions:

> *"The first step is that somebody has to draft something, because if you don't have anything on the table…, everybody knows if the group is set up, then the outcomes are asked. By this rule [having a draft ready] it is very easy."* (GR1, Germany)

The Group 1 Chair's strong hand in the OMC process provoked the participants' perceptions about operating in a top-down steering environment. According to one participant: *"My opinion was that it [the process] was controlled and driven a lot by Germany and by the European Commission."* Such an hierarchical approach to group work influenced the participants' learning experiences. As the participants were operating under a time constraint and were not given enough opportunities to engage in the policy debates, the report largely seemed to reflect German interests. An expert comments:

> *"I think, it is very much the Chair who is controlling the situation and the other, members of the group they are... they would like to change something but the Chair is in the end the one who decides. So sometimes there were discussion on what would be the best or we think that this thing should be more emphasized or but in my opinion it was very much in the hands of the Chair, Germany. /…/ Some countries were stating that Germany was like forcing some ..., some arguments."*

The top-down environment affected the ownership of the policy decisions. Other country experts from Group 1 could not associate themselves with the process, because of the heavy German influence. The German Chair drafted the report, steered the process and most of the examples of best practices also came from Germany. At the end of the OMC work, the German Chair organized a workshop where their best practices and policy approaches were demonstrated and explained. Some experts were sceptical and distanced themselves from the process as illustrated by the following quote: *"They invited all of us over, and they showed a lot of things what they did with the Structural Funds, so it was kind of a show-off time for a Germany."* (country expert, GR1)

Country experts from Group 2 and Group 3 had a different experience with their Chair and steering type. The steering was seen to be inclusive, integrating diverse policy perspectives from the participants. Country experts confirmed always having an opportunity to provide their contributions toward the policy documents. Feedback was incorporated into the report and a final consensus was reached among all participants.

The participants from Group 2 all agreed that they were equal decision-makers and were able to shape the process. The following quote by a Group 2 country-expert demonstrates the mutual effort in the process:

> *"And the way we worked, as a start, we made a kind of work-plans for the group, where we had the first discussion about the rough ideas that we had. We decided about the structure of the report and then the main issues that we wanted to deal with. We also had some workshops with the experts to discuss these ideas and then later on we started to work on the report of the group. And during the process, we had several versions and concepts of the report that we discussed in the group. We discussed also the different aspects of the field. It was a kind of interactive process that resulted in the final report of our group in the end."* (GR2, Netherlands)

Similarly, Group 3 members described the process as "integrated" and "bottom-up", where everyone's opinion was encouraged and taken into account. The following quote is illustrative:

> *"The process was a typical bottom-up process in which there was some discussion about items proposed and then a report based on this first discussion. Then two different times to collect evidences from the different countries by specific questionnaires."* (GR3, Italy)

In most cases the country experts from Groups 2 and 3 were appreciative of the leadership and contributions made by the group Chair. Several experts noted that because of the work done by the Chair, the process was productive and enriching:

> *"Our German colleague made an excellent job. He was very strict on one side. On the other side, he was friendly enough and open enough, not to scare the participants. But in general, it [the process] needs quite a strict regime in such an open group."* (GR2, Austria)

> *"The Chair, Professor [name] did an excellent work on gathering information and drawing up the essence of the discussions and summing up in the end of the meetings, and bringing it all into the drafts of the reports. So, in a way, that was probably the most crucial job that they were doing to extract the valuable from all the inputs and all the discussions, yes. /…/ And I think he did a really good job."* (GR3, Norway)

Overall, the Chair had an opportunity to influence the mandate of the group, the structure of the process and the nature of the final report. The way the process was handled by a particular individual shaped the OMC experience. Group 1 participants indicated having a top-down steering style process, which hindered their learning experience. Their ownership of the decisions was not as clear as in the other groups.

Participants from Group 2 and 3 viewed the process as integrated and inclusive, having a bottom-up steering style. The experts indicated having a very productive learning experience. The country experts from those groups tended to appreciate the work done by the group Chair. Only in Group 1 was the leadership role of the Chair was viewed as too dominating at times. The urgency of the topic and a tight timeframe for Group 1 affected the need for tight steering, creating a less integrated experience.

Difference 3: Group Composition

Another significant factor shaping the learning experience is the diversity of the group composition. Learning occurs among individuals participating in a social interaction (Sabatier, 1986) and is related to the expertise and perspectives each participant brings to the process. The current findings indicate a difference in learning experiences based on a) what **job-related position** participants represented (e.g. EC, ministry officials, academics, external experts); and b) what are the **country-specific particularities** (e.g. experiences in the policy area, financial resources and similarities in the research systems). Both themes are discussed below.

a) Job-related differences

Four distinct job-related groups emerged across the participant pool – the Commission experts, the ministry administrators, the academics and the external consultants/analysts. While all groups had representation from the Commission, the greatest variety of participants from the different Commission units was present in Group 1. As the topic involved cross-sectorial matters, policy makers from DG Regional Policy and DG Employment were present along with DG Research policy officers. **The Commission experts** represented the interests of its distinct units and provided diverse knowledge to the group. This diversity was reflected in experts' comments as they learned about the different organizational cultures within the Commission. Several experts from Group 1 mentioned learning more about the way the Commission operates:

> *"Also it was very interesting to discuss with people from the Commission and understand the differences because at the beginning someone just believes that the Commission is something uniform, that everybody works on the same line and that they have the same interpretation for the things. And then you realize that there are many many differences at the level of the Commission, its not something uniform."* (GR1, Greece)

However, having an unusually large proportion of Commission experts in the group might have hindered learning and created a power hierarchy. The Commission is often seen as the representative of European power. Therefore some country experts might have felt intimidated by having the Commission experts witness the debates and open

argumentation. As demonstrated by the following quote, the presence of the Commission experts might have held some countries back in expressing their true opinions: *"I can honestly say that meetings without the Commission, discussion often times were much more lively than with the Commission."* (country expert, GR1)

Ministry administrators formed the largest group among the selected OMC initiatives. Group 2 had the most uniform group configuration, composed primarily of ministry officials. The participants typically worked at their national governments, or were involved in affiliated organizations. The participants found it easy to reach a common ground in policy debates and consensus was always established. Learning was experienced through analyzing best practices. Most participants were satisfied with the content-specific knowledge gained. Sabatier (1986) notes that policy-oriented learning within a similar belief system is common and comes naturally. Members within the same advocacy coalition are always seeking to improve and confirm their understanding of causal relationships within their policy beliefs. However, learning by truly challenging the core policy beliefs was absent.

The knowledge that ministry officials brought to the meetings was **politically aligned**. Five experts across the groups mentioned having difficulties in separating individual experience from political knowledge. Ten experts across the groups felt that they were contributing a mix of individual expertise and political knowledge. As ministry employees, their experience was based on country-specific political approaches. The experts themselves were accepting of the fact that they contributed both types of knowledge:

> *"I think it was a bit of both. You always take with you some of your national and political background, of course but we dare to describe our professional opinion. We did not have to justify our views or opinions. You could operate quite freely."* (country expert, GR1)

> *"I was quite conscious about representing [name of the country], and then I was not there as a private person, so to speak, representing [name of the country]. But, of course, your own knowledge is also embedded in ... you have your experience with you, and you bring it and into the meetings, of course, so it was mixed, I would say."* (country expert, GR3)

Group 3 was distinct from the other groups because **academics** were involved. In this case, typically two people represented one country - a person from the ministry and another individual from the university sector. This arrangement provided an opportunity for the academics to be part of the process and to diversify the insights on the policy approaches. As noted by four experts from Group 3, academics had quite a different opinion from the ministry officials. Diversity of views where the power-balance was established often created lively debates and enhanced the learning experience among the participants. The country experts reflect:

> *"What was most obvious was the people coming from academia. They were more speaking like academics, to put it that way. And we were coming from the Ministry, and we were more bureaucratic, in a way. So you got the sense that you had people from different cultures there."* (GR3, Norway)

> *"It was a kind of interaction between the real experts [university faculty] in this field and the people who are engaged in the more policy side of the work at the Ministries who didn't know all the details of this work. I think it was a kind of useful interaction."* (GR3, Netherlands)

People working outside of the government structure emphasized the freedom in expressing their individual views. Eight experts from Group 3 were working as academics or administrators outside of the ministries. These experts were able to strictly present their individual opinions and not worry about the alignment of political viewpoints. The following quotes serve as examples of that theme:

> *"I did not bring any political arguments because I am a civil servant [outside of the government] and it was more like what I knew about the SF and the FP that I could bring in. No political arguments."* (country expert, GR2)

> *"I understood myself as more or less as a researcher and a moderator. So I didn't have anything in mind about the interests of my country or whatever. I think … it was a quite wise decision of [the name of the government] to ask someone neutral into that process. So I didn't have any... No, at no point in that process this was political."* (country expert, GR3)

Three experts from Group 3 emphasized the freedom that an affiliation with a university would give them compared to the ministry officials. Here are some examples of this opinion:

> *"I was the one who didn't know exactly, the one who wasn't from the Ministry but having this bond with the university, asking questions not always a Ministry would ask. Perhaps it would be different point of view. /…/ Ministry has perhaps less flexibility or freedom than I had. Because they came with some guidelines from their Ministry. But me, I was completely free. I was speaking from my personal experience, basically it was my opinion. It is really different when you are coming from the university than from the Ministry."* (country expert, GR3)

> *"I can say all what I want to say if I act as an academic, because this comes from my expertise, but I can't say what I want on behalf of the government."* (country expert, GR3)

The participants from Group 1 and 2 stressed the important role played by the **external experts** in analyzing data and helping with their reports. The external experts and consultants were individuals without any government affiliation, providing theme-specific expertise to the groups. For example, Group 2 used the external expertise to gain country specific knowledge on China and Brazil. Having external experts providing knowledge to the group members shaped the learning process. Consultants potentially influenced the direction of the discussions, as they needed to be clear on the specific ideas and themes that were involved in the report. A Group 3 participant recalls:

> *"then there is the group of…how should I label these people? Well, consultants, whose job it is to actually write the report so they listen to what the groups say, they take notes and it is quite an open discussion during several hours."* (GR3, Sweden)

According to Sabatier (1986, p. 679) policy-oriented learning is most likely to happen when participating professionals represent different coalitions and belief systems. The author suggests that such interactions require obtaining a certain technical knowledge about the other party in order to engage in a dialogue. As demonstrated by these findings, different worldviews and values truly impact the individual learning experiences. The participants were able to learn about the diverse political interests of the Commission units. The Ministry officials provided knowledge that is aligned with a country's political approaches. Academics provide expertise-based knowledge and have considerable freedom to express it. The findings support the view that operating across the belief systems (Group 1 and 3) might take additional effort and influence the learning focus. For Groups 1 and 3 the learning emphasis shifted from the policy approaches to the nature of knowledge (political interests and power-relations). The group that operated within the same belief system (Group 2) easily reached consensus and was easily able to focus on the policy content.

b) Country-related differences

The list of participating member-states varied across the groups. While some countries were represented in all three groups (e.g. Germany, France, UK, Spain, Belgium, Romania, Sweden, Norway), others were more selective and participated in two out of three selected OMC groups (e.g. Finland, Ireland, Slovenia) or were present in only one of the OMC group (e.g. Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Iceland). The participation activity was related to country's **interest and previous experience** in the topic. As the Commission informant comments:

> *"Yes, so obviously some member-states were more active than others and that reflects, in part, the level of their international cooperation activities and in part their interest in working together with the other member-states."* (EC expert)

There was general agreement that the most active countries represented the old Western European and the Scandinavian regions. These countries had the longest experience in the area of research policy and had the motivation to share this knowledge with others. In addition, these countries had important **economic interests** to safeguard. The Group 1 country experts made the following reference regarding the participation activity of the older Western states:

> *"I think the main reason was that they [old Western European countries] were worried that these new member states were spending a hell of a lot of money with the SF and not getting nearer to 3%, but getting further away from it. And they were really worried. Because they are putting all that money into it and they are not seeing the results, so I think that was their main interest. Because they didn't benefit from the SF as much as the newcomers."* (country expert, GR1)

> *"I did mention to you that you have the big countries that are very dynamic, because they have to also defend their own interests and in a way to pay the way on what to do, you know. Because all of the recommendations of the working group were translated by the Commission on the calls of the FP7. /…/ You have countries such as Austria, France, Germany, even Italy, so they have interests in Third countries. They have joint laboratories or joint research institutes. So for them it is very important to have a common position about the EU and the Third countries because it's not only about research, it is also about business."* (country expert, GR2)

Several countries that had recently joined the European Union were interested in gaining **new policy-relevant knowledge**. The following comment is representative: *"It's a pity we couldn't get into everything, because everything was important."* Among those countries there were member-states that had limited expertise in research policy and were therefore perceived to be the observers, contributing less to the content of the policy discussions. As a country expert from the older Western state asserts: *"I think, the new member states they were there just to listen, not to miss out something. They really didn't put much input into it".* (country expert, GR1). Another expert from Group 1 reflects: *"What a pity that the ones who should have the most interest of this debate, Eastern Europe, were not very active."* The less active member-states were sometimes taken back by the policy situations at home where the reluctance towards policy change was dominant. A country expert from Eastern Europe describes the situation:

> *"Most of the time it's just talking and nobody is listening on the other side. I think that's a big problem. /…/ The politicians always say, we should have evidence-based policy and things like that and open government but it's just talk. It's rhetoric, nothing really happens."*

Availability of resources also influenced participation activity. As the participation in the OMC groups requires a considerable amount of resources (primarily human resources in

terms of time and commitment but also financial), not all countries were able to afford frequent participation in the OMC groups. It was the newly joined member-states or the smaller countries that had this disadvantage. A representative from the older Western countries commented on this: *"Because the exercise is time consuming and small countries do not have enough human resources to devote to this exercise."* (GR2, Italy) The European Commission expert confirms the lack of resources influencing low participation activity for the recently joined EU countries:

> *"The new member-states are still very much marginal in terms of participation because they don't have many resources and they don't have well developed capabilities and structures within the Ministries and so it is difficult for them to even engage in some of these discussions."* (EC expert)

Country-specific similarities and differences in research systems tend to direct the learning focus. When a research system is viewed as similar to one's own national system, the attention towards learning increases. The systems' similarity is linked to applicability of a certain policy approach, and potentially similar challenges. Four experts from Groups 1 and 3 indicated the connection between learning and similarity in research systems. In cases where the best practices were presented by a country with a very different research system, the enthusiasm for learning was lower. Here are two examples by the country experts that illustrate this point:

> *"The good examples came from Germany, Austria, Netherlands and maybe it was UK also, but then there were other examples that were good in one way but it was impossible to use it in [name of the country]. If you take Poland for instance, they had other use of the funds from the SF than we did. It was not easy to learn from their experiences because we cannot use them in Sweden. Mainly it was from those old EU countries who are more on the same level as we are with innovation."* (GR1, Sweden)

> *"In the first instance, I thought the Scottish experiences in creating regional structures were interesting and I quite liked the experience of their marking performance-based evaluation structures. /…/ Scotland is a little bit closer to Ireland in terms of scale and size and so on. And their experience, I thought, was more relevant to Ireland."* (GR3, Ireland)

The drive to compare one's country with only the best in the field of research and innovation, explains why some countries chose not to participate in the OMC exercise. For example, three experts noted the lack of interest in OMC participation by the United Kingdom (UK), a country that is perceived to be a leader in research and innovation. According to a country expert: *"in UK there is always some scepticism towards these exercises."* (country expert, GR1). Another country expert notes:

> *"UK doesn't care at all about European Union's international cooperation. It's never really involved in that. It got to the groups but it never really participated strongly because they really want to have their own international cooperation which is very strong."* (country expert, GR2)

Lack of participation interest might also have been caused by the differences in research systems with continental Europe and greater similarities with the United States of America (US). An expert from Ireland confirms having stronger ties with the US than with continental Europe:

> *"Ireland tends to look to America almost as much as it would look to Europe, in fact, arguably more. Certainly traditionally, we would have looked to, more to America for, I suppose, investment. We have a huge diaspora which is based in America and Canada as well … we don't have a tradition of having loads of foreign languages and so on. We would probably be less focused on Europe."* (GR3, Ireland)

This finding that similarity is related to learning is related to Common's (2004) argument, where he looks at policy transfer and suggests that policy is most likely to be transferred when there is a perception of similarity among the policy adopters. Rogers (1995) links policy diffusion to policy beliefs and notes that the diffusion is influenced by consistency in the existing values, past experiences, and current needs of potential adopters.

Country-specific differences that influence overall learning experience include previous experience in the policy area, availability of resources and similarity of the research systems. The older Western countries had an advantage in participation. Having an extensive experience in the policy area and financial resources, they were leading the process and often determining the direction of the discussions. There was also anticipation by those countries to shape the European policy agenda for economic interests. Countries with less experience were often the silent observers who were aiming to learn from the experiences of others. Learning was particularly enhanced by the examples from similar research systems to that of the learner.

Difference 4: Reaching consensus

In order to incorporate best practices into the final report, an agreement was needed about what counts as a best practice in the context of European research policy. In all the groups, an agreement among the participants was reached through **consensus.**

Consensus is reached not by a majority vote but by gaining mutual consent of all participants (Elgström & Jönsson, 2000). Susskind (2006) sees consensus-building to lead to results that tend to be fair and effective. Elgström & Jönsson (2000) note that the

processes of learning have triggered the use of consensus-based agreements in Europe as a way to come to mutually accepted solutions to policy problems. In the OMC groups, consensus was reached through discussing various views and presenting arguments. A country expert describes the process:

> *"Most of the time people would give different reasons for one or the other [idea] and you might not agree but if the reasons are good and you don't feel strongly otherwise, you agree. You can also put down your reasons and convince the others. It's a consensus and, in general, it never feels to be a rule by the majority." (*GR2, Spain)

Experts, mainly from Group 2 and Group 3, frequently mentioned **not experiencing any big controversies** or heated arguments during the discussions. Based on Haas's (1992) view, these groups functioned as an epistemic community, where members share specific understandings, values and beliefs. Participants confirmed having quite similar viewpoints on the issues. According to Sabatier (1986), learning within the same policy paradigms is straightforward and comes naturally without any major arguments. Experts from those groups frequently noted that it was easy for them to reach an agreement with very few controversial issues emerging.

Reaching an agreement across policy paradigms was more challenging, especially for the Group 1 participants. Three participants from Group 1 commented on experiencing **disagreements** during the meetings. These heated debates were related to the different backgrounds and worldviews that the participants brought into the process. For example, the diverse political interests between the EC Directorates caused arguments among the group members. For the country experts, the decisions related to the overall direction of the groups' work created tensions. Some experts supported taking a broader strategic policy approach, others embraced a technical and more operational course that would have helped with everyday administration of the funding programs. The focus of the debate shifted away from the content to bargaining tactics. In those cases, the Chair had to make the final decision:

> *"We had very intensive discussions and also a lot of exchange of views. /…/ It was not easy to find a compromise there. But in the end I decided as a Chair of the group. I said I want this, otherwise I can not accept the report."* (GR1, Germany)

According to Elgström & Jönsson (2011), the bargaining approach in the EU negotiation process is aimed primarily at self-interests versus problem-solving approach for common interests, which would support learning. In the case of Group 1, bargaining tactics might have hindered the mutual ownership of the decisions. As the Chair made the final decision, the mutual agreement among all group members might have been forced.

Overall, the OMC structure supported reaching a consensus. On one hand, the OMC process, characterized as a voluntary learning exercise without any legally binding decisions, made consensus reaching easier. The experts did not have to risk being accountable for the policy decisions that other countries were asked to adopt. On the other hand, the non-binding nature of the decisions could potentially affect the richness of the debate. According to the informants, not all policy nuances, especially the sensitive ones, were brought to the table. Experts noted the avoidance of strong arguments in order to maintain a pleasant working environment. The following quote is illustrative: *"sometimes very controversial issues did not come into the final version of the report, as we tried to avoid them maybe sometimes."* (GR2, the Netherlands)

The selective approach to issues might have also contributed to a less practical final policy document. As the emphasis was on including all the country-specific examples in the report, the final policy document tended to have a long list of different approaches leading to a document that was too **generic.** Decisions related to what to eliminate were difficult to make as countries were interested in having their examples in the report. Different examples were useful in different policy contexts and it was impossible to prove otherwise. According to an expert from Group 3:

> *"If your objective is to find out who is doing best in Europe, yeah, you run into a conflict, because people wouldn't accept us saying this country is doing best, and that's the reason why. But what you can do is to say, if you follow this objective... and objectives could be different, then for this objective this instrument is a good one."* (GR3, Germany)

Elgström & Jönnson (2000) note that however many efforts are made within the expert groups to create consensus and unity, individual participants are often disregarded. This is consistent with the current findings. Usually participants across all three groups agreed that everybody was given an opportunity to speak up, present opinions and influence the overall outcomes of the process. However, some exceptions occurred. In four cases country experts from Group 1 and 2 indicated witnessing some **inequalities** during the debates. In some cases it tended to be the bigger, more experienced countries whose opinion had more weight. The dominance of Germany was observed in four cases:

> *"Germany was chairing [the group] and [a name of the country] really got it to the point where he [the expert] said, "Well, I'm fed up because it looks like this is a German show and [the name of the country] doesn't feel comfortable with this."* (country expert, GR2)

Eastern European countries were struggling to find the balance between the stagnant policy situation at home and the expectations for contributing ideas at the European level. These experts were hoping to gain suggestions from the more experienced countries to their particular situation, but the input towards the topic was not always

relevant to the older European countries. The older European countries ended to direct the discussions towards the topics more interesting to them. A country expert from Group 1 notes:

> "*If nobody met the same problem, or they were not aware of it, so there were no solutions developed yet because the more developed countries did not have these problems. /…/ They weren't interested, they did not find it interesting."*

In conclusion, as characteristic of the EU policy-making, the OMC groups anticipated consensus. Consensus was reached through the debates and discussions. Reaching consensus across a policy paradigm (Group 1) was more problematic than within a policy paradigm (Group 2 and 3). The older Western states tended to dominate the discussions at times. By having many examples to contribute, the older Western countries set the course for the overall OMC process. As the conflicts were sometimes avoided and most examples were included into the final report, the final document tended to be broad and not easily applicable in diverse policy systems.

7.7 The Learning Mechanisms

Knowledge, whether empirical or experiential, was actively shared among the group members. That is when the actual learning took place. By asking participants to describe their learning experiences, several potential learning mechanisms were identified including *active engagement* (Paasi, 2005), *lesson drawing* (May, 1991; Rose, 1993; Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; James & Lodge, 2003), *imitation* (Oliver, 1991; Thun, 2004; Toens & Landwehr, 2009), *mapping, comparing* (Smith, 2001) and *value acceptance* (Sabatier, 1988; Haas, 1992). Evidence of the learning mechanisms where learning was obstructed was also present. In those cases *non-learning* (Heclo, 1974) and *blocked learning* (Rose, 1991) was documented. These learning mechanisms help to explain how learning takes place, suggesting potential ways to enhance policy learning experiences in the settings of open coordination.

The most frequent learning mechanism, reported by twelve experts across the groups, was **active engagement***,* where individuals actively contributed knowledge and learned new information or updated existing knowledge in the process. The experts' OMC discussions involved a significant amount of preparation (collecting and synthesizing data, preparing presentations, providing feedback based on their own country-specific knowledge). Current findings indicate that experts not only learned about the policy approaches of other countries, but became more knowledgeable of their own country's policy approach in a comparative perspective. The following quotes are illustrative:

> *"I need a dialogue process, which makes myself learn from the experience of the stakeholders in research and innovation."* (GR1, Germany)

> *"Actually participating in it was the most significant aspect of it [the OMC process] as opposed to the actual physical outputs. People learnt by being there and then they sort of translated the experiences a little bit further for themselves. /…/ You kind of take this, you internalize it."* (GR3, Ireland)

Situations where active engagement is encouraged serve as useful learning experiences. Warner (2006) notes that participation activity is linked to the expectations for having meaningful results of the process. Current findings elaborate on this perspective. The findings suggest that the learning activity is linked to the previous area-specific experiences where participants feel their knowledge contributions are relevant and important for taking the OMC process forward. One informant recalls:

> *"I was very active in criticizing, providing analytical criticism. Because I know very reasonably the situation in Brazil … we are cooperating with three funding agencies in Brazil. …. And also I was very active in proposing modifications to the several versions of the final document. /…/ Personally…. it was a very rich experience."* (GR2, Portugal)

Wenger (1999) suggests that through active participation people enhance area-specific expertise and develop shared understandings on policy issues. Current findings confirm this perspective. Participation in the group discussions was seen as a key mechanism in helping experts to share a variety of policy ideas, develop mutual understanding on the issues and propose policy recommendations as a group. The group dynamics were often seen as very supportive where everyone could speak openly. The following quote is illustrative: *"You were allowed to talk. Some people were very very open, some weren't very open. /…/I enjoyed it, the debates and arguments and the way reasoning [occurred]."* (country expert, GR2)

Lesson drawing, a strategic approach to gain information on specific policy instruments, is a more focused policy learning mechanism (Rose, 1993). The findings provide five cases where the expert had a particular policy area in focus from the beginning of the process. It could be assumed that this was something possibly encouraged by one's government. In lesson drawing, experts actively collected information to take back to their home countries. Knowledge was related to a country's particular needs and what was regarded as valuable in terms of practical applicability. Lesson drawing was mentioned by the Group 1 and 2 experts who represented the newly joined EU member-states. Informants made references to the intention of applying new knowledge in their countries:

> *"I wanted to see if they [other countries] were using SF to promote participation in the FP because I told you we were very very bad in participation, we were not happy with our results. /…/ I saw how they [other member states] did it and I thought it was wonderful and it could have worked in Hungary."* (GR1, Hungary)

> *"We aimed to learn what programs others have, how they make joint agreements. That was interesting and something that we will apply in the future."* (GR2, Lithuania)

Imitation is viewed as a practice where government officials consider a variety of policies that have been proven successful elsewhere and choose the one that is most appropriate for them (Thun, 2004). Imitation is also seen as adoption without making context-specific changes (Toens & Landwehr, 2009). While lesson-drawing is a calculated and strategic approach, imitation was not planned in advance or encouraged by the government but was inspired by the experts' own learning experiences. Four references were made regarding intentions to imitate specific policy initiatives by drawing on the examples of other member-states. Experts from both the old EU member-states and newly joined member-states mentioned this mechanism. In this case experts made references to replicate policies based upon the new knowledge gained in the group. In some cases experts were clear about country-specific circumstances. In other cases it was not clear whether the desire for efficiency might have overshadowed the context in which they operate:

> *"We focus in any specific national activity and try to examine and to improve and to check if we can transmit that to our national contexts. So this mutual learning is in the form of good practices and checking the transferability of these policy initiatives or matters or programs."* (GR1, Spain)

> *"India should be one of our target countries for us, because it was one of the target countries of this working group and others have benefitted from it."* (GR2, Romania)

According to Haas (1992), the diffusion of new ideas and information can lead to new patterns of behaviour that influence policy coordination. In six cases **value acceptance/diffusion** was observed where participants acknowledged the expertise of others and accepted their input. However, no references were made to the situations where specific policy beliefs were changed entirely as a result of the knowledge exchange. Examples of value acceptance include the statements by Group 2 and 3 experts:

> *"It was more difficult for [country] to be visible because we do not have any recent policies in this area, but we did not disagree on the good examples of other countries, which are more advanced."* (GR2, Austria)

> *"My feeling was that the excellence initiative from Germany is something that should be looked at more deeply by all the countries in order to understand the extent and value of such activities."* (GR3, Italy)

Sabatier (1988) emphasizes **awareness building** among different stakeholders in the process. The author notes that core policy beliefs are almost impossible to change, but policy learning pushes one to learn about views and perspectives of the opponent. The current findings confirm this approach. In eleven cases participants, mainly from Group 1 and 2, indicated increased awareness and understanding towards the policy-making processes at the EU. The following quote where awareness-building in described confirms the point:

> *"I think that there was a lot of learning on the EU level that you have to learn to work with people who work on other topics, who work in other buildings. So that was I think really, it may be a very basic thing to say but I think that was one of the most valuable things. That you speak with people who do other things and you learn from people who work with other things and then try to understand why they do things and they understand why we are doing things."* (GR1, Flanders)

The group also employed information **mapping***,* which served as another mechanism for policy learning in four cases. This approach has not received a lot of attention in the scholarly literature. Mapping of policy practices potentially contributes to individuals updating their views and perceiving new policy problems to be tackled. Information was gathered and based on the analysis, the group arrived at an overall understanding of where countries stand in terms of research policies. For instance:

> *"The impact of mapping in this learning exercise can influence policy-making and decision-making. I think some countries were good [at] this and they took the results of mapping and put it into learning and practice."* (country expert, GR2)

In seven cases the experts reported **comparing** policies and research systems against one's own. Knowledge for comparisons might have been previously collected or gained during the OMC process. The experts representing the older Western countries frequently mentioned this mechanism. As these countries are able to demonstrate considerable achievements in research policy, the experts were interested in learning how their country's performance measures up against the others. Determining best practices is often a result of comparisons (Kaiser & Prange 2004; Paasi, 2005). The OMC served as an opportunity to collect country-specific information and to agree on the best practices. As a country expert reflects:

> *"We made presentations on the national policies and national instruments in the research cooperation area, and that formed the basis for our discussion. We discussed the similarities and differences regarding the approach to internationalization of research. /…/ I think it was very useful to benchmark what we are doing in [country] and it is very useful to learn about what other countries are doing in this area."* (GR2)

Not all participants were actively involved in the policy learning process. According to Heclo (1974) **'non-learning'** occurs when policy-makers (experts) may be unwilling or unable to adapt to new information. They may be satisfied with the current situation (Zito & Schout, 2009), or political circumstances may not support policy change (Heclo, 1974). Two experts, one from Group 1 and the other from Group 3, asserted being satisfied with the current situation and not learning that much during the process:

> *"Regarding the topic, [I learned] nothing. We had our own initiative and that's why also [name of the country] has not fully participated in the follow-up group activity."* (country expert, GR1)

> *"the main message from this White Paper was keep on the steady course. There was common understanding that we had introduced some really good instruments in Norway, and that they were working quite well. "* (GR3, Norway)

In a similar vein, there were eight occasions where experts expressed **blocked learning** (Rose, 1991), recognizing individual learning but indicating lack of potential for policy change in the larger organization (e.g. government, ministry). As an expert reflects: "*And I really thought that this idea was something very good and I tried to get the Financial Ministry involved but they weren't so keen on that."*

In conclusion, the participants identified several learning mechanisms during the process. It seems that the most rewarding learning experience is provided through practicing active participation, mapping, comparing, lesson-drawing and imitation. It is the full involvement and engagement in the process that helps to enhance information sharing and learning. While the representatives of the newly joined member-states were engaged in lesson-drawing, experts from the older Western states were engaged in comparing and benchmarking practice. Satisfaction with the current situation has the potential to lead to non-learning scenarios or result in blocked learning.

This chapter has identified several context-and process-related factors that shape the individual learning experiences. It has also examined the learning mechanisms utilized by the individual participants. The following chapter analyzes the specific learning outcomes across the groups that were accomplished as a result of the OMC work.

CHAPTER 8: Findings. Process Outcomes

This chapter presents participants' views on the outcomes of the OMC process addressing the fourth research sub-question - *What impact has the OMC policy learning initiative had on the policy-making in the area of research policy?* The chapter examines what the experts learned during the process, how this knowledge was applied in the policy-making and what were the specific results of the OMC process. This data is crucial in understanding the overall influence of the OMC process on the EU's research policy. Grounded in the theoretical framework, the findings are categorized as evidence-based outcomes and value-based outcomes, analyzing separately individual, group, country and European level results. The overview of the outcomes is presented in Table 14. The distinction between the evidence-based and the value-based outcomes is made based on knowledge application. The evidence-based outcomes are those where a clear indication about the application and implementation of the knowledge was evident. The value-based outcomes are experts' reflections on individual learning and gaining new knowledge without having a clear impact on policies.

Table 14. Overview of the process outcomes

Level	Evidence based outcomes	Value based outcomes
Individual	knowledge dissemination activities (7); enhancing one's career (2); using new contacts (1)	learning about policy approaches (12); learning about programs (6); developing an understanding about policy views of others (10); building new vertical and horizontal networks (15) learning about policy coordination (8); no-learning (3)
Group	producing policy reports/guidelines (12); establishing new admin body (SFIC) (6); creating a spin-off OMC expert group (5)	developing an authentic dialogue (6); contributing to paradigm shift in policy cooperation (5)
Country	start of a new program, a new cooperation initiative (6); improved policy coordination activities (2); reference to a policy paper (1)	contributing concepts and ideas for policy debates (10); gaining awareness on policy approaches (5); strengthening an argument (3); influencing a policy discourse (3); safeguarding policies (1); increasing visibility (1) no outcomes (9)
EU	developing policy reports & guidelines (4); establishing new admin bodies and virtual cooperation forums (9)	becoming a policy developer (5); better coordination between different Directorates (3); informing further debate in research (2); raising broader policy awareness (2)

8.1 Individual Outcomes

Most participants (twenty-one informants across the groups) found the OMC learning experience to be very rewarding. Experts indicated how much relevant knowledge they were able to gain. They recognized that individual learning had happened and emphasized the growth in personal expertise. Most of the learning outcomes were mentioned in relation to individual knowledge enhancement in updating ones' policy views (value-based approach). The evidence-based perspective, where experts talked about the concrete instrumental outcomes, occurred less frequently. The following quote summarizes the dominant perspective on learning outcomes:

> "*I did not have any expectations when I went to this working group but then of course you learn a lot. /…/ I think it was learning really more of myself and for my unit."* (GR1, Belgium)

This section on the individual outcomes presents the evidence-based perspectives first (ten comments), followed by the value-based perspectives (fifty-one comments). The perspectives of the country experts and the EC experts are presented together.

8.1.1 Individual Evidence-based Outcomes

The evidence-based outcomes involved knowledge dissemination activities; new career opportunities and using newly developed contacts for work. The most often mentioned tangible outcome was being involved in specific **knowledge dissemination activities** that followed the OMC work[20]. This theme was mentioned seven times. Individual experts arranged meetings or distributed summaries of the policy reports. These activities helped to disseminate knowledge back to one's organization and to demonstrate the governments' interest towards the OMC work. Through such activities experts were able to inform their colleagues on the latest developments at the European front, and contribute new ideas and concepts to policy circles within one's organization.

Two country experts referred to a **career enhancement opportunity**. The OMC experience helped the experts to increase their authority and establish themselves more as European experts in the area of research policy. Countries tend to value experiences at the EU level decision-making and experts who possess such knowledge have an advantage in being involved in international projects. The following comments confirm the point:

[20] On knowledge dissemination activities see also chapter 7.3 - process-related activities.

"*But of course for myself it was very useful because I'm now in Brussels and I'm the liaison for [name of the country] in research and development."* (country expert, GR2)

"*After the OMC, I was invited to participate in the network for the use of SF in the southern European countries."* (country expert GR1)

The OMC process helped to establish horizontal networks among the country experts that in one case resulted in application to later work. The expert **used the new contacts** for a work-related policy problem:

"So I got to know the persons that I later on contacted in regards to other questions to hear what... how do they do these things in Sweden, for instance, or in Denmark. So to build up a network of contacts, I would say, is an outcome of this expert group." (GR3, Norway)

Such networks help with accessing policy-relevant information when the need emerges for additional insights. As country-specific information is sometimes difficult to access, these new contacts allow for a quick entry-point for relevant information.

Overall, the instrumental use of the learning experience was mentioned rarely. Most experts tended to reflect on the aspects of individual learning that did not translate into specific examples of knowledge use. The following section focuses on the value-based examples that were dominant among the comments.

8.1.2 Individual Value-based Outcomes

The individual value-based outcomes were mostly described in terms of gaining new knowledge related to policy approaches and programs. As experts analyzed and comprehend this new knowledge, they gradually developed an understanding of the policy views of others. Another theme frequently mentioned by the experts across the groups was gaining valuable contacts among the policy experts. Those contacts were viewed as valuable for future policy issues that need to be resolved. Each theme is explained in more detail below.

New knowledge related to different **policy approaches** became a major theme among the participants from GR1 and GR2 (stated nine times). GR3 informants mentioned this less frequently (three times). The theme for Group 3 focused primarily on institution-specific knowledge, where broader policy approaches were not the focus. Even after several years, ten informants could recall detailed examples on a certain policy approach that had caught their attention. This is an indication that learning had happened and that the knowledge had been absorbed. Here are some examples by the country experts:

"I got a lot of information about the best practice examples in Europe and different approaches the regions used. /…/ What was interesting that Greece, that has a lot of problems at the moment, they had a very interesting policy approach in their R&D strategy. They have set up a separate agency to fund R&D in the universities and research institutes and also in companies. Not as a part of the Ministry but as a substructure." (GR1, Germany)

"I was quite surprised about how far Poland was using the SF. Really using, not only applying. For example, for research infrastructure. To improve their universities, to improve their research centers they set up spin-offs in institutes. That was really impressive. /…/ So the working procedures how to apply for the SF, how to implement the SF, how to organize processes, we learned a lot from the Polish." (GR1, Germany)

"Yeah, one thing that surprised me was the... the way in which a country like Norway integrates publication performance measurement into research policy. /…/ The special thing in Norway is that they really calculate publication measurement as a government, and they measure the success of their universities by that. And they allocate funds by numbers of publications. And I learned that this...this is what they were saying...that this works quite well in Norway. And I always thought this is very tricky and difficult to implement, a system like that." (GR3, Germany)

Five experts commented on how a certain new policy approach could potentially lead to a country-specific policy improvement. This knowledge was linked to the application aspect, expected to increase the efficiency of one's own policy approaches. The following quote from a Group 2 informant is characteristic:

"I could improve our own approaches in the Netherlands because we have instruments for international cooperation. We got a lot of ideas out of this [OMC] how other member-states organize this. That was very useful, the exchange of ideas and mutual learning." (GR2, the Netherlands)

Another theme that emerged across the three expert groups was gaining new knowledge on **program administration**. This kind of information seemed to have practical relevance to the experts and therefore was well remembered and reflected upon (six times). The specific focus on program learning was related to a topic under discussion. As the Group 1 members were involved in discussing the operational side of the two funding programs, most program-related comments (five) came from them. They found it useful to learn about the ways other countries administer these two fundamentally different funding schemes (FP and SF). A country expert reflects: *"And then I learned also a lot about how other countries are using those two programs [SF and FP]. That was my individual learning."* (GR1, Flanders)

The specifics of administering a research cooperation program were mentioned by the Group 2 and 3 representatives. Group 2 experts learned about the specific examples of establishing research cooperation initiatives between the countries. One expert from Group 2 found multi-partner cooperation programs particularly important, referring to the best practices contributed by his Nordic colleagues:

> *"For the mobility of researchers you have many, many agreements but what was new to me was to learn about the examples of multilateral cooperation as operating in the Nordic countries. Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Holland are currently involved in multilateral programs. Their national programs are open to the researchers from the foreign countries."* (GR2, Portugal)

Group 3 experts discussed the operation of research programs within and between universities. The interest was created by the examples where specific centers were selected to strategically enhance selected research areas. One expert highlighted the example of the German Research Excellence initiative that was found to be particularly useful:

> *"I remember that my feeling was that the Excellence Initiative from Germany is something that should be looked at more deeply by all the countries in order to understand the extent to which you can take any kind of aspiration from increasing research excellence. This was my first feeling."* (GR3, Italy)

As a result of the OMC discussions, country experts started to analyze why countries have adopted certain programs or policy approaches. In this process, the experts developed awareness **about the policy views and perspectives of other policy-makers**, particularly at the European level. Ten country-experts reflected on better understanding the variety of policy-making approaches better. Mutual understanding on why certain directions have been pursued or why some of the Commissions' policy approaches were fragmented or overlapping was developed. The experts got to know about the organizational culture in the EC departments, as well as decision-making mechanisms and relationships among units. As mentioned before, the experts from Group 1 were exposed to the tensions between the different European Commission officers. At the national level, Commission operations are typically viewed as a monolithic affair, where bureaucrats are working towards a common goal. The reality that emerged was quite different, where often a variety of cultures and perspectives meet. These processes of mutual understanding can create a firm ground for developing policy solutions among participants.

The OMC provided an opportunity for the country experts to **broaden their professional networks**. Fifteen informants mentioned that participation in the OMC mutual learning group abled them to get to know new people and establish novel working relationships. Horizontal networks among the other country-experts were mentioned most frequently. Such contacts were viewed as useful for potential collaborative endeavours. According

to Connick & Innes (2003), policy networks in a collaborative governance approach contribute to social and political capital and can change the dynamic of political debate by sorting out issues before those arise at a high political level. Current research data indicates that these new networks can contribute to better and easier information flow among the experts. The following quotes are illustrative:

> *"For me it was very useful to deepen the cooperation network with different partners in the European Union and also to get more European partners and to widen my views about funding, innovation in the region."* (GR1, Germany)

> *"So we established…..this is really something...a good relationship with other experts, and now that I have someone in Denmark I can always ask, "Hey, what is going on in Denmark?" [Laughs] So this is the major contact. There are some others ... It's not a permanent contact, but it's more... If.... well, if one day I think about, "Oh, I heard that there is an interesting tuition fee model in Scotland" and then I go back into my mind and think, "Do I know anyone from Scotland?" And then I remember, "Oh, there was this guy sitting in that working group.""* (GR3, Germany)

Three experts brought up the theme of lobbying as an indirect outcome, linking this to the networking theme. In this case the networking involved a vertical flow of information between the member-state experts and the European level administrative bodies. Lobbying involved promoting an idea to the Commission that needs to gain more supporters in European policy circles. A country representative explains:

> *"But during the period that I was involved in the SF administration and the FP7, the networking was very important, also the lobbying with countries where you had the same interests in influencing the Commission. So you can also lobby not only in the OMC level but also at the CREST level or even at the research group level, to defend your interests better."* (country expert, GR1)

As experts were mostly ministry officials, the topic of better **policy coordination** was important to them. Eight experts across the three groups reflected on learning about policy coordination mechanisms nationally and at the EU level. On five occasions experts emphasized country-specific administrative activities to secure information flow among the government units and between other organizations. Examples where a specific intermediary organization had been created were found to be interesting:

> *"I learned a lot in these CREST meetings and the expert groups. I saw how they were coordinating, I saw the coordination of inter-ministerial committees. Different countries were using that kind of a tool between their ministries."* (GR1, Hungary)

"*The knowledge that I took back was how different organizations deal with the international issues. Countries like France, for example, they have part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dealing with international cooperation. It is called France Cooperation International. In Italy there is now a specific institution dealing with that. And thanks to being part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the international cooperation is a very strong asset. And also Germany, they have a very large Bureau that deals with international cooperation and deals with the European funding system."* (GR2, Italy)

Challenges related to policy coordination were mentioned in regards to the OMC group work. Two experts noted that during the OMC process they learned how to operate groups that possess diverse cultural backgrounds and policy beliefs. The following quote is representative:

"I learned very much how to handle and moderate such heterogeneous groups. Yeah, so my major learning effect was not the content that we produced, but what's the...what was my role in the process. Yeah, and to have these different countries around the table and to bring all that [information] together. I have a feeling that I learned a lot in that respect." (GR3, Germany)

The EC policy-maker involved in the OMC work similarly recalled learning about the diversity on policy approaches among the member-states. According to him, a clear solution for increased cooperation was a task extremely challenging to achieve. A variety of organizations and individuals involved in research policy complicated the cooperation process. As the officer asserts:

"We noticed that all countries were struggling with the development of international cooperation policy, because depending on the level of Ministries or directorates, universities, there is not a kind of a national connection at different levels. Priorities can be very different, different thematic research priorities, the relevant Third country parts will be very different. So it is very difficult to make a real change but you can formulate criteria or working method to prepare a content of international cooperation. Policy is a very challenging task."

The OMC process also provided opportunities for the European Commission policy-makers to **learn about** the area specific issues of **the member states**, their political interests, views on issues and perspectives regarding sensitive topics. First and foremost the OMC process proved to the Commission experts that the member-states are willing to come together and discuss issues on research policy for the first time. It was clear, that the mindset was starting to gradually change from viewing research policy as purely national matter towards seeing the benefits of collaboration. The EC policy-makers who participated in Group 2 recalled this realization of having a potential for cooperation:

"Well, I think the first and most important thing that I learned was that there is the willingness of member states to work together on this topic. It was a relatively new topic to work out a European perspective on how to go forward."

"For the Commission it was very interesting and we learned a lot about how member states can act together in this area. /…/ We learned how the member-states felt to a certain extent about the areas where they can work together and where they want to work together or barriers for coordination in S&T processes. And this was overall very helpful and is still very helpful to know and we sometimes also go back to the reports when we try to initiate new activities."

The OMC process provided ways for the EC policy makers to "test the waters" in order to understand what issues are sensitive to countries and which member-states might be less open to work together. That type of knowledge allowed the Commission experts to shape and modify their policy strategies in the future. The following quotes are representative:

"You need to know what is going on in the member states as much as possible. /…/ You also have the different biases that different member states bring to the table. You have some countries where all the officials maybe are instructed to take part in these types of processes but not necessarily contribute in a proactive manner but to use it more as basically intelligence collecting exercises in order to minimize …, so they can then act in the 'real' policy circles knowing what's going on, in order to minimize the EU's agenda." (EC expert)

"Then if you go to the member states, to study what are the really concrete barriers you will not find so much perhaps, because it's often more about the political willingness, more softer things… So you will not find a legislation that there is not possible to work cross border but in the end it doesn't happen because there is no support or no political interest, or is the focus more on its own issues." (EC expert)

Finally, three experts from Group 1 mentioned that their individual learning experience was very marginal. One of the experts was not actively participating in the meetings and later decided to send someone else from his department to the group. Another expert from Group 1 was not motivated to participate from the beginning, noting that he was involved only because of his job responsibilities. Third expert stated focusing mainly on meeting new people and sharing knowledge.

An interesting finding emerged from a comparison of the experts' initial participation rationales to individual learning outcomes. Only a few experts across the groups stayed strictly with the initial participation focus and provided related comments. Typically the **learning focus became much broader and more nuanced during the process**, as revealed in Table 15. The only group that stayed with their initial focus was the experts,

whose goal was to compare and benchmark policies. In those cases, the experts' focus was on gaining knowledge on the policy approaches of others and the individual learning had to be significant to perform comparisons. This finding confirms the point that learning processes shape participants' views and help to update one's understanding on policy strategies, paradigms and interests, as noted by Radaelli (2004).

Table 15. Comparison of country experts' initial rationales to learning outcomes

Initial Rationales	**Learning Outcomes**
To gain new knowledge (14)	Learning about policy approaches (12) Gaining new contacts (8) Gaining an opportunity to influence EU level policy-making (1) No learning (1)
To influence policies (5)	Learning about decision-making mechanisms (4) Learning about policy approaches (4) Gaining new contacts (4) Realizing that one can not influence policies (1) Gaining visibility (1)
To coordinate policies (5)	Learning about policy coordination (2) Learning about policy approaches (1) Learning about decision-making mechanisms (1) No-learning (1) Learning about common challenges (1)
To share and teach (4)	Learning about policy approaches (3) Gaining new contacts (3) Learning about program challenges (1) No-learning (1)
To gain visibility and representation (4)	Learning about policy approaches (4)
To compare and benchmark (3)	Comparing one's policies against different approaches (3)

In conclusion, the individual learning outcomes were mentioned in terms of the new knowledge that the experts gained. Bennett & Howlett (1992) argued that policy learning involves knowledge about organizations, programs, and policies. Current findings contribute to the data and indicate that policy learning includes new knowledge about the **policy approaches** that countries have adopted, learning about **programs** and learning about **processes** – how countries coordinate policy programs and how different individuals operate in the policy-making process. Through the OMC work both the country experts and the European Commission representatives got engaged in building mutual understanding about the policy problems that each party faces. Through learning activities they become more aware of the policy views of others. The member-states' representatives became more open to the idea of mutual cooperation and the Commission representatives learned about the potentially sensitive areas that could be avoided in order to take the policy discussions forward. New policy networks were created as a result of the learning process that could contribute to better information flow horizontally (among the member-states) and vertically (between the EC administration and the member-states). Participants' individual learning outcomes were

much broader than the initial participation rationales, confirming the point that learning helps to update participants' knowledge on policies and policy processes.

8.2 Group Outcomes

As all three OMC groups had to produce a policy document at the end of their work, most group level learning outcomes were described in instrumental terms. The experts noted developing a policy report, but important organizational changes were also present. For example, Group 2 was able to establish a new European level administrative body that continues to work on research internationalization issues. The work of Group 3 led to a spin-off OMC expert group on university research. The value-based outcomes were related to knowledge exchanges. As a group, the experts developed an authentic dialogue that gradually led to a shift towards increased policy cooperation.

8.2.1 Group Level Evidence-based Outcomes

The instrumental outcome of creating a **policy report** was mentioned most frequently. Twelve experts across the groups commented on that. An example by the Group 1 expert is representative:

> *"The output of this working group was more of the guidelines on how you could understand the differences between the programs and how you could combine those [financial] resources." (*GR1, Sweden)

In some cases, the ideas presented in the policy reports were later elaborated by the Commission experts. For example, two Group 1 experts described a policy report that was created by the European Commission. The Commission's more detailed report was based on the group's general recommendation that the two funding programs should be more aligned with a country's research developments. An expert recalls: *"Afterwards, after we delivered our report, the European Commission formulated also a document about the coordinated use of the SF and the FP funding scheme."* (GR1, Germany)

Yet, these reports were not able to influence the European program requirements immediately. Only recently, with the Europe 2020 strategy, are the SF program requirements are changing and they are becoming more aligned with the strategic policy directions of the European Union. Support is increasingly being provided now to the creation of technology labs and other research infrastructure that would enhance research and innovation projects. The work of the OMC expert group contributed to shaping this broader decision at the European level. As a Group 1 informant enthusiastically asserts: *"This group was so successful and sustainable that today the research and innovation in the next SF period starting in 2014 will be in the core of the program."* (GR1, Germany)

Six Group 2 participants described an **organizational change** that they were able to trigger as a group. One of the main issues brought up in their policy document was a need for a higher-level political influence to enhance international research cooperation. The group proposed the formation of a European level advisory body where politicians and government officials participate to discuss issues of international research cooperation. The emphasis is on developing the European strategy of research internationalization. This policy idea was quickly adopted and led to the formation of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) in 2008 (Council of the European Union, 2008). The Forum is currently functioning, composed of high-level political representatives of the member states and Commission experts. 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[21]. As a country expert reflects:

> *"The most important outcome was the creation of the permanent body, the SFIC. To a certain extent this OMC expert group was upgraded to a permanent form, not necessarily the same people but more political. So one of the impacts of the expert group was the creation of this SFIC. The most strategic idea of the time was that you could speak in one voice and through a common strategy vis-a-vis Third countries. That was the main goal. /…/ The SFIC is a more or less in a same nature as CREST, high level advisory body, to advise the Commission and the Council on strategic issues of international cooperation."* (GR2, Portugal)

The main outcome for the Group 3 participants was the initiation of several **spin-off OMC thematic workshops** that focused on various aspects of enhancing research excellence in the universities. Five experts made related comments. The participants recognized the need to learn more about university-related good practices and proposed, as one of the recommendations, the formation of a "Peer-Learning Activities on Universities" initiative within the framework of the fifth OMC cycle. The initiative was approved by CREST and was launched in 2010. The leading country was Denmark, with representatives from over forty European universities also involved. Two group members describe:

> "*What was an outcome was the follow-up project... So that was a clear outcome. The outcomes of our study, by means of these workshops, were distributed to a larger audience. So we had quite a number of people in these workshops, and we brought in the experiences from the first phase into the second one, and so I think by having such an exercise with this peer-learning, that's enhanced the effect [of the OMC group]."* (GR3, Germany)

> *"Well, I know that it resulted in, I think, it was about five different workshops with interested countries on the five different topics, and I think Norway, at least,*

[21] SFIC mission is available at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/policies/era/sfic

took part in two of them. And as far as I know, the people from the university level taking part in these workshops were quite satisfied with the workshops and it's quite a lot of good arena for meeting people from universities in other European countries, and to make contacts and to discuss common challenges with them. So that was a quite valuable outcome of this particular expert group, I think." (GR3, Norway)

In conclusion, the evidence-based outcomes were very apparent and easy to notice. Each of the groups had a clear group level outcome that the experts were able to comment on. These outcomes have played a significant role in shaping European level research policy debates towards themes that are important to the member-states.

8.2.2 Group Level Value-based Outcomes

The group level value-based outcomes were not immediately evident. These outcomes emerged gradually when experts described their knowledge sharing experiences in the group. Policy learning influences the attitudes and policy beliefs of participants. Innes and Booher (2003) view creation of an authentic dialogue in a group as an important factor in the learning process. The authors propose 'diversity' and 'interdependence' as two crucial conditions in establishing an authentic dialogue among participants. Each stakeholder brings diverse interests and competing policy agendas to the process. At the same time participants are dependent on each other, as the policy agenda cannot be taken forward without relying on each other's knowledge (Innes & Booher, 2003).

Based on these two criteria, the conditions for developing an **authentic dialogue** were present in all three OMC groups. Policy-making in the OMC mode is an environment where diversity and interdependence meet. The diversity that was represented in the OMC process is threefold. First, the EC policy-makers are trying to guide the process according to the EU's strategic directions. Second, the participating country experts are influenced by the political views of their government. Third, experts as individuals contribute individual skills and individual interests that shape the policy outcome. As one EC policy-maker asserts:

"It's difficult, very many different agendas get mixed up. Ultimately, it depends on the people. Sometimes you can have a dominant personality playing a strong leading role and you end up with a more successful process. Then you get some other group where there is a detractor, somebody who is pulling things back. So the success or failure is not dictated just by pure institutional arrangements that are put in place, but people, ultimately things get done by people."

Participating members were aware of their interdependence in taking the policy development forward. Experts in the OMC group saw a potential for enhancing policy coordination in Europe as a result of the OMC work. The fact that groups were able to discuss policy failures (see Chapter 7, Process-related knowledge contributions) is

another factor that indicates the presence of mutual trust and open dialogue. It is apparent that the bottom-up OMC structure contributed to the creation of an authentic dialogue. As the recommendations were non-binding and participation was voluntary, the participants could speak freely and in most cases represent their own professional knowledge as opposed to advocating for a certain policy agenda.

Knowledge sharing in an open coordination environment led to ownership of policy ideas in the group. The experts discovered that they often shared mutual concerns regarding European level research policy. Several participants were concerned about the lack of policy coordination and the fragmentation of European level research policy. The idea that European level policy coordination is important emerged through these discussions and was articulated in the policy recommendations.

Four country experts across the groups commented on developing a shared understanding of how important it is to work collaboratively in order to influence policies. By working together, the experts were **contributing to a paradigm shift** in policy debates. For the first time the member-states were willing to work together as a group. Such openness towards mutual collaboration has been absent as research policy is typically discussed within member-state governments. Through the OMC process, the experts became aware of their shared similarity in ideas, concerns and benefits, which they shared. For example, the experts learned that working together enhances the chance to advocate for policy ideas at the EU level:

> *"what I learned during the involvement in the expert group was how to promote our research capacities in the best way in Brussels because it is no use to promote just your own capacity but you must join forces with the others, the other countries, so now we work usually together, we have speakers from several countries, on some specific topics and it has more impact then. That was what I learned, how to join forces." (*country expert*,* GR2)

> *"I find it's useful. It's useful for the country because it's important to be inside the process. It would be useful for the European policies, for being influential at the European level. It's useful to participate with people, because they learn to interact with other people who are involved."* (country expert, GR3)

Overall, at the group level, most comments were related to instrumental evidence-based outcomes, as those were easily detectable (e.g. producing a policy document). Some group-specific outcomes also emerged. Group 1 experts advocated for increasing financial support to research funding and after several years a change occurred regarding the requirements of the current FP funding cycle. Group 2 was able to initiate the creation of a new advisory body and Group 3 deepened the debate on research excellence by suggesting a follow-up OMC cycle on peer-learning initiatives. Value-based outcomes were less evident. Those outcomes occurred intuitively and were mentioned indirectly throughout the interviews. Value-based outcomes included creating an

authentic dialogue among participants that contributed to a paradigm shift in European research policy.

8.3 Country Level Outcomes

Most country level outcomes tended to fall into the value-based category, thus confirming the critique in the literature where authors refer to the lack of tangible outcomes at the national level (e.g. Kröger, 2009a; Morano-Foadi, 2008). Typically an organization, including government, is operating in a routine decision mode, where new information is matched and adapted to already existing activities (Lindquist, 1988). New information rarely brings about immediate change in policy domains (Lindquist, 1988). Therefore, limited instrumental outcomes, where a piece of knowledge led to direct policy change, were evident.

8.3.1 Country Level Evidence-based Outcomes

When describing outcomes at the country level, most country experts could not provide clear examples of a policy change. A total of nine participants, mainly from Group 1 and Group 2, were able to describe some evidence of a country level direct learning outcome. Six experts reported the start of a new **cooperation program** in the area of research based on the knowledge and contacts received through the OMC work. Here are some illustrative examples of such initiatives:

> *"I heard that Holland was doing something. They were doing something with Poland and I liked the idea and I took it home and I told my colleague and then we had a program developed similar to what the Dutch were doing. Then we asked them to come over and teach us. We also did a program like this on technology incubation with Israel."* (GR1, Hungary)

> *"Thanks to this working group we have opened our bilateral cooperation with India. Yes, so it was what to do, yes or no, but after all the input and after the report that has been done by experts that were contracted by the Joint Research Center, so we have decided that we will open a bilateral relation with India."* (GR2, Romania)

> *"We launched in Spain, in 2007, an Excellence program, a program to promote the excellence of our universities and this program, the name is International Campuses of Excellence and this was somehow a reaction to other Excellence national programs in other European countries that we examined together with this OMC."* (GR3, Spain)

One expert noted a decision to participate at the European level bilateral **research cooperation grant program** (INCO[22]). For participation they needed to identify suitable project partners. The OMC group served as the perfect opportunity to meet experts and establish necessary contacts for the project:

> *"The main output was that we identified our partners and after that it was also the decision to participate or not in the INCO calls of the FP7 regarding the coordination actions between Europe and the Third countries. As a result [of the OMC group], we have participated in one call and Romania is coordinating a ERA-NET project on the Black Sea region and we are now in another one."* (GR2, Romania)

An expert from Group 1 asserted that the OMC policy documents served as the **key reference** in influencing a policy debate at home. The expert recalled a situation where there was a debate between two ministries regarding new requirements for a funding program. The OMC policy documents was referenced to settle an argument:

> *"I have one positive example, for sure. We [the OMC group] decided to adopt a simplified accounting system between the SF and the FP, to simplify the funding rules. At that time we in Estonia were just working on the same issue. We also wanted to introduce this simplified accounting scheme in Estonia but the people from the Ministry of Finance did not like it for some reason. They thought it was not appropriate. But we recently had finished this OMC report and I was able to make a reference to that report. Then the problem was settled."* (GR1, Estonia)

In two cases, experts described an **improved policy coordination** system that resulted from the OMC work. One expert from Group 1 asserted the role of a knowledge broker disseminating information in an accessible format to the local decision-makers over the years. The expert cooperated with another key individual within the policy circles. As a result of their mutual efforts, a specific coordination body was set up to help with composing European level grant proposals based on domestic research cooperation. An expert describes:

> *"In my country the coordination was really off. We didn't have much. Later on we did, as an outcome of this exercise, we started to have a better coordination which was I think a good outcome. That was my intention. /…/ We took the main report and translated and made abstracts and sent it to people, to politicians. Things don't happen overnight. I think it took about 3 or 4 years to have this research coordination body set up. But finally it happened."* (country expert, GR1)

[22] INCO-NET projects were established for bioregional cooperation of S&T cooperation with countries that have signed an S&T agreement with the European Union within the framework of FP7 (EC 2011b).

An expert from Group 2 describes a similar situation where a new coordination body was set up to help with policy coordination in the country:

> *"Perhaps, its not exactly because of my participation directly but now we have a Funding Body, the Lithuanian Research Council and they and we directed the role of finding joint research programs under the bilateral agreement to them – coordination scheme that is very widely used in the EU level."* (GR2, Lithuania)

Overall, the direct country-specific outcomes were quite rare, involving mainly a new program or a policy cooperation initiative. In some cases, country level debate had been already going on and the knowledge gained from the OMC served as the final trigger in the decision-making process. Even in those examples, policy change did not happen quickly but after several years of collaborative work and preparations.

8.3.2 Country Level Value-based Outcomes

When reflecting on country level outcomes, the experts across the groups most frequently commented on **contributing concepts and ideas** to the policy debates at one's organization. The following statement by a country expert from Group 1 is illustrative: "*I think more importantly, we used this study to enhance the debate within our national actors involved."* (GR1, Netherlands). At least ten country experts, mostly from Group 1 and 2 noted contributing new knowledge when developing country level policy documents or national research strategies. Two experts assert:

> *"In an indirect way we certainly used this report and also took the results on board to further our strategy. In my department there are two parts to the work, one part is the work in Brussels and the other part is more of a bilateral context with individual countries like China, Brazil, Canada, US and so on. And I think especially for the second part, the bilateral context, we took some ideas on board that we experienced form other countries, how they organize it."* (GR2, the Netherlands)

> *"Yes, for sure there was an impact. /…/ In 2008 we launched our national internationalization strategy which is now further developed and of course we applied the results from this survey and discussions of the CREST OMC working group."* (GR2, Germany)

Five experts across the groups mentioned **gaining general awareness** about the policy issues under debate. These international policy discussions put a particular theme into the spotlight, allowing administrators to gain specific knowledge, clarify issues and concerns about the topic. Even if the knowledge did not have any particular direct

outcome, the ideas were taken abroad and could be used in the future. The following quotes are illustrative:

> *"One of the outcomes at the national level was a better understanding of the practitioners in the field, involved in those two programs. And raising understanding of correct purposes of these programs. On the user end there was quite little knowledge. I think the idea is now sort of common knowledge - looking at smart specialization strategies."* (GR1, the Netherlands)

> *"Also the choice of countries [for research cooperation] is really important. We are evaluating that all the time, and we are also looking at what are the arguments for other countries to cooperate with other countries. So I think a lot of information was gained by the participation in this group also. But more indirect, not really that we took the recommendation directly on board, more in an in-direct way. /…/ Especially with science councillors, we didn't have or we only had one science councillor. I think, we will put more emphasis on having science councillors in other countries as well.*" (GR2, the Netherlands)

> "*And, of course, you also get quite good knowledge on what is happening in other countries, and what they do to promote research excellence, and you know where to go back and find information about a specific good practice, if you want to refer to it, in some other kind of setting, for instance."* (GR3, Norway)

Three experts stated that the OMC policy document served indirectly as a **strengthening factor** in deciding on a policy direction. The European level policy paper added more weight to the arguments used in the domestic decision-making process. An expert asserts:

> *"No direct changes but we did make use of the works, the studies like this. Even now when setting our specialization strategies for the new SF programs, for instance. So there was certainly an effect. /…/ The whole national approach was sort of developed at the same time as this study was conducted. It strengthened our case, sort to say."* (GR1, the Netherlands)

Three other experts from Group 1 and 2 noted making use of the OMC experiences to **influence a policy discourse** among domestic policy administrators. These European level experiences from other countries were viewed as significant evidence that contributed to the gradual shift in the policy debates at home. This change in attitudes and policy debates has taken time and only now are the experts starting to see the differences. A country expert notes: "*There has been a change in the attitude or knowledge, but it is slow."* Two country experts were able to bring specific examples on how the policy discourse took place:

"Nationally we used these themes and experiences of these kinds of studies also to help getting our regions and departments within the municipalities towards this more cluster-based research approach. It was quite a shift in the mentality for our region. /…/ So, there were also political arguments where we could use this report in our case." (GR1, the Netherlands)

"The most important was that people started a long time discussion after many years when we discussed the next FP and the next SF. How could we do this better this time? I am not sure we have been successful but it is a little bit higher up in the agenda compared to the last time when we were working with the FP." (GR1, Sweden)

One expert from Group 3 mentioned that his participation in the OMC process had a **safeguarding effect** on the domestic policy situation. In this case the national policies were firmly in place, there were no intentions for policy change, but an eye was kept on the EU level changes. Clearly, European level policy developments in research and innovation are important to the national governments and they do follow closely the debates in Brussels. This finding supports the comments presented in chapter 7, according to which some experts were sent to observe the policy trends and act only when necessary. Due to the voluntary nature of the OMC recommendations, no specific action was taken in this case. An expert recalls:

"It was a matter of guarding or watching over certain issues so that there are nothing in their [the Commission's] motivations that are against the current policy at the national level. So that you can perhaps regard as a specific outcome at the national level. The recommendations were not against [name of the country] policy at the time." (country expert, GR3)

One expert from Group 1 indicated an increase in the regional **visibility** as a result of the OMC process: *"I think it was a good PR for our region. We are a weak region on the border of [a name of the country] with a weak economy."* (country expert, GR1). Participation in the European level policy debate provided this region with additional visibility and made others more knowledgeable about their policy approaches.

Nine participants, a few from each group, mentioned having **no country level outcomes** that resulted from the OMC work. When explaining their opinions, experts referred to the rather broad nature of the recommendations in the report, the small likelihood of having one policy document to change a national policy discourse, there not being enough similarities with research systems with other countries and/or resource-based constraints that some European countries currently face. Here are a few examples to illustrate the point:

"We didn't make very important use of the results. Sometimes also the results were not very clear, they are quite broad or general." (GR1, Greece)

"*My impression was that in general terms... for the countries more active like us, it is not expected that single participation in a group itself makes a big change. Of course there is a difference between countries, some are very explicit in science, have very explicit strategy for international cooperation with Third countries.... There are not many examples as the study shows that there are not many countries with such strategies as we in Portugal do."* (GR2, Portugal)

"Now, Ireland has kind of hit his own roadblocks right now, financial roadblocks and so on, due to sort of a lot of major financial crises that as a country we're dealing with and so investment in research has probably taken different turns now than it has done previously. Anyway, so I think probably the OMC and the output of the OMC has been superseded within Ireland just due to eternal circumstances." (GR3, Ireland)

Overall, when describing the country-level learning outcomes, the experts tended to emphasize the value-based impacts over direct policy outcomes. The most commonly stated value-based outcome was the contribution of specific knowledge (concepts and ideas) to the policy debates. Sometimes the OMC reports were used to advocate for a certain policy approach, guard against EU level policy developments or gain general awareness on the best policy practices. In each of the groups there were individuals who indicated having no outcomes of the process, because of broad nature of the recommendations, the lack of resources or the lack of a need for a policy change.

8.4 EU level Outcomes

As the country experts are not permanently involved in EU-level research policy, their insights on learning outcomes were mostly related to individual, group and country level contributions. The EC policy-makers made most of the comments regarding the broader European level outcomes, as all of the informants had been working for the Commission for several years and had the best insights on the longer-term changes. The Commission experts were able to describe the important gradual shifts that the OMC process has helped to bring about. Several comments provided by the country experts regarding the EU level policy cooperation supported the Commission experts' view, as the country experts continued following the policy developments related to their OMC topic.

8.4.1 EU Level Evidence-based Outcomes

The broader policy developments at the EU level started through small initiatives. Small developments gradually started to shift the policy paradigm from resistance towards mutual collaboration between the member-states and the Commission. The OMC played a key role in this process because the OMC topics suggested the areas where there was an openness and interest to initiate policy debates. Through the OMC

discussions, the member-states were able to indicate several pressing policy topics that needed to be addressed at the highest level. As a bottom-up voluntary process, the OMC gradually proved to the member-states that they do hold power in the European policy decisions.

Triggered by the ideas shared during the OMC group discussions, the Commission policy-makers developed a number of **policy documents** that elaborated on the pressing issues in research policy. These follow-up documents were forwarded to the CREST and the Council of the European Union for discussions and approval. One of the first initiatives, marking the start of gradual EU level policy changes involved the issue of human capital, the researchers. The topic was of great interest to the member-states and participants were open to sharing ideas at the European level. The issue of the researchers' mobility was thoroughly examined with the help of country representatives with respect to recruitment challenges, social security issues, visa problems and training opportunities. This discussion was taken forward by producing several policy documents that were adopted by the Commission and later by many research organizations in the member-states. Among those were the development and endorsement of 'The European Charter for Researchers' and 'The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers' in 2005[23]. The start of gradual changes in policy discourse through such documents was commented by an EC expert as follows: *"You see, this was already something… that there was clearly a development of something a little bit more sophisticated than just a funding program."*

The importance of these follow-up policy documents was noticed by the country experts as well. For example, Group 1 participants were closely following the European level developments related to the administration of the FP and the SF. Four experts similarly noted that their OMC work did result in several follow-up policy reports prepared by the DG Research staff, that have further informed the European policy debates on funding instruments. The experts described the gradual policy changes that were emerging as a result of those policy documents:

> *"I think this study [OMC report] influenced the European Union as well. I think one or two years after our study was conducted, DG Regio came up with a sort of similar document or guideline on synergy of these areas. So with the time of one or two years they sort of embraced the work of the group and I think also now in the debate on the new SF programs for 2014-2020 you can see the elements of this process."* (GR1, Netherlands)

> *"Now what we started in 2007 with this OMC group was so successful and sustainable that today research and innovation in the next SF period starting in 2014 will be in the core of the program./…/ So it was 5 years more or less, work*

[23] For the Charter and Code of Conducts see http://ec.europa.eu/eracareers/pdf/am509774CEE_EN_E4.pdf

to set up a new SF period but the seed for this success was done by the report or by the work of the group from the OMC on making better use of the SF." (GR1, Germany)

The early steps taken through the OMC process triggered some noteworthy **organizational changes** at the EU level as well. One example is the setting up of a European level discussion forum that aims to develop a large-scale research infrastructure projects –European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI). As noted by an EC policy-maker in the comment below, the process did not involve representatives from every member state (probably due to limited resource capabilities). Nevertheless it was a step towards facilitating collaborative policy discussion that eventually led to over thirty different research partnerships with diverse pan-European interests represented:

"They [the member states representatives] were putting in place a strategic forum called ESFRI - European Strategic Forum for Research Infrastructures. /…/ ESFRI and the whole process that has kicked off, has led to a gradual development in a project of a EU level that is really improving the efficiency and the effectiveness with which the member-states set about developing a new scale of research infrastructures."

Another early initiative - the ERA-NET scheme **-** created a setting where member-states could connect, search for cooperative partners and share their best practices. The ERA-NET scheme was a virtual network of national research councils, working voluntarily to enhance cooperation in areas of research and innovation. An EC expert who was involved in establishing this process emphasized the value of such an initiative:

"We established ERA-NETs as a way to help public authorities to discuss among themselves, not at the level of diplomats, but at the level of the program managers in the member states. They actually never met before, these guys! The ERA-NETs were quite successful because they allowed people to share practices, how do you design, how do you implement, how do you evaluate program, how do you launch a proposal, what criteria do you use? And this whole thing at a very working level broke ice and allowed convergence of practices." (EC expert)

A country expert from Group 2 also commented on the establishment of the EU level virtual cooperation forums to discuss research cooperation issues and find project partners. This was seen as a result of the OMC group recommendations:

"*In practical terms, what was really developed was INCO-NET and ERA-NET. I think you should take a note on that. What was really put into practice, more practical was the implementation of INCO-NET and so called international ERA-NETs. There is an ERA-NET regarding to China, another devoted to India, to*

Russia, another starting in Africa. So this is a way of putting into practice of recommendations of this groups." (GR2, Portugal)

Another noteworthy organizational change was triggered directly by the work of Group 2, as noted earlier in the chapter. A new European level advisory body – Strategic Forum for International S&T Collaboration (SFIC) - was established. Six experts commented on that. This body put international research cooperation in the spotlight in Europe and informed further debates on the topic. The following quote from a Group 2 representative is illustrative:

> *"On the European level what happened by the end of 2009, was the type of Communication produced by the European Commission on international cooperation. The member-states and the Commission discussed this issue [research cooperation with Third countries] on policy level in the Council. /…/ The Commission developed a kind of a strategy, a proposal for international cooperation of the European Research Area. This was put on the table of the European Council, the Council reflected on that, they discussed and they came up with opinions. So what happened was that we developed, we created kind of new Strategic Forum on International Collaboration - SFIC."*

These follow up policy documents that were adopted at the highest political level with the insights by the OMC expert groups, helped to take policy coordination debates forward. Organizational changes such as the creation of SFIC, ESFRI and ERA-NET virtual forums have established a space for the country experts and high-level decision-makers to meet, discuss and learn from each other. That opportunity to develop a dialogue and share ideas among the member-states was absent before. It is an opportunity that contributes to the sharing of policy ideas and the advancing of policy dialogue among various stakeholders.

8.4.2 EU Level Value-based Outcomes

Five EC policy-makers assert that the start of the OMC process marks a significant institutional change in the European Commission providing the Commission with the incentive to really take an active role in the EU's research policy. The OMC was introduced and applied to research policy three years after the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy, in 2003. As noted by Van Vught (2010) the OMC created an additional context for European policy-making in the field of research. The OMC emphasized knowledge sharing, mutual learning and identifying important policy issues in research policy. As a result, the OMC process pushed the European Commission to take an active role and to become a catalyst in research policy development. Until 2003, European research policy had a very limited scope and was mostly operating in the cycles of the Framework Programs (FPs), providing financial resources to the member states based on the

submitted applications. The OMC process served as a trigger to start a gradual shift for the DG Research from operating as a funding agency towards **becoming a policy developer** in helping to create the European Research Area. Creating the space for the member-states to discuss research policy, several issues emerged to which the Commission needed to respond. As the EC policy-maker comments on the shift:

> "*Research policy at the EU level was largely a sort of monolithic affair. About every five years a new FP was adopted and the only policy discussion was what is the next set of thematic priorities going to be to fund research. So basically research policy at the EU level revolved around funding instruments and so the policy was no more than just a tactics or the strategy of the funding agency."*

In order to provide full leadership and carry policy discussions forward, DG Research had to reach out to other departments within the Commission – a role that it hadn't fulfilled before. The need for cooperation and additional knowledge from other experts created important new channels for information flow and eventually led to **better policy coordination** between the Commission units. Three experts commented on that phenomenon. Here is an illustrative example:

> *"It is not the policy paper that is really changing something. The guidelines were changing the work in the Commission. They were forcing more of some internal collaboration between different Directorates."* (GR1, Sweden)

As an informant from the DG Research recalls:

> *"You suddenly had an array of policy issues where DG Research, in order to try to move ahead with EU research policies, found itself now in building up linkages and dialogues with a lot of the other policy departments in the Commission, something that it didn't have up until that point. There was no real sort of discourse with the others because DG Research has and still is considered to be a baby, an infant, something that is only beginning to grow, in terms of policy."*

The beginning was not smooth and contained problems due to the certain sensitive topics at hand (e.g. Group 1 discussing funding issues with Commission experts from other units). Several country experts from Group 1 noted conflicts of interest between the representatives from different Commission units. However, over time things changed and cooperation within the Commission units and between the member-states and the Commission has significantly improved. An expert from Group 1 with long term EU level policy experience recalls:

> *"There [at the Commission] were real problems with collaboration. I would like to have my garden with my foods, and nobody should look to me. That was a situation, everybody was fighting for his garden. And we fully overcame it. /…/*

Today we have a fully new culture, discussion of collaboration, it's incredible. Fantastic!" (country expert, GR1)

As a result of the OMC process, the communication improved among the member – states as well. The Commission experts were able to bring countries together and share knowledge and learn from each other's policy perspectives. As the Commission expert recalls:

"I think it [the OMC process] was very useful. It provided that first push towards a re-examination of international cooperation policy and … because it was under the OMC, it was a rather less formal configuration than perhaps it might have been if we'd come straight in with another group which had been established with a particular remit. It was a sort of, if you like a kind of softer entry into bringing member-states together." (EC expert)

Tighter contacts with the experts among the member-states allowed gathering more up-to-date knowledge on the current situation in the area of research and then to take appropriate action.

When discussing the question of expected OMC outcomes, the European Commission representatives were enthusiastic. They have accepted the fact that there have been a few tangible policy changes at the national level, but emphasize the behavioural change that has occurred as a result of the OMC working groups. The Commission experts emphasize that more time is needed to really evaluate the impact of learning processes. They look at the process in a broader perspective than just evaluating the impact of a single OMC group. The EC policy-maker asserts:

"OMC is just a label. And it's a label that is not connoted very positively, because the Lisbon Strategy was considered as not sufficiently effective. But you consider the timeframe. It's 2000-2010. But the 3% target only happened in 2002. The real target setting exercise at that time only happened in 2005 when there was the real launch of a Lisbon Strategy. /…/ So I don't think the OMC has failed. If it has failed, it has failed to produce noticeable effects by the end of the Lisbon Strategy. But look at the behavioural change it has created! And that is long-lasting. In a sense it has created a trend in administrations to use common tools, to be more transparent about their policy-making process when they want to develop a new strategy. That has made them more open to external advice from the Commission and from peers of other countries on what they are doing." (EC expert)

These examples illustrate the significant fundamental contributions that the OMC initiative has made including **raising broader awareness** towards the need for policy cooperation, creating this willingness to work together and ultimately shaping existing policy conversation at the European level. European level organizational changes,

supporting and enhancing focused policy discussions among the member states and the Commission units and taking the lead role in enhancing coordinated European-level research policy are just some examples of the important impact the OMC process has had over the years. These steps taken by the DG Research for broader policy cooperation has made the institution an important player in the European policy discussions that inform the future policy directions. This is a significant impact of the OMC impact that has not been addressed in previous scholarly work.

The regional vision – the *Europe 2020* policy document - has positioned research and innovation at the core of fulfilling the high socio-economic expectations for Europe. However, the lack of indicators to measure the long-term value-based policy processes has made it difficult for the European Commission and the member-states to continue with the mutual learning exercises. The next section explores the perceptions of the OMC participants about the process and the need for continuing with this method of mutual learning.

CHAPTER 9: Findings. Experts' Perceptions on the OMC Process

This chapter provides participants, both the country experts' and the EC experts' perspectives on the open coordination process. It first describes the experts' views on the strengths and weaknesses of the OMC initiative. Then it examines the perceptions on the need to continue with the mutual learning initiatives such as the OMC.

9.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of the OMC Process

Experts were asked to give their perceptions on the overall experience of participating in the OMC process. They were encouraged to elaborate on the specific strengths and weaknesses of the process. The overall learning experience seemed to relate to the different group characteristics specified in Chapter 7. Most country experts (twenty-one informants across the groups) viewed their experience as useful and relevant (e.g. "*I think it [OMC] is a very good instrument*"; "*I can not even define weaknesses because you gain so much*"). However, five experts, mostly from Group 1, regarded their experience with less enthusiasm (e.g. "*I think it [OMC] is a relatively good way*"; "*there was certainly a learning effect in that*") compared to Group 2 or 3 informants. As stated above, Group 1 participants had a very short timeframe to operate, the steering type was described as a top-down and the political tension shifted the learning focus away from the content. Overall, only one expert (Group 3) noted that he didn't learn much and participated only to fulfill his work responsibilities.

Three main themes emerged when experts described the strengths of the process: mutual learning, gaining new contacts and the voluntary nature of the OMC process. Thirteen experts across the groups indicated that the opportunity to **gain new knowledge and learn** from the experiences of others was an important strength. Most comments (eight) regarding learning came from Group 2 participants. OMC provided the experts with access to unique ideas and novel information that might not have been available otherwise:

> *"Mutual learning and stages of the policy experience of the countries is still the most important role of the OMC process. Speaking for the Netherlands, that was our main interest, this mutual learning element and getting new ideas from the other countries."* (GR2, the Netherlands)

> *"I do believe that the OMC method is a very powerful method to learn insights from each other, because you get, in a structured way, information about policy measures in other countries. You do take the time to look at those and discuss with each other."* (GR1, Belgium)

Some differences across the groups emerged when experts elaborated on the value of learning. As Groups 1 and 3 had the most diverse participant pool, they mentioned learning in relation to the diversity of views that different stakeholders brought to the process. As an expert from Group 3 explains:

> *"I think what is a strength is that this process brings together ministry and university representatives /…/ to have an interaction between them. This was a very, very good process, because we got to know both points of view. I think this is really a strength."* (GR3, Germany)

Group 2 participants were most enthusiastic about learning and they were hopeful for a policy change. They saw the strength of the OMC in the potential to influence decision-making at the national or the European level: *"I think it was among the strengths the impact of mapping and new learning exercise, which can influence policy-making and decision-making."* (GR2, Czech Republic)

As Group 3 focused mainly on comparing policy approaches at the national level with indirect expectations at the EU level policy change, their learning experiences were related to building individual expertise. Participants focused mostly on growing individual expertise by building expertise: *"I think there's instance of a passive knowledge that you bring back home even if it's difficult to be specific about it."* (GR3, Sweden). Another expert asserts:

> *"I could think about that in the future you know, you kind of internalize it. It's really I think… I mean kind of come away and say that's something I might go back to if we were ever doing some you know different model. I might come back to it if I was going to do that in the future."* (GR3, Ireland)

The opportunity to meet new people and **develop professional networks** was another strength of the OMC process emphasized by eight experts across the groups. The OMC allowed building one's professional network with new useful contacts for the future. It also provided them with a chance to combine the diverse expertise of many participants. The following quotes are illustrative:

> "*Yes, it is a very useful mutual learning exercise. Policy makers can create networks of policy-makers because in the past we had only networks of researchers or people working for firms but not networks of people working in the management of research. So this is a novelty." (*GR1, Greece)

> *"And it created networks of national representatives and in that respect, I think, the OMC process was good."* (GR2, Portugal)

One expert mentioned having the opportunity to get easier access to the EU level policy-makers. Having a history with working together with the Commission representatives

builds a personal link between the country experts and the relevant stakeholders for the future.

Eleven informants, including two EC representatives, emphasized the unique structure of the OMC. Having OMC as a **voluntary, bottom-up and non-binding process** was seen to be an important strength. According to their view, this type of process projects an effort at democratic decision-making in the European Union, where countries themselves can decide which policy issues need to be addressed and discussed. The participants assert:

> *"Well, the sharing of knowledge and looking into hot issues, that's a voluntary basis, common interests, no-one pushes you. That's the good part of it." (GR1, Hungary)*

> *"The strength is that it is really driven by the interest of the member-states, the topics are proposed by the member-states. Once they are accepted, they are really widely accepted by quite a number of member-states. So and those members who contribute to these discussions really have an interest in it, interest to learn and interest to share experience./.../ This is certainly a strength." (*GR2, Germany)

> *"the strength and the weakness is informality of these groups. And because of the informality, people freely discuss things without any tension or any country interest, really, in back of their minds."* (EC expert)

The main weakness identified across the groups was the **lack of tangible policy change**. Fifteen country experts across the groups and two Commission representatives raised this concern. They were not able to see the clear impact, at a national or European level, of the work they conducted. The following quotes are illustrative:

> *"The challenges are related to the big question of 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."* (GR2, Germany)

> *"The OMC is not quick and not effective. It needs time. It needs to balance. And the idea to balance it among so many countries and countries which such different economies and different effectiveness of Europeanization is for me something which is not...it's more of a political rhetoric than effectiveness."* (GR3, Italy)

There were different reasons given for a lack of policy impact. Group 1 participants noted that the low impact had to do with the specific decision-making structure and the weight (or lack of) area experts have in the decision-making process:

"I think that reporting to the advisory body of the European Commission [CREST], this is a very long distance from the real world and the European Commission. So I think it must have some higher impact, so that also the participants are aware that if there is a recommendations that you are taking seriously, more seriously." (GR1, Belgium)

"The people who are participating in the OMC are not lets say heads of the agencies. They do not have the political weight, they do not influence directly the policy-making and the decision-making." (GR1, Greece)

Country experts mostly from Group 2 mentioned the lack of political will to take up the proposed recommendations and change something at the national level:

"The weakest point, according to my view, is that it really depends on the country which is involved, if they [policy-makers] want to use the results or not." (GR2, Czech Rep)

Group 3 participants referred to the lack of any follow-up of the process. It was felt that if there was any continuation of the process, it might have had more impact than only a one time OMC cycle. Some experts felt that the report was forgotten as soon as it was finished, new policy issues emerged and nobody had time to continue with it. This issue could be addressed by getting the Commission officers committed to each policy topic and getting other EU level policy-makers involved in the follow-up activities.

The countries that participate and the individuals who are actively contributing to the process shape the overall learning experience. As the nature of the OMC process is non-binding, there are no real requirements for commitment from participants. This flexibility can be both a strength and a weakness. **Lack of engagement** was mentioned five times when describing the challenges of the process. Seven experts across the groups reported disparity in activity and knowledge contributions among the participants. This knowledge disparity was linked to the dominance of some countries but also to the time people could contribute to the OMC:

"With the OMC the big weakness is the lack of engagement between countries. You see it in practise, you see it in many OMC groups that some countries have very strong interests, like Germany, and the big member states in this case and the other member states have a more passive role. Also with this group there were countries represented who never made any interventions in the meetings and had a complete passive role, in fact." (GR2, the Netherlands)

"Negative is that it is a little old-fashioned mode of collaboration. OK you can start with the meetings and have your ideas and someone writes a report and you are trying to make this report a little better next time and even better the next time and then you have the final report. That means that those people

working full time have an advantage and you say - OK. The full time people get more opportunities to control the perspectives on the work." (GR1, Sweden)

Two experts recognized having potential knowledge gaps related to the expertise of the group. As the nominations included people from the ministry circles, there was not a proper way of ensuring that the group represented diverse perspectives and a range of knowledge on the topic:

> *"No one can control that you really cover different experiences and enough to enrich the discussion or to cover the topic properly. So I'm sure that we are having gaps because no one had experience on those gaps because all concentrate on administrative science and research, so none of them have formal training in international relations as such."* (GR2, Spain)

> *"You know different organization would put forward a different example and you might have had a completely different dynamic so… So I suppose it's all a question of representation."* (GR3, Ireland)

The final challenge that emerged from the interviews had to do with the scarcity of time and one's heavy everyday workload, mentioned by six participants. Experts conducted the OMC work on the side of their everyday job responsibilities. The following quote illustrates the point:

> *"I was doing this after my ordinary job. I had no other people helping me, maybe a few more. And we were doing this after our ordinary job. I could not spend so many hours compared to Germany and some other countries. They were working on it full time for some months."* (country expert, GR1)

In conclusion, most experts emphasized the usefulness of the individual learning experiences provided through the OMC work. Mutual learning was linked to the diversity of perspectives, the potential for policy change and the establishment of new contacts. Variety in job-related positions and country representations enriches the conversation. Clear outcomes of the group work in terms of follow-up initiatives would enhance the experience and add relevance to the work. Lack of engagement is often related to limited time. Providing support for the participants by way of time and resources would help to increase the learning experience.

9.2 OMC and the Need for Continuity

The OMC process has not been explicitly emphasized in the recent European level policy documents. There are controversial perceptions about the OMC. An ERAC report from April 2011 states that "*the possibilities to enhance a dialogue and mutual learning has far from fully been used yet, and the use of the Open Method of Coordination could be*

considered to encourage dialogue between the research and innovation policy communities in the Member States" (ERAC, 2011). A year later an ERAC report states that a review and possibly a redesign of the OMC-instrument should be undertaken (ERAC, 2012). Based on the Innovation Union strategy, the mutual learning exercises (through comparing and benchmarking policies) are still seen as the main mechanism for enhancing coordinated research policy in Europe (See European Commission, 2011a).

Most participants of the OMC working groups had very supportive perspectives on the continuity of the learning process. Country experts across the groups emphasized the importance of the activities. The following quotes are characteristic:

> *"Yes, definitely [the learning should continue]. I think after all there is quite low cost./…/ I think it is important that we do."* (GR3, Sweden)

> *"Yes, I think it's a good way to bring together people from all around Europe with expertise on quite specific questions and to let them exchange experiences. And to have a chance to draw out the essence, and to draw conclusions from it. Yes, I think it's... I think one could learn more from this kind of exercise, than from, for instance, arranging a conference, or something like that on the same topic."* (GR3, Norway)

Clearly, the focus on learning continues to be important for experts. Some informants among the member-states and the Commission see mutual learning initiatives becoming institutionalized and see them as an integrated part of their everyday activities:

> *"I can accept that you don't find the OMC as a buzzword any more, yeah, it is even a good thing because I will say OMC is becoming daily work. The daily routine. The daily routine for us. /…/ But it is really the continuous obligation for the member states to set up the European Research Area."* (GR1, Germany)

> *"And the fact that we are not using the OMC anymore might be something like a trend. It's not fashionable any more. But I think you can really equate OMC with mutual learning. That's a new way of calling it. And so mutual learning activities are continuing."* (EC expert)

Other experts, not intensively involved in EU level policy-making, note that the continuous need for getting experts together remains. The following quote is representative:

> *"I would appreciate if the Commission, probably from time to time, brings together the people who work in that process in important roles, or people like me who moderated and managed such a group, they should probably see these people more as a resource to come back to from time to time."* (GR3, Germany)

The Commission policy-makers have a very positive attitude towards learning initiatives as well. The following quote is illustrative: *"I think in terms of the learning, I plead guilty, I am a believer that there is policy learning."* (EC expert)

One policy-maker notes that benchmarking and learning activities have been incorporated into the Lisbon Treaty and therefore have to be followed by law. It seems that learning is still very much anticipated and expected by the policy-makers. In conclusion, both the member-states' representatives and the Commission policy-makers find OMC as a useful policy tool. There is an interest and a need to continue with the mutual learning activities. Some see such activities becoming an integrated part of the everyday work. Others look forward to follow-up types of activities that could enhance learning and provide additional opportunities for cooperation.

CHAPTER 10: Conclusions and Implications

This chapter summarizes the findings of the research, provides answers to the research questions and discusses the implications of the study. The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section presents the key findings of the study, focusing on the group formation dynamics, then the individual rationales for participation, the group comparisons, the process outcomes and the participants' perceptions of the OMC process. Where applicable, the perspectives of the member-states experts' and the European Commission experts' are provided. The second section of the chapter discusses the key findings in a broader context, draws linkages with the literature, analyzes the implications for diverse policy contexts and provides policy recommendations.

10.1 Summary of the Findings

The OMC groups are formed by the CREST advisory body, which is co-chaired by the member-states and the European Commission (DG Research representatives). There are several factors that influence the OMC dynamics. First, the older member-states (such as Germany) tend to take leadership roles in the CREST and the Council of the European Union. They often propose the OMC topics and get support from the leadership of those organizations. Second, the European Commission has a noteworthy role in the CREST governance, holding one of the Chairing positions at CREST. Therefore the Commission is actively involved in member-states' policy discussions and is in a position to influence the decisions.

The main selection criterion for the individual OMC group participants is their specific expertise. Bureaucratic knowledge regarding policy processes was valued over content-specific knowledge. Bureaucratic knowledge involves experience in policy-making at the European level but also in domestic policy circles. Nine experts had several years of administrative policy experience both at their home governments (ministries, affiliated research agencies) but also in international institutions (e.g. CREST advisory body, OECD, EU's Framework Program, EU's Structural Funds program). Six participants were nominated because the OMC topic was directly related to their job responsibilities. Because these experts were either responsible for the policy area or they needed to build expertise, their participation was needed. Five experts commented on having a previous collaboration experience with the person who made the nomination.

The minor emphasis on content-specific expertise was unexpected. Only five country experts emphasized the importance of content-specific knowledge as a selection criterion. Some of those experts had been working in a policy area related to the OMC topic for over ten years, setting up research partnerships or administering funding schemes. Scientific expertise was not viewed as being important. In four cases (mainly among Group 1 and 2 participants) the political underpinnings of the nominations were

mentioned. In such cases the specific nominations were made based on calculations of whether a country was hoping to actively shape the course of the OMC discussions or preferred to remain as a silent observer.

The experts' participation rationales revealed a divergence of interests among the two stakeholder groups, the country experts and the Commission experts. The country-experts' participation rationales were mainly learning-related. Fourteen participants across the groups asserted that they were eager to gain new knowledge. Their learning focus was related to the specific OMC topic. Four experts across the groups, mainly from the older Western states, cited teaching as a motive for participation. These country experts felt a sense of responsibility to assist others in their efforts to overcome challenges in research policy. This finding is unique, as the policy learning literature describes the process primarily from the perspective of the learner. This finding contributes to the literature by adding the perspective of the teacher. The objective of comparing and benchmarking policies against one's own was mentioned three times.

Rationales not related to learning were expressed by the country-experts less frequently (a total of ten times). For example, five experts, primarily from Group 1, viewed OMC work as a way to access European level policy-makers and to increase their opportunities to influence European and domestic policies. In the case of Group 1, the changes in the EU level policies were expected to lead to domestic expansion of structural funds. Five experts were critical of the fragmentation of policy approaches in Europe, feeling that they resulted in wasted resources and little benefit to the member-states. The OMC provided an opportunity to raise the issue at the European level, with the aim to change the current situation. In four cases, Group 2 and Group 3 participants were hoping to increase the visibility and reputation of one's country.

Most of the European Commission experts were driven by instrumental evidence-based outcomes. Their job responsibilities mandated them to enhance policy coordination in the European Union. Learning from the member-states was not their primary focus. The Commission informants emphasized the importance of creating a unique space for policy learning, where the member-states could align their policy ideas. In addition, the EC policy-makers were eager to develop a network of country contacts, which would be useful in their future work. When learning-related perspectives were mentioned, it was in the context of participation in and support of the learning process.

Although experts were given a certain amount of freedom on how to conduct the OMC work, the overall structure was quite similar across the three groups. The groups had to collect and analyze policy approaches related to their specific topic, agree on the best practices and propose policy recommendations.

The context-related similarities across the groups involved *nationally important policy areas* and European level *political commitment* to regional policy coordination. Several experts across the groups commented on having national policy debates in parallel to

the OMC work, which made the proposed OMC topic particularly relevant. Experts saw the OMC work as an opportunity to gain new ideas and fresh perspectives on the policy issues discussed at home. Such "windows of opportunities" contribute to learning as it enhances the participants' motivation to participate and really engage in the process. European level political commitment provided an important context for policy debates. A high-level support was expressed by the adoption of a series of European level policy documents by the member-states' politicians. While political pressure is sometimes seen as a hindrance to learning (Radaelli 2003), in this case it seemed to provide the supportive context that was needed for a meaningful engagement in the OMC initiative.

The process-related similarities across the groups included *country of the group Chair, type of knowledge contributions* and *knowledge dissemination activities*. The group Chair for all three groups came from Germany. As the focus was on learning and not on gaining political power, the German leadership in all three cases was approved and accepted by the participants. Experts' knowledge contributions involved empirical country-specific information and experiential knowledge on policy approaches. For empirical information, questionnaires were composed and distributed among the member-states' representatives. Country-specific expertise was shared during the meetings. In four cases policy failures were discussed, which speaks to the trust and open environment among the participants. Academic knowledge was not used, as the focus was on the current applicable policy approaches. The EC policy-makers contributed administrative support. They helped country-experts to form reports that could help to further policy discussions at the EU level.

Knowledge application across the groups took place through formulating policy recommendations. The number of recommendations ranged from nine (Group 3) to twenty-four (Group 2). Policy recommendations across the groups tended to be broad, so as to accommodate the variety of situations and contexts the member-states operate within. The inclusion of country-specific best practices was important to the experts and led to a sense of ownership of the policy report. The reports were disseminated within the country experts' home organizations and within the Commission. Experts introduced the final results to their internal colleagues through meetings, memos or by organizing workshops. The Commission published the report and disseminated it to all member-states through the CREST Committee and by using public EU websites.

The main context-related differences across the groups involved the level of *political tension* and the *urgency for policy results.* Group 1 was characterized by high political tension and an urgency for policy results. This tension occurred among the European Commission representatives and was driven by the idea of partly reorganizing the two distinct funding schemes between the Commission units. Political tension shaped the focus of learning. Four Group 1 country experts noted that they gained new knowledge about the organizational culture of the Commission and its decision-making processes. That type of learning was not often mentioned among the other groups. Similarly, the urgency for policy results influenced the learning focus. Group 1 had the highest

expectation for policy change. Inherent learning experience was shifted more towards accepting the results and producing the final report. Learning experiences were not as significant as in other groups.

The process-related differences among the Groups involved *timeframe, steering type, group composition* and *reaching consensus*. All of these factors tend to influence policy learning. Group 1 had the shortest timeframe for operation, less than six months to produce the policy report. Three Group 1 representatives expressed modest enthusiasm towards their learning experience. They tended to hold back raising new issues for policy debates. Group 2 experts had the longest time to operate (2 years) and were the most satisfied with their OMC experience. Eight of the ten experts provided comments indicating a very productive learning experience. They had time to debate, raise issues and slowly come to an agreement. Five Group 3 participants found the learning experience most useful. Several experts from Group 2 and Group 3 expressed developing mutual ownership towards the policy recommendations.

Perceptions of group steering were related to the activities of the group Chair. The Chair had an opportunity to influence the mandate of the group, the structure of the process and the content of the policy documents. Group 1 experts noted a top-down steering environment. The Chair incorporated numerous best practices from the Chair's own country which led to some resistance to the policy recommendations. Group 2 and 3 experts confirmed having an inclusive bottom-up steering type. These experts were satisfied with the leadership and were very appreciative of the work conduct of the Chair.

Group composition plays a significant role in policy learning as well. The diversity of knowledge was sustained by four distinct groups of participants – the EC experts, the ministry officials, the academics and the external experts. The Commission experts represented the diverse views of their distinct units, allowing others to learn about the organizational differences in the European Commission. The expertise of ministry officials was a mix of content-specific and bureaucratic knowledge, making it necessary for the participants to analyze the political rationales behind certain policy perspectives. Academics working external to government offices indicated having more freedom in contributing their expertise and providing unbiased individual knowledge. The findings also indicate that learning is related to the potential power-balance within a group. Having many Commission experts in the group might have hindered the openness of knowledge sharing.

Country-specific differences influence learning. More experienced countries from the old Europe and Scandinavia tended to participate actively in the process. The opportunities to shape European level policies, which could enhance a country's economic interests, were important in determining the level of participation activity. Several newly joined member-states were primarily driven by their genuine interest to learn and therefore they were not selective in terms of the OMC topics. However, their

lack of experience in the policy area or European level decision-making process hindered their participation. Examples from similar national systems were seen to be more relevant and useful. Differences in research systems lessened the learning focus and less attention was paid to the details.

Agreement was reached through consensus. Differences emerged between the groups. Group 1 participants noted that they had intense debates during the discussions. Experts were communicating across diverse policy paradigms thus contributing to the tensions. Group 2 and 3 experts who operated within the same policy paradigm engaged in very few arguments. They noted how easy it was to come to consensus. Nevertheless, their learning might have been less effective, as in four cases the experts recognized that they avoided discussing sensitive conflicts in order to maintain a supportive learning environment.

The interviews revealed several learning mechanisms that were employed in the OMC process. Twelve participants across the groups mentioned the usefulness of *active participation,* in which preparing presentations, participating in debates and knowledge sharing activities increased awareness of policy approaches and challenges. Seven experts conducted *policy comparisons*, where new information was compared against the situation in one's home country. Six informants, mainly from Group 2 and 3, experienced *value acceptance,* where the expertise of others was acknowledged and made inherent to the learning process. *Lesson-drawing*, where emphasis was given to a particular aspect of a policy, was noted by five participants from Group 1 and 2. In such cases, there could have been a political mandate to look for knowledge about the specific instruments and approaches used by other countries. Four experts reported *imitation*, where group discussions gave inspiration to borrow a certain policy approach. This activity was not strategically planned, but emerged during the course of the group work. *Mapping*, where the policy situation of participating countries was presented in order to gain an understanding about country comparisons, was reported in four cases. Eight informants, representing mainly the newly joined member-states, reported *blocked learning*, where individual learning was present but did not lead to any domestic policy change. In two cases *no-learning* was noted by informants of Group 1 and 3, where the motivation to learn was not present.

The process outcomes were presented according to the theoretical framework, by dividing the findings into evidence-based and value-based outcomes and then focusing on individual, group, country and European level results. At all levels, except for the group level, the value-based learning outcomes dominated. Among the individual value-based outcomes, gaining new knowledge was predominant. Experts were able to cite specific examples and name countries whose approaches they found to be particularly useful. Fifteen informants, EC officers and country experts alike, viewed broadening their professional network to be important. Ten participants mentioned that they gained an increased understanding of the policy views of others. They become aware of the relationships between stakeholders, decision-making styles and organizational

cultures. Eight experts commented on learning about the ways in which other countries coordinated and implemented their policies. The European Commission experts became aware of the gradual changes in attitudes of the member-states. The EC experts were convinced that there is a willingness to collaborate and engage in policy discussions. Instrumental evidence-based outcomes involved career enhancement for two participants. Seven experts described knowledge dissemination activities. Three experts recognized a lack of individual learning. A comparison between the experts' initial rationales with their individual learning outcomes revealed that the learning process leads to a broadening of one's understanding of the nuances of policy approaches and a gradual updating of the policy beliefs of the participants.

Group level outcomes were mainly related to the instrumental outcomes. All three groups were successful in producing a final policy report with a set of policy recommendations. In addition, each group was able to have an impact on European level policy processes. The work of Group 1 gave birth to another high-level policy report that had an impact on shaping the regulations of the current Structural Funds funding cycle, leading to more flexible regulations for the research infrastructure. Six Group 2 experts noted an important organizational change that resulted from their work. As one of the main recommendations, a high level advisory body – Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) – was created. SFIC is composed of member-states' politicians who meet regularly and discuss international research collaborations. Five experts from Group 3 noted that their work led to the creation of a spin-off OMC group in which representatives of over 40 European universities participated in workshops discussing research excellence. Value-based outcomes involved the creation of an authentic dialogue among the group members, where open conversations led to an analysis of best practices and policy failures. Such debates have contributed to a paradigm shift in enhanced member-states research cooperation, a theme that was cited by six country experts across the groups.

When describing country-level learning outcomes, the experts emphasized indirect results over direct policy outcomes. They acknowledged the lack of specific policy outcomes at the national level. However, the richness of the value-based outcomes the experts provided as a result of their learning experiences was quite unexpected. In ten cases they stated the contribution of specific knowledge (concepts and ideas) to the policy debates. Three experts from Group 1 noted how the knowledge from the reports was indirectly incorporated into national strategies or other policy documents, so as to strengthen an argument. In two cases (Groups 1 and 2) OMC reports were used to advocate for a certain policy approach, specifically to take a more cluster-based method to research production and to build synergies among the regional and national policy-makers in a country. A Group 3 expert mentioned using knowledge to guard against EU level policy developments, making sure that those policies are aligned with national level policy directions. Five informants from Group 1 and 2 reported raising general awareness at their home organizations towards the best policy practices of other

countries. In each of the groups there were individuals (total of ten) who did not discern any tangible change or influence as a result of the process.

The European level learning outcomes were mostly described by the Commission experts. According to their insights, policy change has been emerging gradually, thus leading to a shift in policy discourse towards policy coordination. DG Research has been in the forefront of these changes. Several new strategic forums (e.g. ESFRI, ERA-NET, SFIC) have been set up to support policy discussions among the member-states. By creating such spaces where member-states can share their knowledge and discuss research policy, the resistance towards cooperation has gradually started to diminish. The bottom-up policy approach is appreciated by the member-states and has contributed to acceptance of the idea of mutual collaboration. The Commission, as facilitator of the process, has had an opportunity to mediate the policy issues faced by the member-states and present them to the Council of the European Union for broader discussion. By doing so, the Commission has become a policy catalyst as opposed to operating only as a funding agency.

When experts described the OMC process, three features across the groups were regarded as the main strengths - *mutual learning, establishing new contacts* and *the voluntary nature of the process*. The most useful was mutual learning, through which new ideas were gained. The building of new professional networks was another important strength (emphasized by eight experts across the groups). OMC allowed people to establish personal contacts that could be used as new information channels in the future. The voluntary approach and freedom in implementation of recommendations was valued by eleven participants. Experts felt that the process was driven by the member-states and no pressure was exercised to adopt the recommendations.

Three features were regarded as weaknesses - the *lack of policy results, the lack of engagement* and *the lack of time for committing to the process*. Fifteen experts expressed frustration that clear OMC outcomes did not translate into policy changes. As the participation in the OMC is voluntary, the disparity in knowledge contributions was seen as a weakness. Seven experts commented on the lack of engagement by some countries. The lack of participation leads to lower learning effects and degradation of the process. Often there was a core group of active members and a number of silent observers that shaped the overall group dynamic. Six experts noted that limited time availability and one's heavy personal workload might have led to the reduced participation and a reduced earning effect.

Both the member-states' experts and the Commission policy-makers articulated a continuing interest toward the mutual learning activities. Some see such activities as becoming an integrated part of everyday work. Others look forward to follow-up activities, which could enhance learning and provide additional opportunities for cooperation.

10.2 Main Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

This thesis has analyzed the individual policy learning experiences of the member-states' experts and the European Commission experts involved in coordinating European research policy. The Open Method of Coordination policy initiative provided an organized setting for examining experts' perspectives. Three OMC expert groups, operating between 2006-2009, were the focus of this thesis. Group 1 discussed issues of research funding, group 2 exchanged knowledge on international research cooperation and group 3 shared best practices on university research excellence.

Based on the research findings, the following conclusions emerge:

- Experts' individual policy learning experiences **have an impact** on European research policy. Experts help to determine policy issues for European level debates, propose policy recommendations for European research policy, and serve as important facilitators of policy-relevant knowledge between the member-states' governments and the European Commission.

- Experts in the context of the Open Method of Coordination are largely mid-level **government officials** who do not have a direct influence on policy decisions. They have an essential influence on offering concepts and ideas for the policy debates.

- There is a **difference in the participation rationales** for the country experts and the Commission experts. While the country experts were focused on the value-based outcomes (gaining new knowledge), the Commission experts were aiming for evidence-based results (increased policy coordination). This difference influences the learning focus and the perceptions of process outcomes.

- Experts' policy learning experiences are **dependent on contextual and process-related factors** including simultaneous policy debates at home, political support towards learning, political tension around the topic, the urgency for policy results, timeframe, group composition and group steering style.

- **The impact** of the experts' individual policy learning experiences emerges **gradually and should be viewed through value-based aspects** such as an increasing policy-relevant expertise, developing an awareness about the policy views of others, increasing openness towards mutual cooperation, developing willingness to coordinate policies among the member-states and building one's professional network to facilitate policy-relevant knowledge.

Each of these findings is reviewed in a more detail below.

The European Commission has introduced the Open Method of Coordination initiative in order to enhance policy coordination and increase economic competitiveness in Europe. These goals were anticipated through the application of a "soft" policy approach by exercising mutual learning practices. The main criticism of the OMC initiatives in research policy involves a lack of tangible outcomes, specifically evidence of policy change at the European and country level (e.g. Kaiser & Prange, 2004; Szchuzak, 2006; Kröger, 2009). There is a discrepancy between the ambitious goals for regional integration and the applied methods for achieving this goal. Learning is an individual cognitive process that cannot be expected to lead to a quick instrumental policy change in a country or a region.

The literature suggests that the change in individual policy beliefs, norms and values fosters flexible forms of cooperation (Sabatier 1986, Jacobs 2009). While policy learning is viewed as a process of updating one's policy perspectives, the individual participant's perspective of the policy processes is largely absent in the OMC discussions. **This research study is the first in the area of research policy to focus on the personal experiences of the OMC participants.**

To understand who shapes European research policy, **the first sub-question was posed - *Who has access to the OMC working groups in the EU's research policy?*** The OMC process, driven by political and economic goals, brings together the Commission policy-makers and the member-state experts who have a direct link with policy-making within their national governments. Eighteen of twenty-six country experts held **mid-level administrative positions** within their ministries (head of units, head of departments, administrators and senior administrators). Six experts represented organizations that are affiliated with the governments (executive directors of research agencies). Participation by university representatives (e.g. faculty members, university administrators) was rather rare, as only two informants were working at universities. Stakeholders from non-government organizations or the private sector were not present. As mid-level administrators, the participants were able to provide concepts and knowledge to the policy process at home but they were not in a position to make the final decisions. Therefore, as noted by several experts, the direct impact of their knowledge on policy change was minimal. However, experts' knowledge dissemination activities within their organizations helped to spread the policy views of other European experts, by gradually building a mutual understanding concerning the dominant values and policy beliefs in the European Union.

The research policy discussions are mainly **shaped by the individuals who actively participate in the European research-related advisory committees**. One of the important gatekeepers of European research policy is the CREST advisory body, composed of member-states' representatives and European Commission policy-makers. While the CREST itself does not have much decision-making power, it serves as an

important catalyst for European research policy. CREST members propose policy issues for European-level debates, monitor the outcomes of policy recommendations and facilitate policy discussions between the Commission experts and the member-states. Representatives of the **older Western countries** tend to hold the leading positions at CREST, thus providing them with the opportunity to **shape the uptake of policy ideas** for mutual learning. Representatives from the newly joined member-states often lack the experience or resources to counterbalance those countries. On one hand it is useful to have the most accomplished countries as leaders of the process. These countries have experience on what works in research policy, so the others can learn and gain useful knowledge. On the other hand, the topics proposed by the older Western state serve their own needs and economic interests. The issues important to the other member-states are sometimes disregarded, widening the performance gap. It is important to include topics addressing the particular challenges of the less-accomplished countries to the learning agenda to secure broader impact of the learning initiatives.

In order to clarify the motivation to engage in learning initiatives, **a second sub-question was raised -*What are the participants' rationales for participating in the OMC policy learning initiatives?*** Professional, political and personal rationales were represented across the expert groups. The country experts were primarily driven by professional rationales. Their initial perspectives were related to benefitting one's country. They were most interested in **gaining new policy-relevant knowledge** that would help to advance policy approaches at home. By learning from others, insights were gathered on the most efficient policy approaches to implement. The specific aspects of the new knowledge were related to the group topic, such as examples of how other countries navigate the research funding schemes, best practices on research cooperation and ways to improve research excellence at universities. A focus on **comparing and benchmarking** policies serves a similar goal. Using policy comparisons, lessons were learned which serve as a quality control mechanism for a country's policy directions. **Teaching** others emerged as a unique theme. This indicates that the member-states are gradually opening up to the idea of working together and helping other countries in Europe to develop policies that have proven to work. Without the OMC initiative, such coordinated forms of teaching activities could not have occurred. In a few cases the OMC initiatives were used for political reasons. Some country experts saw the OMC as an access point to European level decision-making where experts have a chance **to shape a policy agenda**. This occurred as an individual initiative and not something mandated by the country governments.

The individual interests of participants were also present. Experience in EU level policy-making **enhances an expert's authority.** Countries place a high value on expert knowledge in EU policy-making. As demonstrated by the current findings, experts might get career promotion opportunities based on their experience at European level policy-making. It is in an expert's personal interest to participate in such initiatives to gain new knowledge, build one's professional network and increase one's authority domestically and internationally.

Differences emerged in the participation rationales between the country-experts and the Commission experts. The Commission experts were driven by a **political agenda**. The Commission representatives were very open regarding their rationales for achieving increased policy cooperation. However, they were not aggressive in achieving their goals. The Commission experts saw their primary role as creating opportunities for learning and supporting country experts in their efforts to discuss research policy alignment. Differences in the rationales affected the learning focus. The country experts were focused on new knowledge, not a policy change. As a result, country experts gained nuanced information on policy approaches and were mostly satisfied with the process outcomes. The Commission experts were focused on policy change and recognized the lack of process outcomes. Yet, **the OMC knowledge-sharing practices seemed to change the initial focus of the participants**. The country experts started to recognize the benefits of policy coordination. The Commission expert became increasingly aware of the differences in the research systems and rationales of the country-level policy directions.

A third sub-question explored policy learning experiences - ***In what ways does the OMC process contribute to individual policy learning experiences?*** First, as the OMC process is about knowledge sharing, it **helps to build expertise**. The findings demonstrate that the process enhances **bureaucratic administrative expertise** (e.g. how to set up policy initiatives, how to coordinate between funding programs, policy units). In this study, the OMC topics were related to practical policy issues, which demanded operational process-related knowledge relevant to policy-making. Having bureaucratic knowledge was the most important selection criterion for experts. Context-specific knowledge was viewed as being of secondary importance. **Content-specific expert knowledge** (e.g. effectiveness of certain policy approaches, knowledge regarding target countries) was also viewed as being significant, as it provides the foundation for carrying the policy debates forward. Academic/scientific knowledge seemed to have even less importance, and was rarely used to support one's argument. Policy learning seems to involve two distinct aspects - gaining knowledge about the operations of decision-making and gaining knowledge about the actual issues, topics, and policy approaches. It is therefore important to **secure a balance** between these two aspects, assuring that content-specific expertise is equally represented.

Second, the OMC process enhances the skills of **active knowledge facilitation**. Experts are increasingly viewed as knowledge mediators and facilitators (Stehr, 2003; Fisher, 2003; Michaels, 2009; Stehr & Grundmann, 2011). The experts needed the skills to access relevant information, collect and analyze policy-related knowledge and determine the most useful information for their individual national contexts. They needed to mediate between knowledge production (among government policy circles, the European Commission) and knowledge use (decision-making in their governments but also with the European Commission). By performing these activities, experts made judgements on what knowledge is considered to be relevant to the other member-

states, what policy ideas are important for their governments and what information should be provided to the Commission. These decisions enhanced the expertise and authority of the expert. The experts became filters in the knowledge facilitation process, developing a powerful position in influencing policy agendas nationally and at the European level.

Third, the learning experiences are **dependent on the contextual and process-related factors** that emerged from the comparison of the three OMC groups. Learning is enhanced when the **topic is related to national policy debates**. In such cases new knowledge is directly relevant to participants and opens up a "policy window" allowing one to contribute expertise to policy discussions at home. It is easier to engage in learning exercises if there is **political commitment and support**, as was the case in the OMC groups. The process was conducted with political support, engagement of country-experts was seen to be important and time spent on policy learning was perceived to be useful and relevant. Such a supportive environment increases participation activity, knowledge sharing and mutual learning. Countries where the domestic political support was not evident tended to participate less actively in European level policy developments.

Political tension and an urgency for policy results, experienced primarily by the Group 1 participants during their OMC work, influenced the focus of policy learning. In cases of political urgency, learning shifted away from gaining knowledge on policy approaches in favour of learning about organizational cultures and decision-making styles. Creating a tangible result (e.g. policy document, set of best practices) becomes the primary focus and is reached often through bargaining strategies. With political bargaining, one has to accept the results of the negotiations and recognize that these changes might be less stable than policy shifts brought about through learning practices (Elgström & Jönsson 2000, Hertin & Berkhout, 2003). **Political tension** was experienced when stakeholders (from the Commission) represented diverse policy views, making the participants raise awareness of the differences within one organization. According to Sabatier (1988), the diversity of perspectives forces the participants to learn about the rationales and motives of the other party. Therefore, witnessing conflicts and disagreements during the policy debates provided an opportunity to refine one's policy beliefs. When a group experiences little diversity in policy beliefs, learning experiences are less rich. Radaelli (2004) suggests a different approach. He notes that the presence of a policy agenda might be a hindrance to learning. Such alternative rationales might shift the focus of policy debates, turning the learning environment into a power struggle. Instead of sharing knowledge on best practices, participants might exercise their power to advocate for a particular policy agenda. The shift in learning was evident in Group 1 whose participants experienced a high degree of political pressure. Group 1 participants tended to provide very few examples of specific policy approaches. The urgency for producing policy results can lead to a **limited timeframe** and thereby influence learning. When the topic is urgent (e.g. financial matters that need a quick solution as for Group 1), there is not enough time for knowledge sharing, analyzing information and updating

one's policy beliefs. Focusing only on getting the policy report done hinders ownership of the recommendations, and creates barriers for genuine learning.

Individual policy learning experiences are also influenced by the **group composition and the steering style**. The Commission experts mostly contributed political knowledge and represented the interests of their particular units. This allows for raising awareness of the diversity in organizational processes and the decision-making styles within the Commission. The ministry officials among the country experts presented politically aligned knowledge, making the participants analyze the rationales behind a certain policy approach. The few academics in the group provided personal expertise and enhanced learning by content-specific examples. The presence of several Commission representatives in Group 1 discussions created a hierarchy between the country experts and the Commission experts. As a result, open dialogue was hindered.

The OMC approach has been viewed as a shift towards a more democratic, bottom-up approach to policy-making (Wallace, et al., 2010). As the findings demonstrate, while the member-states are increasingly more involved in European-level policy-making, the **pool of participants is remarkably homogeneous**. This finding overlaps with the research findings by Gornitzka and Sverdrup (2011) who found that EU decision-making is strongly biased towards the officials from national administrations. For policy coordination purposes the tendency to use government officials is strategic and serves its purpose, as these people have direct access to the opportunities to influence policy decisions. However, for learning purposes, the lack of diversity can be limiting, as the unique insights from a broader expert body were absent. Those insights from diverse stakeholders, including members outside of the government structure, could potentially lead to unique and innovative policy approaches (Lundvall, et al., 2002). According to Sabatier (1988), learning is enhanced by the diversity of policy views and ideas. The diversity among experts' worldviews could contribute to the overall richness of the learning experiences. In several cases, experts noted that it was easy for them to settle on policy recommendations, as most participants viewed the policy ideas in a similar manner.

The **bottom-up steering style** practiced by the Chairs of Group 2 and 3 contributed to integrated policy-making where every contribution was valued and accepted. This approach led to mutual ownership of decisions and made it easier for experts to support and disseminate the results of the OMC work. Country representatives of the older Western states tend to have the respect and authority in these policy discussions. They often determine what counts as a best practice, while representatives with less experience from emerging policy contexts tend to only observe the policy discussions. Furthermore, there are differences in resources (time, human resources, financial resources) available to countries. The availability of such resources determines what kind of policy approaches are endorsed and adopted. All of these factors need to be considered when aiming to create truly enriching policy learning experiences for all participants.

Through activating the individual learning mechanisms, the OMC process **helps to develop awareness of policy beliefs among participants**. A wide range of learning mechanisms was identified based on the participants' comments. Learning is potentially most enhanced by **active participation, lesson-drawing, mapping and comparing mechanisms.** These activities involve focused behaviour and individual engagement in policy approaches, aspects that could be built into future learning initiatives. These mechanisms are also less affected by political tension or power hierarchies, factors that may hinder learning. Other types of learning approaches such as value acceptance, blocked-learning or non-learning are more dependent on contextual factors and influenced by the level of conflict in the group or the extent of political commitment. Of note, value acceptance mechanisms were described primarily by Group 2 and Group 3 participants. Those were the groups with little conflict among the participants. Sabatier (1986) suggests that moderate conflict, as witnessed in Group 1, would encourage the acceptance of the secondary policy beliefs of the other party. In Group 1, six experts reported an increased awareness of diverse policy perspectives. These findings suggest that **moderate conflict** in policy learning might not lead to a change in policy beliefs but rather might contribute to awareness-building about the policy issues.

Finally, a fourth sub-question focused on the policy learning outcomes, asking ***What impact has the OMC policy learning had to the policy-making in the area of research policy?*** According to the theoretical approach used in this study, the findings clearly point to the **dominance of value-based impact**, a crucially important aspect in policy-making. Such impacts are not easily translated into measurable outcomes but serve as essential building blocks in the policy-making process. Recent scholarly work increasingly supports the view of gradual policy change (Richardson, 2000; Pierson, 2004; Streeck & Thelen, 2005). Mahoney & Thelen (2009) argue that far-reaching change can be accomplished through the accumulation of small, seemingly insignificant accomplishments. This research aligns with that view.

As noted in the literature, policy learning is essentially a cognitive process where individual participants share information and knowledge. Through this process, a **gradual update of goals, norms, values and behaviours takes place**. As stated by Egeberg, et al., (2003) policy-makers' views change when they increasingly operate in international policy-discussions (e.g. European policy environments). The OMC process provided country experts with a learning space, where they could meet, build relationships, and share policy-related expertise. During the OMC discussions an **understanding was developed about the policy views of others.** Experts learned about the reasons behind arguments and came to understand the diverse political culture in the European Commission. This knowledge is most valuable for future policy debates, but cannot be translated into quick, easily measurable outcomes. Through these OMC dialogues experts came to realize that there are significant benefits to cooperating together. Hearing about the diverse policy approaches of other countries makes one analyze the relevance and applicability of policy approaches in one's own country.

Gaining knowledge of how countries are operating funding schemes or running research cooperation programs provides unique insights on how this could be done more effectively in one's own country. Experts' norms and policy beliefs tend to gradually **shift away from national influences** towards being more open to regional policy approaches. Experts take these ideas and concepts back and disseminate them among their own organizations. Dissemination of such ideas at their home organizations provides a step towards building gradual awareness and acceptance of the policy ideas developed in the European policy circles.

Policy change is rarely a result of one person's influence but a complex interplay of ideas, institutions and interests (Hall 1998). Working together as a group increases the chances to contribute to policy change. Several important **organizational changes** accompanied the work of the OMC groups. The work of Group 1 impacted the reorganization of the European level funding instruments – the European Framework Program and the Structural Funds Program. Group 2 established the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation to keep research cooperation prominent on the political agenda. Group 3 initiated a large-scale follow-up OMC group that targeted the discussion of university research excellence among representatives of academia. These initiatives could not happen without collaborating through an authentic dialogue. As a group, the experts were able to contribute to a gradual paradigm shift in European research policy – **from resistance towards more open debate and mutual collaboration.**

The impact of the OMC policy debate on the national policy agenda among the member-states has been evident. While the linear instrumental changes are limited, the experts were able to gain new knowledge and **contribute information to the domestic policy debates.** The examples of **strengthening a domestic argument** include the increased emphasis on developing research clusters, engaging in multilateral research projects and establishing science diplomatic posts for research collaboration. Through the dissemination activities the experts were able to raise the awareness of their colleagues on the directions of the policy debates at the European level. They were able to **inform their superiors on the directions and developments** that might help those who are making the policy decisions. The OMC debates also helped to **broaden the professional networks** of the country experts. These networks serve as important channels for distributing information horizontally (among the area experts but also among the policy departments within the Commission) and vertically (between the EC and national ministries). This information includes knowledge of each other's strengths and capabilities as well as discovering ways for further collaboration. As noted by Gornitzka (2010), interaction between sectors that are built on different principles is a fundamental dynamic of change. Eventually it can result in a radical change if goals, interests, understandings and actors from one sphere understand one another.

The gradual change at the European level has been significant. As a result of the OMC debates, the Commission representatives were compelled to reach out to other units

and departments for their cooperation and knowledge. For example, the issues related to researchers' mobility are closely linked to the employment policies and regional policies, where thematic expertise and knowledge from those Directorates was included. Reaching out to other departments helped to establish firm **working relationships across the Commission departments**, which contributed to a better flow of information and knowledge within the Commission. These research topics that were raised by the OMC experts and addressed by the Commission helped to **increase broader awareness of the issues related to research** and innovation policy. It also demonstrated the capability of the DG Research to address the issues by taking the policy agenda forward. Gradually the DG Research became **the catalyst and developer of research policy in the European Union**. This was a major shift away from being the funder of research projects for several decades. Since 2000, research policy has become one of the main pillars of European regional development. Several policy documents view research and innovation as the main thematic area that would take Europe as a region forward (Europe 2020, Horizon 2020). For that purpose, the Innovation Union agenda has been created. Recent scholarly work has started to notice the gradual progress made in European research policy. For example, Barré, et al., (2013) state that the Europeanization in research policy has increased substantially over the past ten years. According to the authors, Europe has entered a new phase of coordination in programming and funding, which opens up the opportunity to achieve further coherence in research policy. Part of this process is the contribution of institutional learning that has led to strengthened policy coordination.

Recommendations related to policy learning

Organized policy learning initiatives **are important tools for on-going policy coordination** and should be maintained in the future for several reasons. First, with the increasing emphasis on evidence-based policy-making in changing policy environments, policy learning exercises provide crucial ways on systematically collecting evidence about policies that work. Through coordinated policy learning initiatives, knowledge on best practices can be gained, accompanied with the inputs by experts on why a certain policy approach has been effective. Such first-hand information is not available otherwise. Second, policy learning leads to cooperation and collaboration among countries, contributing to a decrease in the fragmentation of knowledge and resources. While the economic competitiveness among the countries has increased, the results contributing to broader society can be achieved through working together and relying on each other's strengths and knowledge. Third, policy learning exercises lead to building gradual mutual awareness among individuals operating in diverse policy paradigms. This aspect is especially relevant in today's unstable political environment where dialogue and learning needs to take place between individuals not only within a specific policy area but across countries and civilizations.

From this research, several process-related recommendations for organizing policy-learning initiatives can be made that will enhance dialogue and collaboration among the stakeholders. Of utmost importance, there has to be **political commitment** for the process. Only by providing the highest political level support can the process yield meaningful outcomes. Therefore the framing of learning needs to be relevant to the larger public and/or linked to the socio-economic benefits for the country. Considering ways to **secure participation activity** is also important. This could be done by mutually agreeing on relevant topics, clearly stating the benefits of the process and making arrangements to reduce the regular work-responsibilities of the participants, thus making time for policy learning. The benefits of the process should explicitly include the establishment of group exercises that require active participation, such as distributing work assignments, developing potential policy scenarios, mapping and comparing policy approaches and grouping experts based on similarities of research systems. **Diversity in the pool of participants** must be carefully sought so as to assure different viewpoints and knowledge in the process. Learning opportunities should be advertised among a wide range of experts to involve knowledge contributions from stakeholders external to the government. The pool of experts could include individuals from the policy think tanks, industry and civil society groups. It is important **to start with the less sensitive issues** so as to build trust among the participants. The group Chair plays an important role in securing an integrative and bottom-up learning environment, so that the steering style would not create additional barriers for participation and learning. **Follow-up initiatives** will help to keep the topic highly profiled in policy debates, thus adding relevance to the work.

The OMC process provides a great example on how a structure of the learning initiative should be established to create a learning platform for policy debates. First, the **bottom-up, voluntary nature** of the process is a key to the participation of member-states' experts. Through an informal environment, participants can freely discuss best practices and policy failures and learn from the expertise of others. Second, the **non-binding** OMC environment is essential for building trust among the participants on diverse policy views. Such personal experiences build bridges between stakeholders, leading to a common ground for future policy developments. This finding confirms that authentic dialogue supports learning and creates expert networks for the foundation of collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008). The OMC process has also built trust between the Commission representatives and the member-states. The member-states come to appreciate the opportunity to be a decision-maker in European policy-debates, an opportunity that was not available before the OMC era. Through active participation and mutual involvement, ownership of the decision is obtained. There is a need to notice and recognize the value of such ”soft policy” approaches in decision-making. Continuation with the format of voluntary, bottom-up process is an important factor for policy coordination initiatives in Europe.

Concluding remarks

This research illustrates that policy learning practices do not evolve in a uniform manner. They are context-dependent. The context of the current study was research policy. Several factors need to be considered for application of the current research results into other policy areas. First, the **past history** of the policy area needs to be taken considered. For example, if the policy area has been considered as a building block of a nation-state, including its culture and traditions (e.g. education) (Neave, 2001; Gornitzka, 2005), it must be recognized that the political openness for policy learning is potentially lower than in some other policy areas (e.g. environmental policy, transportation). Second, the **uncertainty of effective policy approaches** influences policy learning activity. When the uncertainty in policy practices is high, policy learning is especially important, as it is anticipated to increase the effectiveness of policies and the competitiveness of a country (Common, 2004; Paasi, 2005). This is the case in research policy but could be less relevant in other policy areas (e.g. agriculture, fisheries, culture). Third, **framing of the policy issue** as a "common concern" is a significant factor in policy learning. Such framing increases participation activity and interests towards learning. This was the case of research policy but is evident also in environmental policies, social policy, employment policy, education and training policy (Trubek & Trubek, 2005). According to Trubek & Trubek (2005) issues such as high unemployment rates, low levels of labour market participation, high expenditures for social welfare and state pensions are issues projected as common problems that need to be addressed for increasing regional competitiveness. When policy issues are framed as common concerns, it is easier to secure political support and the focus on learning initiatives is enhanced.

Also, the current study results are limited to the European Union's governance system. Based on the findings, a few assumptions could be made regarding the usefulness of this **policy learning approach in other governance systems**. Federalism is the most comparable system to the EU multi-level governance system. To a degree both systems share a division of power between two (or more) levels of government (federal-state/provincial and EU-country), policy directions are determined by executive negotiation rather than parliamentary deliberation, and unanimity takes precedence over majority rule (Börzel & Hosli, 2003; Hueglin, 2013). Kerber & Eckardt (2007) theorize that in federal systems the lack of congruency between the federal and regional governance creates situations where the information flow is fragmented or absent, sending mixed signals to knowledge producers and ultimately affecting knowledge application. Several authors have documented the lack of progress in research and innovation policy in federal systems due to an absence of policy coordination (Cameron 2004, Mitchell & Ledwell, 2011; Creutzberg, 2011; Sharaput, 2012). Hueglin (2013) points out that while in the EU system policy decisions are made through negotiations and compromise, the rigidity of the American federal system leads to numerous court cases resulting an unsatisfactory decision for at least one party. Feller (2002) states that the disconnect between the operations of the legislative and

executive branches of the US federal government has affected the implementation of science policy in academic institutions. While the overall federal strategy for universities is to increase interdisciplinary and intellectual curiosity, the performance measurement system by executive branch serves as a barrier to enhancing institutional performance. Canadian federalism presents a similar example. Cameron (2004), referring to Canadian post-secondary education, notes that there is a desperate need for a consensus between federal and provincial governments to avoid financial fragmentation (e.g. overlapping provincial and federal programs for student aid, research support). Similarly, Wood (2013), using the example of employment policy in Canada, argues that Canadian federalism has been moved to extreme decentralization where information sharing among stakeholders has been lost. In employment policy this decentralization has translated into forty-nine federal-provincial bilateral agreements using four different agreement templates to distribute funding for labour market programs. The situation is similar in Canadian research policy, which has been shaped by the federal government through its research funding schemes but also increasingly by the provincial governments who are making their own investments in university R&D. The tension between federal-provincial relations has been indicated by several scholars (e.g. Fisher and Rubenson 2010) and there is a clear need for enhanced policy coordination between the two levels of government.

Therefore, policy learning initiatives with information sharing and mutual learning could potentially benefit effective policy-making in federal systems. As noted by Brown (2008), policy coordination cannot be an outcome of an evolutionary process but must be carefully designed and promoted. The case of EU research policy is an example of such work. Carefully designed policy learning initiatives might provide excellent venues for federal systems for bringing diverse stakeholders together, creating shared views for the policy directions and ownership of the policy agenda at large. According to the current findings, these learning initiatives need to ensure trust and open communication among stakeholders, be carefully supported and facilitated by the (federal) government, and have a clear political commitment towards the outcomes of the process. The coordination difficulties in federal systems such as Canada may be caused by a lack of interest in active participation, a top-down power-system and fewer external pressures on government for better coordination (Wood, 2013). A focus on learning would help to balance the power-hierarchies in the system and lead to an understanding of shared challenges. Using knowledge-sharing activities, an understating of the benefits of mutual collaboration can emerge, leading gradually to a joining of forces for mutual benefit. Overall, policy learning initiatives in multi-level governance systems have the potential to create complementary pan-regional institutional structures and processes to ensure collaboration and dialogue across the policy beliefs.

This research opens up **new venues for further research**. This work has contributed to the two main areas of research – the European integration studies and to the policy learning literature. Hence, further research can proceed in either direction. If the path of European integration is followed, a more in-depth historical approach to the

organizational changes in the European Commission DG Research is needed. How has the organization of DG Research changed over the past few decades? What have been the main factors influencing institutional and organizational change in the Commission? What have been the dominant norms and values facilitated through the organizational changes? How have these changes affected the European integration at large? Such data would provide further evidence on the impact of ideas, norms and policy beliefs to the gradual shifts of policies. The findings on policy learning require more detailed understanding on the factors influencing the individual learning process. A quantitative study is needed to test the impact of the factors, identified in this research, on individual learning. These findings would be of significant relevance when productive policy learning experiences are contemplated in the future. In addition, policy learning experiences in a less structured format than the OMC would provide important insights into the topic. Research on the learning experiences in other governance systems would help to clarify if there are differences in the policy outcomes and would provide insights on the additional factors that impact learning. In this vein, comparative study analyzing policy learning as it occurs in other multilevel governance systems (e.g. Canada, US), would be worthwhile and could provide important additions to understand the phenomenon of policy learning.

Overall, this thesis has contributed to the scholarly literature by clarifying the relationship between individual policy learning and policy change. The thesis provides insights about the micro-mechanisms behind the processes of European integration. It is individual policy learning that shapes the developments of integration through policy coordination. Through these learning experiences member-states' experts gain new knowledge on policy approaches, programs, best practises and policy failures, thereby updating their content-related expertise. In addition, learning experiences involve knowledge of individual relationships, decision-making styles, organizational cultures and power-relationships that diverse stakeholders bring to the process. Such knowledge helps to create awareness and to update the policy beliefs of participants, leading to gradual ownership of the policy decisions across Europe. This thesis draws attention to the less visible policy impacts that can ultimately create meaningful results in research policy. The practices of the "soft" policy approaches such as the OMC should continue to be supported by the member-states, as they have increased the prospects for policy coordination and European integration.

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Appendix 2. Recruitment Letter

Invitation to participate in the study
(Sent by email)

Dear ...,

I would like to invite you to participate in our study on the role of expertise in the Open Method of Coordination in the European Union. The project will particularly focus on the policy process contributing towards European [name of the topic]. Your participation would involve a short interview on your experience and views on the expertise that you have provided in participating in that expert group. In return, I will share our analysis on the experiences of other European experts participating in similar endeavours, which you might find of interest. After receiving your consent, I will call your office to schedule a 30-minute telephone interview.

You will not be personally identified in our research reports, and I will be glad to submit report summaries of the interviews to you at your request. Should you have any questions about the study please contact Merli Tamtik at: merli.tamtik@utoronto.ca or my supervisor Prof. Creso Sá at c.sa@utoronto.ca.

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto. **Your reply to this e-mail agreeing to be interviewed is considered as consent** and that you have agreed to participate in the study (please see the attached consent form for details).

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Merli Tamtik (Tel: 416-978-1227)
PhD Candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Email: merli.tamtik@utoronto.ca
University of Toronto

Appendix 3. Individual Consent Letter, Country Expert

Participant Invitation - Consent Letter

(Sent as an attachment with the Recruitment email, on the University of Toronto letterhead)

Date

Dear [name of the participant]:

I would like to invite you to participate in the study on policy learning through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) initiative. This study focuses on the [name of the OMC group] expert group contributing towards policy coordination in the EU. The focus of the study is to understand how expert knowledge contributes to policy learning in OMC. Participation in this study will involve answering 9 open-ended questions about your perceptions concerning the expertise that you provided in participating in the expert group. The interviews will be audiotaped and then transcribed.

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto. The research will be carried out in accordance with the University of Toronto ethical standards for research. You are free to decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. You can refuse to answer any question during the telephone interview. A specific explanation is not required. Experts taking part in the study will not be identified or the answers evaluated.

All data will be stored electronically and anonymously; the interview recordings will be erased after the transcription is completed and the transcription will be deleted by the end of a five-year period. We see no potential risks to your participation in this study. Should you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant please contact: Office of Research Ethics, University of Toronto, McMurrich Building, 12 Queen's Park Crescent W, 3rd Floor, Fax 416-946-5763. If you have any questions about the research itself, please contact Merli Tamtik at: merli.tamtik@utoronto.ca.

Your reply to this e-mail agreeing to be interviewed is considered as consent and that you have agreed to participate in the study.

Please indicate if you would like to receive a copy of the study results.
Thank you in advance for your participation!

Sincerely,
Merli Tamtik (Tel: 416-978-1227)
PhD Candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Email: merli.tamtik@utoronto.ca

University of Toronto

Interview Questions

This study aims to examine the individual learning experiences that occurred during the Open Method of Coordination policy process in the EU, trying to understand the role of the expert knowledge and the dynamics of the process during working group meetings. The researcher is interested in learning how experts contribute to the policy design and how policy learning takes place through the OMC.

1. How did you get involve in the OMC expert group?
2. Why was it important for your country to participate in this expert group?
3. Could you please describe the process of developing the final policy report?
4. What kind of knowledge did you contribute to the discussions (empirical data, professional experience, country-specific, political arguments)?
5. What kind of knowledge got used in the final policy report?
6. How did you come to an agreement during discussions?
7. What kind of knowledge did you find valuable to take back and use in your country? (Please think of specific examples)
8. What were the specific outcomes of the process (at individual, national and/or EU level)?
9. What are the specific strength and weaknesses of the OMC?

Would you have any thoughts or observations about specific aspects of expertise in this policy process that were not covered?

Appendix 4. Individual Consent Letter, European Commission Expert

Participant Invitation - Consent Letter

(Sent as an attachment with the Recruitment email on the University of Toronto letterhead)

Date

Dear [name of the participant]:

I would like to invite you to participate in the study on policy learning through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) initiative. The focus of the study is to understand how expert knowledge contributes to policy learning and how this approach facilitates policy-making in the EU. Participation in this study will involve answering 9 open-ended questions about your perceptions of mutual learning. The interviews will be audiotaped and then transcribed.

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto. The research will be carried out in accordance with the University of Toronto ethical standards for research. You are free to decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. You can refuse to answer any question during the telephone interview. A specific explanation is not required. Experts taking part in the study will not be identified or the answers evaluated.

All data will be stored electronically and anonymously; the interview recordings will be erased after the transcription is completed and the transcription will be deleted by the end of a five-year period. We see no potential risks to your participation in this study. Should you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant please contact: Office of Research Ethics, University of Toronto, McMurrich Building, 12 Queen's Park Crescent W, 3rd Floor, Fax 416-946-5763. If you have any questions about the research itself, please contact Merli Tamtik at: merli.tamtik@utoronto.ca.

Your reply to this e-mail agreeing to be interviewed is considered as consent and that you have agreed to participate in the study.

Please indicate if you would like to receive a copy of the study results.

Thank you in advance for your participation!

Sincerely,

Merli Tamtik (Tel: 416-978-1227)
PhD Candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Email: merli.tamtik@utoronto.ca
University of Toronto

Interview Questions

This study aims to examine how the European Commission facilitates policy-learning initiatives, such as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in research policy. The researcher is trying to understand the role of expertise and knowledge sharing in the European level policy-making, identifying potential impacts, strengths and challenges of the process. The aim is to understand how mutual learning initiatives contribute to the European level policy design and how it might enhance policy coordination among the member states.

1. In what ways is your work related to policy learning initiatives such as the OMC?
2. Why is it important for the European Commission to facilitate policy learning among member states?
3. Could you please describe how mutual learning is facilitated and secured in the Innovation Union strategy?
4. What kind of knowledge gets to be shared during the discussions with member states representatives (empirical data, professional experience, country-specific, political arguments)?
5. What kind of knowledge gets used in the EU level policy making?
6. How do you come to an agreement during discussions?
7. What kind of knowledge do you find valuable to collect from the member states and use in your work? (Please think of specific examples.)
8. What have been the specific outcomes of the policy learning process (at individual, national and/or EU level)?
9. What are the specific strength and weaknesses of the policy learning process?

Would you have any thoughts or observations about specific aspects of expertise in this policy process that were not covered?

Appendix 5. List of Interviews Conducted

GROUP 1
1. country expert from Belgium/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on May 18, 2012/length of the interview 29 minutes 18 seconds
2. country expert from Belgium/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on June 28, 2012/length of the interview 36 minutes 44 seconds
3. country expert from Estonia /Skype interview conducted in Toronto on May 14, 2012/length of the interview 28 minutes 36 seconds
4. country expert from Germany/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on July 30, 2012/length of the interview 40 minutes 14 seconds
5. country expert from Germany /Skype interview conducted in Toronto on May 10, 2012/length of the interview 1 hour 42 minutes 54 seconds
6. country expert from Greece/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on May 22, 2012/length of the interview 41 minutes 24 seconds
7. country expert from Hungary/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on May 11, 2012/length of the interview 1 hour 8 minutes 47 seconds
8. country expert from Netherlands/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on June 1, 2012/length of the interview 39 minutes 42 seconds
9. country expert from Sweden /Skype interview conducted in Toronto on May 8, 2012/length of the interview 48 minutes 14 seconds

GROUP 2
1. country expert from Austria/ Skype interview conducted in Toronto on April 7, 2011/length of the interview 21 minutes 18 seconds
2. country expert from Czech Republic/ Skype interview conducted in Toronto on April 13, 2011/ length of the interview 30 minutes 41 seconds
3. country expert from Germany/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on April 4, 2011/length of the interview 34 minutes 29 seconds
4. country expert from Italy/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on April 13, 2011 /length of the interview 41 minutes 58 seconds
5. country expert from Lithuania/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on April 20, 2011/length of the interview 20 minutes 33 seconds
6. country expert from Norway/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on April 7, 2011/length of the interview 31 minutes 56 seconds
7. country expert from Portugal/ Skype interview conducted in Toronto on April 20, 2011/length of the interview 48 minutes 9 seconds
8. country expert from Romania/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on April 1, 2011/length of the interview 48 minutes 49 seconds
9. country expert from Spain/ Skype interview conducted in Toronto on April 27, 2011/length of the interview 36 minutes 12 seconds

10. country expert from the Netherlands/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on April 8, 2011/length of the interview 44 minutes 33 seconds

GROUP 3
1. country expert from Belgium/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on July 23, 2012/length of the interview 40 minutes 29 seconds
2. country expert from Italy/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on July 24, 2012/length of the interview 32 minutes 17 seconds
3. country expert from Germany/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on July 24, 2012/length of the interview 37 minutes 41 seconds
4. country expert from Germany/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on August 30, 2012/length of the interview 39 minutes 13 seconds
5. country expert from Ireland /Skype interview conducted in Toronto on July 23, 2012/length of the interview 34 minutes 15 seconds
6. country expert from Norway/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on August 27, 2012 /length of the interview 38 minutes 51 seconds
7. country expert from Sweden/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on August 7, 2012 /length of the interview 32 minutes 50 seconds

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
1. policy expert /Skype interview conducted in Toronto on April 28, 2011/length of the interview 25 minutes 25 seconds
2. policy expert/in-person interview conducted in Brussels on June 5, 2012 /length of the interview 43 minutes 43 seconds
3. policy expert/in-person interview conducted in Brussels on April 11, 2011/length of the interview 39 minutes 22 seconds
4. policy expert/in-person interview conducted in Brussels on June 11, 2012/length of the interview 54 minutes 29 seconds
5. policy expert/in-person interview conducted in Brussels on June 5, 2012/length of the interview 1 hour 18 minutes 52 seconds
6. policy expert/in-person interview conducted in Brussels on June 4, 2012/length of the interview 58 minutes, 28 seconds
7. policy expert/in-person interview conducted in Brussels on June 11, 2012/length of the interview 59 minutes 11 seconds
8. policy expert/Skype interview conducted in Toronto on June 27, 2012 /length of the interview 29 minutes 25 seconds