

State of the art: overview of concepts, indicators and methodologies used for analyzing the social OMC

Porte, Caroline de la

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Working Papers on the Reconciliation of Work and Welfare in Europe

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About the author

Caroline de la Porte is Associate Professor at the political science department at the University of Southern Denmark. She is affiliated to the Centre for welfare state research and is coordinator of the 'Euro-politics' network of the department. She is also an associated researcher of the European Social Observatory in Brussels. Her research interests are EU and social policy reform, new modes of governance, social policy reform of central and eastern European countries.

Abstract

This paper is a detailed analysis about the literature on the Social OMC from 2006-2010, focusing on how OMC research has been carried out. It specifically points to which theoretical framework/concepts are used, and how change is conceptualised and measured. It is organised in five sections. The first concerns visibility and awareness about the OMC; the second analyses research on the EU level coordination process; the third scrutinizes how features of the OMC have been analysed. The fourth and fifth sections, addressing how national integration of the OMC has been researched, respectively address substantive policy change as well as national policy-making. Strikingly, virtually all OMC research adopts theoretical frameworks derived from literature on Europeanisation and/or institutionalisation. Also, as the OMC is voluntary and sanction-free, it depends heavily on how and the extent to which actors use it (agenda-setting, conflict resolution, maintaining focus on a policy issue, developing a policy dialogue, etc). OMC research has become nuanced and does highlight how, for which purpose and with which outcome actors engage with the OMC. Another finding is that there is data on policy issues addressed through the OMC, learning does take place and there is knowledge about domestic policy problems. However, the linkage between knowledge of an issue and direct use of the OMC for policy change in social policy is weak, but that may change with EU2020, where social policy has received a higher profile. Most research covers the EU-15, much more research needs to be undertaken in newer EU member states.

Keywords

OMC, social inclusion, pensions, health care and care for the elderly, theoretical approach, methods, indicators, measurement.

Introduction¹

The aim of this paper is to assess the literature on the Social OMC, especially focusing on the period after 2006. There are three strands of the Social OMC – social inclusion, pensions, health care and care for the elderly – which are distinct in terms of their EU level policy objectives and actor configurations. At EU and national levels, each of these three strands are governed by distinct combinations of national, regional and local governmental, non-governmental and private arrangements, which is why they are often analyzed separately in the literature.

In the *social inclusion OMC* the main policy objectives are to promote inclusion, to provide access to resources, rights, goods and services for all, to prevent the risks of social exclusion, to develop actions for disadvantaged groups, and to mobilise all relevant civil society and governmental actors in policy formulation and implementation. The governance of social inclusion at EU level involves the Commission (DG EMPL), the Social Affairs Council (and the related Social Protection Committee and the Indicators Working Group), but also transnational networks of non-governmental organisations working on and lobbying for particular policy objectives of the OMC inclusion. The actors at national and regional levels comprise governmental social affairs departments and ministries, but also NGOs at national and regional levels that lobby for their aims to the Commission and to their respective ministries at national and regional levels. The institutional setting needs to be taken into consideration as many policies under the social inclusion OMC are decentralised (where regional and local level actors decide upon and implement policies) and some are cross-sectoral.

In the *pensions OMC*, the overarching aim is to combine social adequacy and financial sustainability of pensions systems while modernizing them in response to changing employment, household, and demographic patterns. The EU level actors are the Commission (DG EMPL and DG ECFIN), the Social Affairs Council (as well as Social Protection Committee and the Indicators Working Group) and Economic Policy Council configurations (and the Economic Policy Committee and the Working Group on Ageing Populations and Sustainability). Hence, how the dialogue takes place among these actors (including how conflict is resolved and how the balance between social and economic imperatives of pensions policy are combined) should be taken into account in the literature on the pensions OMC. At the national level, governments (economic and social ministries in particular), social partners and/ or insurance companies are involved in national decision-making and implementation, but aside from governmental actors, broader involvement in the pensions OMC remains limited.

The actor setup in the *healthcare OMC* at the EU level involves three different sets of actors with competing interests and understandings of health policies. The ‘social’ actors, organized around DG EMPL and the Social Affairs Ministers are the main sponsor of this strand of the Social OMC, but they have to share the policy space with, on the one hand ‘economic’ actors, such as DG MARKT and the DG ECFIN (as well as the Internal Market and Ecofin Council of Ministers), as well as with

'health' actors, led by DG SANCO, the Ministers in the Health Council, and the experts and lobbyists. At the national level, the dominant actors are the respective Health Ministries. The manifold public, para-public and private organizations that form domestic health systems (public and private insurers, organized professions etc.) are barely involved in the process².

Some general observations on the extent and depth of recent research on the social OMC will be mentioned here before carrying out the more in-depth literature review. First, most studies use interview material and other primary sources (official documents). However, the number and quality of the interviews vary considerably, as do the analysis of primary documents. The way that sources have been analysed and used is of key importance for the quality of the research and for future research. First, full articles can be written on the basis of few interviews, which have in some cases been used as the main source of information. Second, it was noted that official documents (particularly the national reports member states are required to submit to the Commission in the framework of the social inclusion, pensions and health care processes) were in many cases under-studied, or rather were presented briefly without analytical criteria/indicators. Reports for the Commission represent a source of information which can be exploited more in the future, notably by analysing the way that a member state presents information to the Commission, i.e. is the document mainly a planning or reporting document? Does it involve budgetary allocations (including co-funding from the European Social Fund)? Does it "frame" national policy projects using EU terminology/conceptual frameworks in a serious way? Is policy planned or reported on in the way intended by the EU?

While two-thirds of the reviewed literature was published in 2007 or more recently³, a significant share covers the time-span *prior to* the streamlining of the Social OMC in 2006. Few academic scholars take much account of the demarcation 'before and after' 2006. One in three publications is not clear about the period covered, but this was in most cases discernible when the literature was analysed in more detail. It is notable that most literature does not extensively analyse how the changes to the Lisbon Strategy have affected the social OMCs. This needs to be analysed in more detail in the future. The literature is not always explicit about its conceptual framework, operationalisation and especially indicators. Methodology, in most of the research on the OMC, is most often quite carefully noted. The best research results are obtained when data is triangulated (primary sources: interviews, surveys, official documents), since the OMC has multiple dimensions, each having multiple possible impacts. National case studies are typically written by academics, where cross-country analyses are typically research projects commissioned by the EU.

It is also striking that most research covers the EU-15. Few studies have been conducted for the newly-acceded member states, even though those that do exist conclude that the impact of the Social OMC is more significant if there is also a linkage to EU funding. It is of utmost importance that future research efforts focus more on the new member states, for all three strands of the Social OMC. Within the EU-15, there is a very strong representation of the Nordic Member states (Denmark,

Sweden, Finland: 23 studies) and Germany (20 studies), while France and the United Kingdom (UK) are also well covered. Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain are addressed in five to seven studies. Ireland and Portugal have been covered in detail in the PhD thesis by Jesse Norris⁴.

This literature review is organised according to five main theoretical-empirical issues in OMC research. The first concerns visibility and awareness of the OMC, the second focuses on how research has addressed coordination of the OMC process at EU level, the third focuses on how the features of the OMC process have been analysed, the fourth is about impact of the OMC on substantive policy change at national level, and finally, the last theme focuses on how the OMC process has affected national policy-making. Under each of these headings, several issues are identified: the theoretical framework/concepts and mechanisms for change⁵, qualitative or quantitative indicators ('success criteria') that are used to measure (the impact of) the identified concept, the methodology used and suggestions for future research.

Visibility and Awareness of the OMC

Concepts, Indicators and Tools

Two analytical distinctions are made in the issue of visibility and awareness of the OMC. The first is conceptualised as visibility and awareness about the OMC at EU, national and/or regional levels of governance, by the actors which could potentially be affected by or make use of the OMC policy objectives as leverage. This will be referred to as *institutional visibility*. The second is visibility and awareness about the Social OMC (policy and/or process) in the public sphere (in media and among citizens), and will be referred to as *public visibility*.

Institutional visibility

The issue of institutional visibility and awareness has mainly been addressed for the social inclusion OMC, and has been addressed to a lesser extent for the other strands of the Social OMC. For the social inclusion OMC, the analyses by Kroeger (2008⁶, 2009⁷), are worth mentioning. For Kroeger, the issue of participation in the OMC is crucial as a legitimacy conferring element and in order for it to potentially have an impact. Kroeger operationalizes actor involvement in the OMC social inclusion on the basis of its own ambition to involve a broad range of actors in planning policy development. In Kröger's approach, the criterion for optimal effectiveness is that the all relevant actors - governmental, non-governmental and other actors - should be involved in learning and policy development via the OMC. The criteria she looks at for the likelihood of actor involvement is first, knowledge of the existence of the OMC and second, receptivity of the OMC by actors, where the more 'receptive' the actors, the more likely they are to use the OMC. Or the other way around, actors are likely to be receptive to the OMC when they see an added value. She contends that receptiveness is enhanced when there is a 'carrot', i.e. (co-) funding for programmes and/or prioritization of a policy issue enhanced. The

methods used are content analysis (qualitative interviews with national governmental actors and NGOs, analysis of primary sources – EU and national governmental and NGO documents).

The issue of institutional visibility and awareness among governmental and/or non-governmental actors of the OMC is also raised by Frazer and Marlier⁸. They note that knowledge of the OMC nationally is limited to the actors involved in the OMC and peak level interest organisations, but also that there is considerable variation among countries. However, they do not propose conceptualisation, operationalisation and analysis beyond that remark. But, they do contribute to knowledge about how (among the actors that do know of the OMC) actors are likely to engage with the OMC. Building on the indicator of ‘receptiveness’ highlighted by Kroger in her analyses, Frazer and Marlier note that expectations (in terms of outcome) about involvement in the OMC inclusion are very different between NGOs and governmental actors. Success criteria, then, can be attached to the notion of receptiveness: the likelihood of actors, first, to become involved in the OMC and second, to remain involved is determined by whether they know about the OMC and whether their involvement matches their expectations. According to Frazer and Marlier, a distinction can be drawn between success criteria for the NGOs and for governmental officials, where

- NGOs consider the OMC as a policy resource, and want to use the OMC directly to develop more effective policies and procedures for the eradication of poverty and social exclusion. Furthermore, they want to be fully involved in that process;
- governmental officials only consider the OMC useful as a means for learning and the exchange of good practice, but not to develop policy.⁹ They de facto command the process, so have no further requirements of involvement (although this varies between the main ministry in charge and other ministries which may want to become more involved).

Frazer and Marlier, then are interested in the *mechanisms* of leverage, actor empowerment and creative appropriation, differentiated by which type of actor is concerned. Regarding data and methods, they build on the work of the independent network of experts, which have each individually carried out qualitative longitudinal analysis, in assessing how actors use the OMC and what they expect from the OMC inclusion.

Public visibility

There is virtually no literature on the Social OMC that addresses its *public* visibility and awareness, i.e. how the OMC or issues deriving from the OMC have been visible in the public sphere (media, among citizens). Frazer and Marlier (analysing all three strands of the Social OMC)¹⁰ note that there is ‘virtually no media or public awareness’ of the social OMCs. Their conclusion is based on the empirical analysis carried out by the network of independent national experts, who each carried out a qualitative analysis of the media debate (but with no systematic methodology, rather by first hand knowledge). The mechanism concerned for public visibility is the one of diffusion of ideas from the EU level into the national debate.

Perhaps the most comprehensive and systematic analysis of the public visibility and awareness of the OMC (not strictly on the Social OMC but on the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines and the European Employment Strategy) is the analysis by Meyer (2005)¹¹. Conceptually, the author is interested first, in how the EES process figures in national media (and whether this increases over time); second, in how much ‘voice’ of different EU institutional actors figures in the media, and third, in whether there has been ‘convergence of news frames’ (i.e. same way of framing issues – i.e. from the EU level EES process) in the media. The criteria for success (= visibility) is whether there is reference to 1) the Commission, 2) the good practices/policy in peer countries (cross referencing of policy in different countries), 3) reference to the European Parliament and 3) reference to the European Council. Ultimately, the author was interested in whether, through the mechanism of diffusion, there was a high degree of convergence in ‘news frames’. The methods are different techniques of media content analysis: on the one hand, a quantitative analysis (key word scanning) to determine whether modes of coordination attracted increasing attention in newspaper coverage (for major newspapers for the three selected countries) between 1997 and 2002; on the other hand, a qualitative content analysis through human coding of selected articles (random selection, 10% of the articles), focusing on the contents of the same newspapers, in 1998 and in 2002. This analysis is very interesting, but while it focuses on how the EES process is covered in the media, it does not seek to analyse how policy deriving from the EES (i.e. flexicurity) is addressed in the media. This would be interesting to analyse in more detail, since we know that in many cases public officials are reluctant to acknowledge OMC influence on policy development (see Buechs¹²; Buechs and Friedrich¹³, Ferrera and Sacchi¹⁴, Visser¹⁵, Zeitlin¹⁶ on these points).

Future Research

It is useful to distinguish between *institutional visibility and awareness* and *public visibility and awareness* as discussed above, where institutional visibility refers to the visibility among the main governmental actors (at EU, national, regional and local levels of governance), but also the visibility among the main stakeholders (this may be NGOs for the social inclusion OMC, but it may also be insurance organisations in the pensions OMC, or actors that provide services in the health care OMC, parliaments). Because of the variety of actors concerned by the OMC, it may be useful to distinguish between *institutional visibility* (governmental actors), *stakeholder visibility* (social partners, NGOs and other actors), and *academic visibility* (among academics, especially when they prepare policy analyses for governments).

For now, the distinction between institutional visibility and awareness and public visibility and awareness, seems to be very useful. For institutional visibility, indicators to represent different degrees of visibility are proposed. It may thus be useful to distinguish between:

- no visibility/awareness - never heard of the OMC,
- low visibility/awareness - heard of the OMC, but no awareness of what it is or how it can be used,

- medium visibility/awareness – heard of the OMC and knowledge of what it is, but little knowledge of how it can be used,
- high visibility/awareness – heard of the OMC and aware of how it can be used.

The visibility of the OMC should involve triangulation of data, including the analysis of primary documents, interviews¹⁷. It is important to locate which aspect of the OMC (because of the multi-dimensionality) actors are aware of or not and exactly how they think it could be used: for statistical development, as leverage, for agenda-setting, policy change, institutional development, etc. Empirically, the institutional visibility of the social inclusion OMC has been researched (mostly indirectly) in conjunction with analyses about how actors perceive the OMC inclusion (instrument for learning – governments or instrument for policy development – NGOs). However, there is little comparable information about the OMC in pensions and health care. This is a gap that would need to be filled.

For *public visibility and awareness*, the indicators would have to be adapted accordingly:

- no visibility/awareness - OMC or policy deriving directly from OMC never mentioned in the media;
- low visibility/awareness – OMC or policy deriving directly from mentioned in the media, but with little or no direct reference to the OMC process itself;
- medium visibility/awareness – OMC or policy deriving directly from mentioned in the media, in reference to a topical issue (i.e. European Year on Child Poverty, European Year on Poverty);
- high visibility/awareness – OMC or policy deriving directly from addressed comprehensively as a main issue in the media, in reference to a topical issue (i.e. European year on child poverty, European year on poverty), or to the regular OMC process.

The public visibility and awareness of all three social OMCs would need to be analysed in more detail.

The effectiveness of the OMC communication strategy launched by the Commission has not been addressed in the literature since it is unknown. As mentioned in the OMC social lab workshop¹⁸, a key to communicating to the public is the DG EMPL website, which should be evaluated according to its capacity to provide easy access to information to governmental officials, NGOs and other actors. A key sample of actors to whom the site should be targeted could be used as a test group for a small in-depth analysis.

Co-ordinating the OMC process at EU level

Concepts, Indicators and Tools

Here, I will first review the literature that taps into the pertinence, clarity and operational value of OMC common objectives, messages, recommendations (on EU

and national level) as well as the indicators *and* the capacity of the OMC process to stimulate a genuine policy debate and to build consensus around promising policy approaches. These questions are mostly addressed in the literature by focusing on the *mechanisms* of actor empowerment, creative appropriation and leverage, and policy framing, as well as deliberation and learning.

Definitions and indicators in the OMC: arguing and bargaining

Some specific studies which address deliberation in the decision-making on the OMC are worth mentioning. In the area of social inclusion, Brousse¹⁹ and Nivière²⁰ provide in-depth analyses of the politics of decision-making on technical aspects of the OMC, focusing on the deliberations in an EU taskforce around the issue of homelessness (the aim of the taskforce was to reach an agreement on an EU definition and common indicators). The analyses points out that representatives of the 'EU taskforce' were chosen on basis of technical expertise and not nationality, but that the debate was mainly fuelled by debates referring to national concepts, definitions and indicators, since homelessness, how to conceptualise it, and how to measure it is specific for each country. There were no *success criteria* per se, but implicitly, success was considered to be agreement (within the taskforce) on the definition of homelessness and indicators to measure homelessness. This, then implies the capacity to overcome conflict among actors (Commission, Member State technical experts, NGOs) is 'success'. Regarding the *methods*, the analysis was carried out on the basis of 'participant observation' (the author participated in the Task group, as a statistical expert from the national statistical institute (Insee) in France).

The *mechanisms* (analysed inductively) were the processes of arguing, bargaining and negotiation in the decision-making process of the taskforce. National statistical systems and institutionalised traditions of data collection on individuals have led to very different ways of defining, addressing and measuring homelessness. Notwithstanding these differences, it was possible, within the taskforce (representatives of national statistical offices and Eurostat) to arrive at a consensus on the concept of homelessness, but not on indicators to measure homelessness. In this case, success can be enhanced when experts agree on definitions and indicators.

Pertinence and value of the OMC operational value: consistency vs. novelty

Concerning the clarity of OMC objectives, there is a tension between the maintenance of the same priorities over time (since learning can be incremental) and between the introduction of new issues (to respond to new or hidden challenges). De la Porte²¹ assesses the OMC according to the concept of policy coherence (within each policy field) and across policy fields (in different areas covered by the Lisbon strategy). The criteria for success of policy coherence are stability of the EU policy frame, identified by high consistency over time and by (relatively) high ideological coherence of objectives. The author suggests that the more ambiguous the objectives are, the less likely they are to have a direct impact, particularly where institutions are weak. Elsewhere, the author has suggested that the lack of precision (and weak accountability mechanisms by the EU level and in domestic institutions) is particularly problematic for the new member states, where political elites are under pressure to curb public expenditure quite extensively, leaving little place for

modernization and the development of comprehensive activation and social policy strategy as suggested in the Social OMC²². In a similar vein, the issue of the political (and sometimes ambiguous) objectives and ideologies underlying the OMC has led Buechs²³ to identify the OMC as an instrument that could support welfare state retrenchment or the (more comprehensive) European Social Model. Similarly, Flear²⁴ argues, on the basis of a governmentality analysis, that the OMC in health care is a means to promote neo-liberal policy. However, the analysis focuses only on how the OMC can be used for reinforcing the ‘market rationality’ (liberalization) and not how it can be used to develop a more comprehensive social model. Most of the analyses on the political coherence of the OMC aims are not followed by operationalisation, indicators, methods, mechanisms. They are merely comments on the potential risk associated with broad OMC objectives. The analysis by CARITAS²⁵ aims to analyse empirically, inter alia, the extent to which the OMC objectives have had an impact. The methodology is participant observation, where individuals are involved as observers of OMC integration nationally for a number of years, and where they conclude empirically that the broadness of the OMC objectives makes them difficult to assess. The mechanism at hand here is policy diffusion and framing. While one of the advantages of the OMC is that it is revised constantly, the aims which are central to it should be clear, otherwise actors which do not work with it on a daily basis have a hard time to come to terms with it.

From ideological framing to creative appropriation

The multi-dimensionality of OMC objectives has been pointed out in various analyses on the national OMC and EES. Ferrera and Sacchi²⁶, for example, analyse the introduction of the EES and OMC/inclusion in the context of domestic reforms affecting what was formerly a dominantly passive labour market and decentralized and scattered policy for inclusion/anti-poverty. They analyse new labour law and political documents setting the policy frame (in particular the White Book on the Labour Market, 2001) and analyse how politicians, in introducing these reforms, have used the EES. Their *operationalisation* of the impact of the OMC explicitly seeks to take account of how domestic changes (legal frameworks, changing political priorities of government) influence the integration of EES and OMCincl policy objectives, with a focus on actor empowerment, and the development of institutional change. In their analysis, institutional change refers to the use of OMC methodology - setting policy priorities, specifying targets, planning, measuring progress via indicators, monitoring and evaluation – in national policy-making. The *mechanisms* which the authors focus on are how the OMC (and its broad multi-dimensional aims) is appropriately creatively or used as leverage (or selective downloading, i.e. selectively selecting aspects of the OMC to support existing reform efforts and/or to introduce new issues onto the policy agenda) in policy development and in the context of domestic reform. The *methods* are qualitative analysis through triangulation of data (primary governmental documents indicating agenda-setting or legal changes, interviews) and *process-tracing*.

In his analysis, Armstrong²⁷ notes that, despite the ambiguity in OMC objectives, the OMC is used as leverage by different types of actors, in the context of domestic reform, where actors at regional level have used the comprehensive OMC policy

objectives and indicators to propose reform at regional level. *Conceptually*, he analyses (policy and institutional) change, conceived as an alteration which goes in the intended direction of the OMC and can refer to policy change or actor empowerment/involvement in the OMC. This is *operationalized* as the adoption of OMC policy objectives and/or indicators in national/regional policy development and/or the use of the OMC by actors (governmental or non-governmental). The *mechanisms* the author focuses on are agency/leverage and creative appropriation. The analysis is comprehensive and is done (*methodology*) on the basis of primary sources (governmental documents, policy documents, interviews). Greer and Vanhercke²⁸ analyse how decisions are made in the OMC, focusing on the mechanisms of arguing *as well as* bargaining, i.e. discussion on the basis of new data and knowledge, as well as how to respond to new challenges, at the EU level (in the committees, the indicator groups, within the Commission, within taskforces). The *methods* are data collection on the basis of primary sources (interviews, primary sources), triangulating data and also engaging in process-tracing.

Measurement of key objectives in the OMCs

There is a rich body of knowledge on the more specific aspects addressed through the OMC, including the quantification of key problems and how to respond to these across member states. Here, three such reports will be mentioned. A report by the SPC²⁹ aims to define and to measure child poverty (framing) to then assess the phenomenon across the EU, and finally to propose solutions to combat child poverty (through learning). Learning here is conceptualised as:

a. Provision of statistical information to detect configurations of and risks of child poverty across EU countries;

b. Policy solutions about how to combat child poverty. It involves, then a way to frame child poverty on the basis of various quantified data sources, on the basis of which policy solutions are proposed. Due to the agreement on the concept of child poverty, it has been possible to identify configurations of child poverty across countries, how to monitor policy and how to assess child poverty and well being in the EU. In other words, when there is a common EU-level definition, then the precision involved in the analysis and proposal of policy solution is high. The factors (*indicators*) influencing child poverty which were identified in the report are first, children living in jobless households, second, children living in households at risk of “in-work” poverty, and third, the impact of social transfers on child poverty. The policy indicators of “success” (policy solutions to child poverty) listed are first, child mainstreaming, poverty proofing approach, involving the analysis of child poverty ex-ante and ex-post, second, assessing the impact of various policies on child poverty and social exclusion and third, monitoring child poverty and well-being. The report is interesting in so far as it analyses the extent to which member states used international, national data and/or EU data (EU-SILC and LFS) in analysing child poverty. It contributes to knowledge about how member states frame child poverty, facilitated by the EU frame of reference and statistics. Methodologically, it is a quantitative comparative analysis on the basis of statistical analysis (EU-SILC, LFS, household budget surveys). It is a very complete overview of the different types of data produced around the issue of child poverty. However, particular problems in different countries are hidden by statistical analyses (for example in the Nordic

countries). This is a case where the EU (and national) statistical data is sufficient, but where the decisive factors in trying to diminish child poverty are political decisions about developing and implementing comprehensive policy in this area. . The *mechanisms* involved are policy diffusion and learning (with others and about own experiences and policy issues), on the basis of existing instruments (EU and national statistical data sources) and in line with the EU frame of reference.

Similarly, in Joint Centre for Scottish Housing et al.³⁰, the issue of homelessness was addressed in detail. The report analyses the different sources of data used for quantifying, defining and assessing homelessness. Contrasting with the report of the SPC, the starting point is that there is no common definition on the issue of homelessness. One of the conclusions of the very comprehensive analysis is that without a common definition and agreement on how to measure homelessness, it is difficult to develop policy in this area. Arriving at a common definition, then, is one of the necessary but not sufficient conditions for the EU-level to be able to develop more precise EU policy in this area. Once again, the *mechanisms* concerned are learning and policy diffusion. Despite the fact that there is no common EU definition on homelessness (partially due to the different national databases, and partially due to lack of political will), the analysis shows how existing data can be exploited to accurately assess the number of homeless people, their characteristics. Methodologically, national case studies were prepared on how homelessness is measured, how information is collected and how service providers for the homeless are classified (interviews were also carried out for each case). The analysis showed how three different types of data sources were used for quantifying, defining and assessing homelessness in the selected national cases. There are different *Indicators* of the extent of homelessness for different data sources. For Survey methods, this was calculated by street counts, surveys of those in overnight emergency shelters, surveys of local authorities to estimate numbers of homeless people; for administrative records, the data used to gather information about some categories of homelessness are official national returns, official registers of service providers and in particular NGO client record systems; for general population and census data, the homeless are calculated by analysing those living in institutional situations, with family or friends, in accommodation for homeless people, in overcrowded, unfit or unconventional living conditions. The innovation in the report is to analyse how client recording systems of service providers have been used, and to suggest integration of this data in the development of EU methods of data collection in this area. This analysis is very comprehensive, underlining that without good data, addressing homelessness becomes difficult.

The third report by EHMA et al.³¹ develops an in-depth analysis on one dimension of the OMC health care – access. The report seeks to locate conditions for mutual learning and exchange of best practices (*mechanisms*). It is *operationalised* by analysing different barriers to access: gaps in population coverage under public programmes; scope of the health basket; cost-sharing requirements; geographical barriers of access to health services; organisational barriers; supply-side responsiveness (e.g. quality of communication of healthcare staff with clients, improving access of vulnerable people to services in the community); health literacy,

voice and health beliefs. The indicators (representing “barriers”) are: people with unmet needs (by income quintiles and age groups), private spending and out-of-pocket payments as % of total HC expenditure, inequality index for access to physicians, reasons for difficulties in accessing primary care, waiting time indicators for different diagnostic services, quality of geriatric care, health status of immigrant populations and asylum seekers, use of home care services by older migrants, Activities of Daily Living. The *methods* are a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis. The qualitative component consists of content analysis (including an analysis of the NAPs 2006-2008 and contact with key stakeholder. The quantitative part seeks to quantify barriers to access on the basis of data from Labour Force Survey, EU-SILC, OECD Health Data, WHO, Missoc and other data sources.

Quality and Relevance of National Strategy Reports (NSRs)

The Adequacy of NSRs and “guidance notes” for the reports has hardly been addressed in the literature. The issue of whether the NSR and the accompanying guidance notes as policy instruments are effective for analysis and mutual learning are not addressed in the literature. The question, then, is whether these instruments are effective in terms of the evidence-based policy learning that they try to incite. It can best be assessed mainly by in-depth qualitative analyses (in particular by questioning the main actors involved in drafting the NSRs). It is notable that especially the “guidance notes” are rather technical and are therefore not known by researchers and have as a consequence not been analyzed in detail. A few sources have addressed this question indirectly. Adequacy has to a minor degree been addressed by Daly³² for social inclusion policy, where she conceptualises the OMC as policy frame and assesses it according to two indicators: how rooted the OMC is in EU policy making and how continuous it is over time. The implicit criteria for adequacy are: the more rooted the OMC is and the more continuous it is over time, the more adequate it is. She looks briefly at whether the national action plans have led to new frames of reference or whether they reframe old policies and also in that sense indirectly addresses their “adequacy”. Lodge³³ analyses the area of pensions, where he also indirectly addresses adequacy by focusing on 3 key indicators in member state reports: presence of objectives, presence of benchmarks or rankings, opportunities for mutual learning. The author here uses content analysis, on the basis of primary and secondary sources. More in-depth research is required in this area. The EAPN³⁴ has briefly looked at this issue from a civil society perspective, but more comprehensive work is needed.

Adequacy of analysis of reports: focus on the involvement of stakeholders

The adequacy of the process of analysing reports, and drawing conclusions from these in consultation with Member States and other stakeholders has been addressed to some extent for the social inclusion OMC, focusing on the mechanisms of how actors may use the OMC as leverage. It has not been analysed extensively for other social OMCs, which is an area where more research is required. Furthermore, the process of analysis that takes place behind closed doors has not been analysed in the literature. This involves so-called “country desk officers” and thematic units in DG EMPL, how contributions from experts are integrated, inter-service consultation within the Commission, negotiation between the Commission and the Member

states. In the literature on analysis of reports, the issue of participation has mainly been conceptualised on the basis of the governance objective of the OMC inclusion, which calls for the involvement of non-governmental and governmental actors in policy development and policy implementation. Brandsten et al.³⁵ make an in-depth and systematic study on this dimension of the OMC, where they examine if the NAPincl has led to increased mobilization of NGOs and People Experiencing Poverty in the development and implementation of anti-poverty policy and whether a platform (for exchange and dialogue) has been crystallized due to the OMCincl. The notion of fit/misfit is the main theoretical assumption in this report, where the greater the misfit with EU policy (in this case participation of civil society actors in policy development), the more likely the impact. The concept of participation has been operationalized/analysed along four dimensions:

1. the interaction between national governments and third sector organisations in drawing up the NAP;
2. the possibility for third sector organisations to influence policy through the NAP process;
3. the creation of stronger links between actors within the third sector;
4. policy change.

What is particularly valuable in this analysis by Brandsten et al.³⁶ is that they take account of the pre-existing patterns of participation and involvement of actors in policy development in assessing degrees of change instigated due to the OMC process. A series of *indicators* are drawn up for each dimension analysed. 'Success' of participation for the process of interaction between national governments and third sector organisations in drawing up the NAP and the possibility for third sector organisations to be involved is eminent when:

1. interaction is enhanced and institutionalised;
2. civil society/third sector organisations develop an ad-hoc and/or institutionalised channel for influencing policy;

These aspects were assessed on the basis of three possible levels:

- Low: third sector not involved in development of NAP; no channels or fora for influencing policy;
- Medium: (previously) Established partners for consultation were involved, ad-hoc meetings were held but not institutionalised;
- High: significant involvement of actors which were not previously involved in the development of social exclusion policy and development of new institutionalised patterns of participation.

In addition to the above, that addresses inclusion in policy process, two indicators address the actual policy influence of civil society involvement via:

1. interaction around policy development in the EU and national contexts.
2. policy change due to action of NGOs (their interaction with government).

For this, three 'degrees of success' were identified:

- Low: where third sectors were not (or barely) allowed to comment on the text of the NAP;

- Medium: where civil society was allowed to comment on the NAP drafted by government;
- High: where civil society participates in writing documents from outset.

The methods used are content analysis, mainly based on primary sources (datapoints, represented by first-hand contact with actors (interviews or participation in meetings) and also reports by governmental and non-governmental actors). At national level, 174 “datapoints” were used and at EU level, 70 “datapoints” were used.

Several other analyses have also addressed involvement of stakeholders in the social inclusion OMC, and also the SPSI generally. Here the analyses by the Tavistock Institute, the EAPN, CARITAS and the ESN will be presented. The Tavistock Institute³⁷ analyses the implementation of the Community action programme to fight social exclusion (CASE). It is an important analysis as it analyses the extent to which certain actions of the programme (notably participation and action of NGOs in the NAPs) has been addressed, and how capacity building (strengthening actors by giving them a voice) has developed. The Tavistock Institute analysis uses the aims of the OMC and the CASE as its reference point (conceptual benchmark). There is no further specific operationalization or specific indicators. Here, the mechanism at hand is how the OMC has been used as leverage, similar to the analysis by Brandsten et al, analysed above. The methods employed are intensive field work and interviews. The analysis shows empirically how initiatives have been instigated and developed with funding. The analysis by the Tavistock Institute especially shows that, had there not been funding, many of the initiatives would not have developed. The report shows necessity of funding programme for social inclusion, and which dimensions are the most valuable.

The EAPN³⁸ has analysed the question of how and the extent to which social inclusion policy has been framed in the NAPsincl, which includes an analysis of how non-governmental actors have been consulted in the development of national action plans. The EAPN analyses are a review of national implementation reports 2008 of the LS from the perspective of anti-poverty NGOs. A “social inclusion scoreboard” is developed to assess the OMCincl, particularly focusing on the positive and negative developments (from a social inclusion perspective) in member state reports. The success criterion is the degree of prioritization of social inclusion under the different headings of the “social inclusion scoreboard”. The mechanisms brought forward in the creation of the scoreboard are naming/shaming/faming. The *methodology* is a qualitative content analysis, whereby National networks of the EAPN make an assessment of their country with regard to the scoreboard; this is then taken up by the “Social inclusion review group” of the EAPN in the development of the overview report (yearly). For the area of social inclusion there is abundant conceptualisation, operationalisation and analysis of the issue of consultation within the OMC. However, it is, surprisingly, totally absent in analyses of the pensions and health care OMCs.

The analysis by CARITAS³⁹ seeks to tap into the extent to which the NSRs and the SPSI contribute to a genuine participatory process. An approach labelled “European Public Value” (EPV) (of the NSRs) is developed, seeking to analyse how the EU process and policy can be of added value to national governance processes and policy development.. It is built on the notion of subsidiarity in the Treaty, whereby the EU can play a role in social policy where it is of added value. Specifically, the report analyzes the way in which domestic policy development (social protection and social inclusion) is integrated with the NSRs at EU and national levels and the extent in which various different actors - civil society, governmental actors, parliaments – are involved. The research project aimed not only at assessing EPV across the EU, but also at building a network of national Caritas experts on social inclusion and the SPSI/NSR. In other words, it had a double aim: research-action and empirical assessment.

The EPV of the NSRs is analyzed according to three core questions:

1. to what extent the NSR/SPSI process has empowered civil society *and* contributed to capacity building;
2. to what extent the NSR/SPSI process has led to new governance coalitions;
3. to what extent the NSR/SPSI leads to innovation, or the potential for public policy and civil society innovation.

The 4 criteria for achieving EPV are:

1. engagement in EU level learning and sharing (increases knowledge about the LS). Here the mechanism is actor empowerment and learning with others.
2. more wide ranging and long lasting relationships across government and between civil society and government. Here the mechanism is institution-building.
3. Enhancement of civil society’s knowledge, capacity and competence due to political pressure and priority setting. Here the mechanism is socialization and learning, but also actor empowerment.
4. policy-makers’ learning and capacity was enhanced due to the crystallization and institutionalization of encounters with the third sector. Here the process is socialization.

The methodology is qualitative and longitudinal, involving the selection of a participant per country (participating observer), to reflect upon the EPV for the four main questions. These were involved in twinning arrangements, Geographical groups, Thematic groups around policy issues (integration, social inclusion and participation in public life of migrants and migrant communities; health, health related social services; learning and working Europe, including flexicurity; child poverty). For each of these groups there was a convenor and participant countries.

The ESN⁴⁰ analysis focuses on the empowerment of local actors, in particular the extent to which local public social services are recognised and the extent to which present challenges for local social work and care are visible in the SPSI. It provides some suggestions to make NGOs more visible and active in NSR editing work and policy development, in order to enhance their ownership of the reports as tools of

mutual learning. It is interested in institutional change, learning and deliberation (involvement in NSR drafting) as well as framing. The indicator of the degree of institutional change is represented by frequency and regularity of participation in national policy-making *as well as* contact with government or European Social Network secretariat (“Be an active national policy stakeholder”). The indicator for vertical learning and deliberation is the involvement and coordination among federal or devolved regions and visibility of the local level. The indicator for framing is the use of EU frame of reference for policy development. The mechanisms involved are the leverage effect and actor empowerment, through socialization, learning, policy debate and institutionalised policy debates. The methodology is qualitative, involving analysis of NSRs, interviews, online survey from 20 ESN members in 12 countries. Like in the CARITAS analysis, one of the methods used is that of thematic focus, where working groups focused on 3 local services priorities (long term care for older people, active inclusion and children and families).

Future Research

From the analysis above, several directions for future research are indicated. First, the tension between multi-dimensionality (but also ambiguity) versus clarity and precision is an integral part of the OMC, and this should be taken into account in any evaluation of the OMC. Thus, the effect of the OMC should be assessed through process-tracing (involving analysis of primary documents, interviews) and triangulation of data⁴¹. It is important to locate which aspect of the OMC (because of the multi-dimensionality) has led to agenda-setting, policy change, institutional development, etc. There is an abundant body of research that already does this; for example, Hamel and Vanhercke⁴² analyse how child poverty has entered the domestic sphere. This line of research should be pursued in the future.

One could envisage the development of success criteria for deliberation within closed groups, where ‘success’ would be when conflict is resolved by agreement on (a) common definitions, (b) common policies, (c) common indicators, (d) common means of assessing policy implementation, (e) common benchmarks. The agreed concepts, indicators and when relevant benchmarks and political objective are necessarily broad (but also complex) to be able to adapt to the realities of 27 member states.

Another aspect of research on the OMC that could be developed further concerns the micro-politics of the OMC, where it would be important to assess the extent to which and how conflict is resolved. As mentioned above, it would be important to assess whether and if so, how, conflict would be resolved (through deliberation) for different aspects of the OMC, such as common a) definitions b) policies c) indicators d) means of assessing policy implementation and e) benchmarks. Such an analysis would provide information about deliberation and cross-national as well as intra-institutional decision-making processes. This analysis could be undertaken in different deliberative fora of the OMC, such as the Social Protection Committee, the Indicators Working group, ad hoc task forces (see work by Brousse⁴³, Niviere,⁴⁴ on this point). In other words, it is not just the capacity of

the OMC to develop genuine policy debate which is important, but equally, the capacity of the policy debate to lead to concrete outcome (solutions to issues of conflict). One would also like more research on the extent to which there is genuine peer review and deliberation about the NSRs (within and between the EPC, EMCO and SPC). Third, regarding procedures of consultation, this has been analysed quite extensively in the social inclusion OMC, where consultation is also the most developed. However, consultation in the framework of the National Strategy Reports has not been analysed in detail, although it is addressed in the reports by CARITAS⁴⁵ and the ESN⁴⁶. This aspect has been virtually neglected in analyses of the pensions OMC and health care OMC. The analysis by Brandsten et al.⁴⁷ provides information about how to proceed with this aspect (see above and Annex 2 for more details).

From a methodological perspective, “datapoints” which represent different types of primary sources of data are useful in OMC research and can be considered for the future. Furthermore, longitudinal analysis is necessary for analysing how integrated decision-making in the domestic sphere is with the OMC process. For insights into the learning aspect of the OMC, then thematic focus groups such as the ones in the ESN and CARITAS evaluations are useful mechanisms, but they provide a snapshot which is not representative of the whole picture.

Analysis of specific features of the OMC process

Concepts, Indicators and Tools

This section presents literature on the reporting cycle of the OMC, which is closely related to the adequacy of the linkages between policy strands within the OMC and with other policy areas at EU level. Some of the literature addresses these questions through more comprehensive analyses on framing and policy diffusion (Buechs⁴⁸; Daly⁴⁹; Greer and Vanhercke⁵⁰; Harvey and Vanhercke⁵¹; Flear⁵²). But there is not much specific focus on this dimension in the academic literature, and there has not really been adequate conceptualisation and operationalisation of this, simply because it has most often not been the main concern of researchers.

Mutual reinforcement and feeding in and feeding out

The most relevant contributions about processes of mutual reinforcement as well as feeding in and feeding out between the social OMCs and the national reform programmes (NRPs) on economic and employment policy coordination are first, the analysis by Frazer and Marlier⁵³ on the basis of the work by Commission-sponsored network of independent experts on social inclusion. They have several useful indicators in their analysis, first, whether there is *explicit* or *implicit* feeding in and/or feeding out and secondly, how economic and social policies mutually affect each other. The specific mechanism they focus on is coordination (between the NSRs and different policy specific Joint Reports) in policy-making. Feeding in and feeding out could be conceptualized and operationalized separately; however, as they are two sides of the same process, it makes more sense to have one scale of evaluation (indicators for success), where no mutual awareness or referencing is the least

successful, and where mutual awareness, referencing and dialogue among the actors involved in drafting the NSRs and Joint reports would be the most successful. Secondly, the reports by the EAPN analyse about how social inclusion is integrated and addressed in the NRPs and how economic and employment policies of the NRPs affect social inclusion aims (of the NSRs). The EAPN, in the creation of its Social Inclusion Scoreboard, has one question about the feeding in and feeding out, but it is a less detailed analysis than the one coordinated by Frazer and Marlier on the basis of the work by the network of independent experts. The EAPN⁵⁴ seeks to locate whether economic policies affect social inclusion and poverty.

Consistency and adequacy of the set of common indicators

The issue of adequacy of the indicators has not been addressed in the literature as it is a very technical question, to be addressed by statisticians. It is one of the main areas where the Indicators sub-group of the social protection committee works in collaboration with the SPC. The process of communication between the two committees in the process of deciding on indicators could be analysed in more detail to locate the extent to which technical aspects and political aspects are taken into consideration in deciding on a set of indicators. It is an opaque and not always empirically distinguishable process, which is why it is not analyzed in depth in the literature.

In the academic literature, this issue is addressed in the framework of more comprehensive analyses on the OMC conceptualized via learning, framing and/or policy diffusion, where indicators and benchmarks are but one dimension in the analysis. Most analyses explicitly or implicitly hold that the existence of indicators and benchmarks in a process strengthens it. This can be seen as top-down pressure from the EU to national level (pressure for reform). The indicators and benchmarks put pressure on member states to adopt national targets. OMC processes with numerical indicators and/or benchmarks are *de facto* stronger, particularly since economic policy coordination to which the other OMCs are subordinate, rely so strongly on numerical aims. However, an indicator or benchmark may only partially reflect a particularly policy aim. But there is another, perhaps even more important effect of indicators. There is evidence in the literature that indicators and benchmarking are seen as a tool for self-reflection (about relative national performance and measures to improve it) and institution-building (development of statistical capacity). As a tool for self-reflection (concept), the indicators may lead members states to discover that they perform less well than expected in comparison to other countries, thereby stimulating corrective action (what Hamel and Vanhercke call the ‘mirror effect’ of the OMC.⁵⁵ Another effect of indicator development is to provide member states with a more solid statistical capacity, where the integration of EU statistical system (indicators/‘success criteria’) in national contexts can:

- help to solve a conflict about which set(s) of indicators to use for assessing a policy problem (i.e. poverty in the Belgian case⁵⁶)
- provide new data about issues or levels of governance which were not previously available (some countries have benefited from this at the regional level in particular).

- incrementally add new data and means of measurement to national statistical systems, even those that are very comprehensive and well developed (e.g. France⁵⁷)

In the area of social inclusion, Lendvai⁵⁸ has argued that the relative poverty indicator as 60% of the median income inadequately captures the extent of monetary poverty in the central and eastern European countries, where poverty is widespread. The most relevant analysis of indicators for the OMC pensions is by Letzner and Schmitt⁵⁹, who are civil servants in the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and who therefore write from an ‘insiders’ view of how it is used. They conceptualize the OMC according to its added value – from a policy perspective for strengthening the social dimension of European integration and from an actor-based perspective, for stimulating self-evaluation and mutual learning (i.e. considering policies and programmes in other countries and assessing whether they can be used in their own context). They see the indicators as crucial, particularly when they are visible in the national arena. However, the analysis of how the OMC pensions and indicators are integrated nationally needs to be developed further, as the empirical reality is likely to be very different across member states. There is not very much data on this, compared to the OMC inclusion. And there are no analyses of statistical indicators for the area of health care and care for the elderly. These analyses are only normative, that is, they comment on the general use of statistical indicators (seen as a strength in the process). The method is desk research.

Analysis of OMC tools for mutual learning

Regarding specific tools of the OMC for mutual learning, this aspect has been studied to some extent in the literature. Kroeger⁶⁰ addresses how funding has been made available for awareness raising and actor mobilisation among civil society in the OMC, arguing that when funding is available then it is a direct incentive to become involved more in the OMC. But in addition to funding, Kroger argues that involvement should produce result which the NGOs consider useful. Similarly, the EAPN, in gathering data from its national networks, has also noted that the uneven funding provided to national networks is a partial determinant of their degree of activity (where activity is guaranteed only when there is funding and where the risk of non-activity is quite high when there is no funding). Armstrong⁶¹ also notes in his analysis that when funding is available then civil society actors do become involved. He has however also noted that for the UK, the EAPN network continued to be active, despite the lack of funding, and that this was due to the key individual engaged in the process. According to the analyses above, then, the success criteria is provision of funding for guaranteed activity. But an additional ‘success criterion’ should be added, that of added value of participation (see the criteria developed Brandsten et al.⁶² above on this point).

The analysis by the Tavistock Institute⁶³ is the most comprehensive analysis of how and the extent to which the Community Action Programme Against Social Exclusion (CASE) has facilitated many aspects of the OMC. This includes funding of the peer review programme, development of transnational networks of non-governmental organisations, funding of network of independent experts, Presidency

events, studies, projects. The indicators are mainly developed to analyse the extent to which the different aspects of the programme are met, and how this has *de facto* contributed to the strengthening of the OMC in social inclusion. The programme objectives themselves were the main yardstick (concept/operationalisation) against which success was evaluated. One important mechanism which the review focused on was learning, actor empowerment and capacity building (strengthening actors, especially non-governmental actors, by giving them a voice). Another was socialization (and learning with others) through different types of initiatives. The report has focused much more on the outcome, than on the operationalisation and indicators (which were determined by the programme objectives). Overall, the different aspects of the OMC not only for learning from or deciding upon key objectives, but also to share experiences and knowledge have not been the object of academic interest. This needs to be analysed in more detail in the future.

Regarding the peer review programme of the social inclusion OMC, OSB Consulting⁶⁴ analyzed 8 peer reviews, which took place under the programme "peer review and assessment in social inclusion". The evaluation focuses on the immediate and medium term impact of the peer review sessions for the participating countries (not for the countries under review), mainly through the mechanisms of learning and socialization. The immediate impact was operationalized as learning for the participants during the meeting. In the peer review process, the mechanism involved for the country presenting the good practice was 'faming' (in case the peer review and good practice were considered to be relevant and interesting). There were 5 possible answers on the survey: very bad, bad, fair, good, very good. The medium-term impact was conceptualized as setting a course of action in the national context, which is whether good practice presented through the peer review programme would be used in the national context for agenda setting and policy development.. In the medium term evaluation, the report by OSB Consulting Impact assessed the extent to which the peer review had percolated through to agenda setting and policy development (the mechanisms) in the domestic context. The data was gathered through surveys. In-depth analyses (with interviews) with one or two of the peer countries attending the session could be relevant for the 'impact' assessment. The peer review programme is a specific learning mechanism within the OMC, but it is not always directly related to the main OMC agenda (i.e. guidelines or main policy objectives). Efforts have been made to integrate this more in the main locus of discussion, the SPC, where peer reviews of particular relevance for the SPC agenda are presented and discussed in the within the full committee, in order to strengthen mutual learning and to take greater advantage of the experiences from the peer review programme.⁶⁵ Overall, the analysis of the short-term impact of learning through the peer review programme is well developed, while the analysis of the medium and long-term impact of 'learning' through peer reviews could be examined in more detail by in-depth country analyses not only for the participating country, but also for the host country. Sometimes, the host country may learn not only about why it presents a case which is "good", but also about how the specific policy or case at hand could be improved.

Finally, the work by Horvath⁶⁶ shows that the SPC is an important forum for learning, in fact it is the most important forum for learning for governmental officials. The mechanism is deliberation, socialization, arguing and bargaining, learning with others. Her analyses also sheds light on the power struggles within the SPC about OMC objectives, how to define them and measure them. Furthermore, the seniority of the national representatives is a first indicator of their relative power within the committee. The methods she uses are qualitative analysis, relying heavily on in-depth interviews.

Future Research

Regarding “feeding in” and “feeding out” between economic and employment policies (reflected in NRPs) and social policies (NSRs), which has been analyzed carefully for the area of social inclusion, it provides information about contradictions and overlaps in policy development across sectors. This needs to be undertaken for the areas of health care and pensions and is of utmost importance, since both areas are heavily influenced by the economic and financial actors in the economic policy coordination processes. A model for how to undertake this is set out carefully and clearly in Frazer and Marlier (see above and the table in Annex 1 for details) that uses the work by the Commission-funded network of independent experts.

The issue of how indicators are used in national reports has not been analysed systematically. The most comprehensive analyses, however, show that it is necessary to move beyond a top-down conception of ‘impact’ or ‘use’ of indicators, towards an interactive process of usage of indicators in the national process (i.e. interaction with national statistical systems and actors). Further research should be carried out on these dimensions which have been found in some cases that the European common indicators are used to:

- resolve a conflict about which set(s) of yardsticks to use for assessing a policy problem;
- develop statistical capacity where this is quite weak;
- incrementally add new data and means of measurement to comprehensive national statistical systems.
- strengthen social affairs actors vis-à-vis financial actors in the national context (pensions OMC).

Regarding the specific dimensions of the OMC, this has been studied to some extent for the OMC inclusion. Funding is crucial for the development of some activities, particularly creating possibilities for action for some actors, but research on this issue is not very extensive. What needs particular focus is how NGOs in new member states are supported, particularly as they are weak and not as institutionally integrated as NGOs in (some) of the EU-15.

Impact on substantive policy change at national level

Concepts, Indicators and Tools

There has been considerable focus in the literature on maintaining or enhancing commitment to policy developed through the OMC, which is closely linked with putting new issues on the national political agenda and the use of OMC concepts, indicators and categories in domestic policy-making. Most often, but not always, these issues are addressed together. First, concerning commitment to policy developed through the OMC, this has on the one hand been addressed using the aims of the OMC as the main conceptual framework, where quantitative indicators are used to assess whether policy change in Member States goes in the intended direction of the OMC or in another (non-intended) direction. The mechanisms concerned are policy diffusion and framing. Buechs⁶⁷ draws a distinction between “welfare state retrenchment” and “strengthening social Europe”. General statistical indicators are used to assess the direction welfare state reforms, but, the main indicators she uses are input indicators rather than output or outcome measures. One of the problems with using indicators to assess policy effort is that they do not directly measure this concept. This is why most of the valuable research involves detailed process-tracing and triangulation. It does provide general indications of the direction of reform (i.e. retrenchment or strengthening social Europe), but the indicators used do not reflect how, if at all, the OMC itself has been used in this process. Most other analyses dealing with this issue analyse governmental priorities and how these change over time, as general indicators of congruence/incongruence with OMC objectives. Such analyses provide background information about the political context in which the OMC is located and are necessary for understanding its integration into national policy making. But more detailed analysis is necessary for locating if OMC has played a role in that process, and if so, how.

In many cases, national reforms are equated broadly with OMC without proof of the latter’s direct influence (Behning⁶⁸). In other cases, the OMC is dismissed without having analysed whether it has any influence (Lodge⁶⁹). Needless to say, it is of utmost importance to understand when and if so, how, the OMC is linked with major national reforms, and this requires careful research, including interview material, process-tracing and triangulation of data. The analysis by Vanhercke and Hamel is worth mentioning here. They analyse the effect of the OMC in maintaining issues on the agenda, in particular the overarching objective of the OMC inclusion, appears to be well-documented (interviews). However, the methodological problem is that there is no counter-factual. The question of whether the OMC is capable of maintaining issues on national agendas should be analyzed in more detail for other countries. The only way to tap into this is interviews and analysis of national documents (focusing on references to poverty/OMC).

Agenda-setting by governmental and non-governmental actors

Concerning issues of agenda-setting in domestic policy development, the analyses focus on how various governmental actors have used the OMC. Here, the literature is well developed and can be used in the future (and mostly also integrates

the national political context as a conditioning or intervening variable, discussed above). From a conceptual perspective, Buechs⁷⁰ argues that the potential usage of the OMC is inherently linked to how the actors in domestic contexts perceive it. Indeed, the OMC, because of its broad and encompassing framework, can be conceived in various different ways, particularly as member state institutions and practices within which the OMC is integrated nationally, vary considerably. She develops a useful typology of potential actor usage of the OMC: strong blaming, weak blaming, credit claiming, denial and refusal. She then develops a list of indicators for each of these categories of OMC usage. It is to be noted that Buechs⁷¹ focuses mainly on governmental actors in this analysis.⁷² Her analytical framework is conceptual, but builds on her own knowledge of the process, which she has gained through in-depth longitudinal analysis of OMC usage in the UK and Germany (content analysis mainly based on primary and secondary sources). Interview material is used to detect actor perceptions of OMC as an instrument. Vanhercke and Hamel⁷³ see how the OMC is used for agenda-setting. Specifically, they analyse (for Belgium) how the OMC has created knowledge about the problem of child poverty. This new knowledge was used by actors in the domestic context as leverage for addressing child poverty in the national context (including the setting of policy objectives accompanied by indicators). Here, too the methods are in-depth analyses of documents *and* interviews, which are necessary to arrive at clear conclusions about the agenda-setting capacity of the OMC. Regarding the mechanisms, the OMC can be considered to be used as a stimulus or lever for agenda-setting, especially for specific policy issues on which new knowledge has been generated at EU and national levels. Once the new knowledge is created, then how it is integrated depends on domestic factors, including the political agenda (which can itself be influenced by the OMC). In a comprehensive cross-country analysis, Kvist and Saari⁷⁴ look at recent EU policy and legislation (conceptual framework) in order to analyse how member states have responded to these (mainly governmental actors). This is a useful snapshot analysis, but the main themes analysed would have to be analysed in more detail over time to see how governments use them (downloading) and shape them (uploading). Three “types” of responses (for downloading only) are distinguished: supportive, where governments support policy developed through the OMC and make (some) efforts to integrate it nationally, resistant, where they are opposed to policy deriving from OMC, and neutral, where governments have no particular position on policy deriving from OMC. In the first (supportive) and last (neutral) cases, then knowledge created through the OMC (indicators, policy analyses about a phenomenon such as homelessness or child poverty), could percolate into more focus on an issue in the national administration.

Other analyses focus not only on the governmental actors, but also bring in other non-governmental actors into the picture. Many national analyses have addressed how the OMC (concepts, indicators, categories) is used in domestic contexts, compared to (or integrated with) concepts, indicators and categories derived from domestic initiatives. These analyses are mainly carried out through process-tracing, which involves careful analysis of primary governmental and non-governmental sources and interviews (Armstrong, 2005⁷⁵, 2006⁷⁶; Ferrera and Sacchi⁷⁷, Jacobsson⁷⁸; Jacobsson and Johansson⁷⁹; Johansson⁸⁰; Kroger⁸¹; Kroger⁸²;

O'Donnell and Moss⁸³; Sacchi⁸⁴; Sirovatka and Rakoczyka⁸⁵; Vanhercke and Hamel⁸⁶; Zeitlin, 2005⁸⁷, 2009⁸⁸; Lendvai⁸⁹). Armstrong⁹⁰ addresses these issues in his analysis of the integration of the OMCincl in the United Kingdom and its regions. Particularly useful is his 2005 book chapter where change is conceptualised as usage (downloading) of the key elements of the OMCincl (policy objectives, indicators, benchmarks) in discourse, for policy development, for indicator development. In his analysis what appears, *inter alia*, is that the OMC is used (as a neutral policy instrument of model) domestically to solve conflict (the case of Northern Ireland) and to develop policy (including use of EU indicators). Jacobsson⁹¹ has a similar analysis for the Swedish case, where social partners used it (again, because it was considered a neutral policy instrument) to solve an issue of domestic conflict. But it was not, in that particular case, used to develop policy. O'Donnell and Moss⁹² analyse how the OMC is used in Ireland, since the OMC “participatory concept” was built on the Irish model of civil society involvement in policy development, and conclude that although civil society actors are very involved in the OMC, but if they do not obtain practical results (e.g. in terms of influence on policy and/or support for projects), then their degree of involvement is likely to decrease. As mentioned above, Kroeger⁹³ reaches similar findings for Germany, where civil society was first quite engaged in the OMC, but then became less engaged when sufficient results did not seem to be forthcoming. This needs to be taken account of in the research on the OMC, particularly in new member states. Conceptually, OMC is considered successful the more involved non-governmental actors are in using the OMCincl. The mechanism of interest is leverage and policy framing, i.e. can the OMC be used as leverage by actors to frame policy in a particular way (guided by the EU policy frame)? The methods used for such analyses are qualitative, where interviews represent important material, but also reports by the actors themselves about their participation in OMC fora. The latter could be the object of more investigation.

Concepts from social OMCs in the national context

How the OMC concepts (i.e. “social inclusion”, “flexicurity”) have been used nationally has been analysed by the EAPN (2008, 2009)⁹⁴ in analyses of the NSRs, and also by Combat Poverty Agency⁹⁵ in assessing the mainstreaming of social inclusion. Both the EAPN and the Combat Poverty Agency develop “scoreboards” which can be considered to be policy yardsticks containing the main aspects of OMCinclusion policy. The EAPN has been analysing how policy is mainstreamed on a yearly basis, on the basis of its social inclusion scoreboard (which is adapted yearly). It aims to tap into how poverty policy is integrated into economic and employment policies, but also how economic and employment policies affect social inclusion/poverty (this is useful to tap into the positive and negative effects of the Lisbon strategy on poverty). Success is the degree of prioritization of social inclusion under the different headings of the “social inclusion scoreboard”. The method is a qualitative content analysis, where the national networks of the EAPN make an assessment of their country with regard to the scoreboard. It is notable that there is a policy follow-up of this in the sense that the results of the scoreboard are taken up by the “Social inclusion review group” of the EAPN in the development of their report and subsequent policy recommendations to the European Commission. This is *very useful* as a way to analyse how social inclusion is prioritized in member state

reports from the NGO perspective. The analysis by the Combat Poverty Agency analyses the extent to which social inclusion has been mainstreamed in different national contexts. The scoreboard by Combat Poverty agency analyses mainstreaming of social inclusion (MSI) in 11 policy areas, seeking to tap into mainstreaming vertically at all levels of government, and horizontally, involving public bodies, social partners, NGOs. The criterion for success is systematic integration of poverty/ social inclusion policy in the policy areas under examination. The analysis draws on some interviews and carries out a quantitative survey, which is then coded in SPSS. The MSI scoreboard was constructed with 7 components and also shows different MSI scores for different types of actors. In other words, mainstreaming (what it is and how it should be implemented) is conceived differently among different types of actors. The survey data used represents 30% of central/national administrations and departments, 15% regional administrations and 30% local authorities/municipalities. In both cases, the mechanisms concerned are mutual reinforcement between the social OMCs and other policies, and institutional change (if the OMC has led to structural changes in policy development – inter-institutional communication).

Effective take-up of EU recommended policies

Concerning the effective take-up of EU recommended policies (reception and implementation of policy recommendations, including in the implicit recommendations in Commission-Council reports (and country fiches), (not only the “recommendations” for the EES), this was not addressed very much in the literature since the researchers do not consider the country specific messages as recommendations. A snap-shot picture of this was presented in the national analyses is Kvist and Saari⁹⁶, where analyses of how Member States respond to EU policy is presented in the national cases, and otherwise, it has been integrated indirectly in analyses of national impact of OMC policy (chapters in Heidenreich and Zeitlin⁹⁷; Zeitlin and Pochet⁹⁸). Analyses on this aspect are addressed through mechanisms of “framing” or “learning”, and indicators for success are (generally) to follow EU recommendations. However, the recommendations and reports and country fiches can also serve as self-reflection in the OMC process, particularly as considerable dialogue between Commission officials and member state representatives takes place (as mentioned previously, this process is largely opaque and needs to be uncovered). This dimension per se has not been analysed in the literature on the Social OMCs.

Learning about national performance

Concerning the stimulation of self-reflection on national performance and independent policy initiatives by domestic actors, has been addressed in many analyses, mainly through the conceptual lenses of learning (Combat Poverty Agency⁹⁹; EAPN¹⁰⁰; Flear¹⁰¹; Vanhercke¹⁰²; Buechs¹⁰³; Armstrong¹⁰⁴; Behning¹⁰⁵; Kroger¹⁰⁶; Zeitlin¹⁰⁷; Lodge¹⁰⁸; Sacchi¹⁰⁹). The success criteria vary, but there can overall be considered to be different degrees of impact, ranging from policy debate, through small scale policy decisions, to a more wide-scale policy reform. The analyses take intervening variables into account to varying degrees (such as political decisions, economic conditions, conflicts which may be exogenous to the OMC). This dimension particularly analyses how particular actors or “policy entrepreneurs” can play a role in

domestic contexts. It is invaluable to have information on the action of individuals and also to follow through on what the outcome of their actions is. While there is a considerable volume of research and analysis on how actors use the OMC (actor empowerment, creative appropriation), the conceptualisation of entrepreneurs in OMC literature is underdeveloped, compared to the conceptualisation derived from general analyses of institutional change (how can OMC impact be seen in national policy development and national institutions). The mechanism involved is clearly one of how powerful actors can use the OMC as leverage (for issue discussion, for policy change, for agenda-setting). This can only be uncovered by in-depth qualitative analysis, involving interviews with key actors, and the careful ex-post reconstruction of events.

Regarding the overall analysis of OMC impact on substantive policy change, the work by Zeitlin¹¹⁰ is worth mentioning as it provides a complete analytical framework, including concepts, operationalisation, indicators and methods. Zeitlin identifies three types of substantive policy change, which are first, cognitive shifts, where the OMC contributes to the development of new policy frames, second, political shifts; where the OMC introduces or raises the salience of issues on the political agenda; third, programmatic shifts, which changes in specific national policies or programmes due to the OMC. These types of substantive policy changes are related to how actors use the OMC, which will be discussed in 2.5. From a methodological perspective, the author identifies the following as necessary in research on the OMC: 1. contextualised process tracing; 2. triangulation of documentary and interview evidence; 3. Systematic comparison of research findings across countries. These are crucial for any research on the OMC.

Future research

There is a considerable volume of research on the impact of the OMC on substantive policy change at the national level. Most of this literature highlights that the OMC has instigated cognitive shifts, some point to political shifts, and some mention programmatic shifts (but it is necessary to assess the linkage with the OMC, mainly through triangulation as suggested by Zeitlin¹¹¹). However, there is less (systematic) research on the effective take-up of policy recommended in the national strategy reports. It would be important to uncover how actors conceive of the EU recommended policies nationally, which is one indicator of its potential influence. Indicators could consider both how the EU instrument (messages) is considered *and* whether the policy message is considered to be accurate. This could be measured against real effect. A typology of influence could be constructed, to reflect this, such as suggested in the table below.

Conception of EU policy among actors/ features of EU tool	OMC	Policy content	Real effect
Strong			
Medium			
Weak			

Table 1: Typology of effectiveness of country specific messages

Also, while the literature is analysed through framing or through learning as the main conceptual frameworks, the role of political decisions and budgetary allocations needs to be analysed more systematically in line with the OMC. Furthermore, there is considerable focus on the old member states, but there are not many comprehensive analyses on the new member states. This gap needs to be addressed. As for most of the literature on the OMC, in-depth process tracing, involving interviews and analysis of documents (with data triangulation) is the best way to secure the quality of the research.

Impact on process of national policy-making (governance/procedural shifts)

Concepts, Indicators and Tools

Since the OMC is effective only when actors use it, the issue of impact on the process of national policymaking (and actors in the national context) is crucial. This has been analysed extensively in the literature, particularly

1. the strategic approach (planning, targeting, resources assigned, policy analysis),
2. multilevel, vertically integrated policy (national, regional and local level) and
3. stakeholder involvement in policy making process, particularly but not exclusive for the OMCincl.

There has been somewhat less focus on multidimensional, horizontally integrated policymaking (horizontal coordination, streamlining, mutual positive interaction with growth and jobs policies, mainstreaming) and on evidence-based policymaking (monitoring and evaluation, use of indicators, data sources and analytical capacity).

National integration and strategic approach

The conceptual framework on national integration and strategic approach is derived from literature on institutionalisation and Europeanisation. The analyses look at the extent of integration of the OMC procedure (i.e. drawing up national reports, in which policy implemented and policy planned is presented, ideally together with budgetary allocations and national targets) in national contexts. The studies also look at inter-ministerial collaboration and the extent to which non-governmental actors are involved in drawing up national action plans and whether or not this process is stable over time, or whether it changes over time. In particular what is noted are

changes over time from EU or national departments within national ministries to more influential domestic ministries addressing social policy. Altogether, many national case studies have in particular highlighted how institutional integration of the OMC (concept) changes over time, detected by shifts in the governmental departments responsible for the drafting of the NAP (Buechs and Friedrich¹¹²; Buechs¹¹³; Jacobsson¹¹⁴; Jacobsson and Johansson¹¹⁵; O'Donnell and Moss¹¹⁶; Vanhercke and Hamel¹¹⁷; Kroger¹¹⁸; Ferrera and Sacchi¹¹⁹; Sacchi¹²⁰). The assessments are made by tracing where the NAP is prepared, how much time is devoted to this and who contributes to the process (primary analyses: documentary analyses plus interviews). This is highlighted together with analyses about writing up the NAP (comparing it with national policy planning documents, budgetary allocations, targeting, etc). There is more information about the old member states than the new ones on this aspect, and more information on the OMCincl compared to the pensions OMC and the health care OMC. This is also addressed by the literature on the Lisbon Strategy relaunch, including Zeitlin¹²¹, as well as reports by EAPN, independent experts, etc. The shift from social affairs ministries to finance/economic ministries as coordinators of the national strategy made it more difficult for NGOs in many countries to participate in the process.

Multi-dimensional horizontally and vertically integrated evidence-based policy-making

Regarding multidimensional, horizontally integrated policymaking, particularly interaction with the growth and jobs strategy, the literature on has been rather thin. This is rather surprising, since it is in 2005 that this process was institutionalised at EU (and therefore also national) levels. However, there are some very valuable cross-country analyses on this. The work of the EAPN¹²² analyzing how poverty issues have been directly or indirectly addressed in the national strategy reports is relevant. In particular the perverse effects of growth and jobs strategies are highlighted, by locating which economic and employment policies have a positive or negative impact on poverty and social inclusion. On this issue, the conflict between the social affairs ministries with other ministries could be analysed in more detail. The most valuable research from the perspective of feeding in and feeding out has been produced by Frazer and Marlier¹²³ and is discussed in more detail above (2.1). A similar analysis could be carried out at the national level (in national planning documents, including the OMC), to locate power balances between different actors and how they affect the (policy) outcome. Regarding evidence-based policy-making, this issue is addressed in most national case studies. However, while most studies document that there is more use of indicators and policy-based analyses in governments due to the OMC, in some cases (where previously underdeveloped) this percolates to evidence based policy making in national administrations. The methods are generally qualitative analysis, where interviews are a key source of data Interviews. Regarding the mechanism involved, the main one is institutional change.

Concerning vertical integration of the OMC, this has been analysed in some studies, particularly for countries with federal structures. For regional actors, in the OMCincl Armstrong¹²⁴ and Buechs¹²⁵ and Buechs and Friedrich¹²⁶ have the most complete analyses for the UK and Germany, but also Kroger¹²⁷ has a relevant

analysis, while for Belgium Vanhercke and Hamel¹²⁸ provide a good analysis. For local level actors, not so many analyses have been carried out. A few good analyses (notably on the local authorities in Sweden) do exist (Jacobsson and Johansson¹²⁹). Conceptually, these analyses draw on the broader Europeanisation literature, and focus on how actors use the OMC and how, if at all, this becomes institutionalized. The mechanisms analysed are actor empowerment and institutional change. The analysis by the ESN on the empowerment of local actors should also be mentioned here. It is the most comprehensive cross-country analysis of local actor involvement. See analysis above, section 2.2.1.

Stakeholder involvement

For the issue of stakeholder involvement, there have been many analyses of stakeholder involvement in the OMCinclusion, providing information about non-governmental actor involvement at national and regional levels. The conceptual framework is often objective four of the OMC itself, calling for the full involvement of civil society actors at all stages of the policy process, from decision-making through implementation to evaluation. There is less information about stakeholder involvement in the pensions and health care OMCs. The analyses focus on involvement of NGOs and civil society, which has overall been increasing over time. However, in some cases, the actors have decreased their involvement, if they do not obtain the desired results from involvement. This should be taken into account in future research, i.e. not only detecting participation towards OMC objectives, but also away from OMC objectives. The Swedish analysis by Jacobsson and Johansson is the most complete national analysis. The cross-country study by Brandsten et al¹³⁰ (discussed in 2.2 above) is the most complete comparative analysis. Both take account of pre-existing institutional features. Jacobsson and Johansson¹³¹ analyse with what ambitions, how and with which results actors (particularly NGOs) mobilise around the process of development of the NAPincl in Sweden. From a conceptual perspective the authors are interested, first, in framing, defined in this article as changes, or at least challenges, to) the dominant policy ideas around the universal welfare state. The OMC in inclusion does challenge the universal welfare state in as far as it frames poverty and child poverty as policy issues, which was unheard of before the major reforms to the universal welfare states during the 1990s and the 2000s. The authors are interested, second, in institutional change that is how the OMC/inclusion has affected the domestic institutional configuration for policy-making in social policy. In terms of mechanisms, they look at policy downloading and learning among NGOs, and also how they have used the OMC to increase their leverage.

In his most recent analysis, where Zeitlin¹³² sets out a research strategy for the OMC, he identifies five types of procedural shifts. From a conceptual perspective, five types of procedural shifts in governance & policy making are identified, each accompanied by indicators for change:

1. Reinforced horizontal coordination and cross-sectorial integration in interrelated policy fields, where the indicator is the creation of new formal bodies & inter-ministerial working groups.

2. Changes in national steering capacity, where the indicator is improved data collection and/or the creation of new systems for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of social policy.
3. Enhanced vertical coordination between levels of governance, where the indicator is the development of new formal and informal structures for closer coordination between national, regional and local levels of governance.
4. Increased involvement of non-state actors.
5. Development of new horizontal and/or diagonal networks for participation of non-state and sub-national actors in EU policy-making processes, where the indicator is the creation of reinforcement of consultative and participatory structures for the involvement of representative interest organisations.

These aspects of procedural shifts and indicators for how change can occur summarize the approach which has been used in most academic literature. The methods proposed as relevant for national and regional integration of the OMC (including substantive policy change and change on procedures of policy-making) are:

1. Contextualised process tracing.
2. Triangulation of documentary and interview evidence.
3. Systematic comparison of research findings across countries.

Future Research

In the analysis by Jacobsson and Johansson¹³³, the authors introduce a useful concept, worth considering in future research on the OMC/inclusion, that is the ‘micro-politics’ of the OMC/inclusion, which refers to the process of different governmental and non-governmental actors trying to gain influence in the domestic arena, using the OMCincl. as a vehicle in that regard. Issues which have only been addressed partially in the literature and which could be addressed more are how the OMC (as a political opportunity structure) contributes to the resolution of conflict in the domestic arena and downloading are combined. Future research efforts need to be made in particular on the new member states. For all member states, how actors use the pensions and health care OMCs is also necessary to consider. Also, for all member states, it is crucial to analyse the effects of the Growth and Jobs Strategy on the OMC/inclusion, pensions and health care OMCs (where the analyses by the EAPN and Combat Poverty Agency provide some useful elements).

For analysing procedural changes, it is crucial, in all cases, to take account of existing institutional conditions and traditions. In most national case studies this is done, but of course the extent to which data (and results) from the cases comparative depends on similar concepts/theories. There is a convergence in the literature towards a focus on the mechanism of “creative appropriation” of the OMC by both governmental and non-governmental actors in national, regional and local settings. These analyses essentially show that to understand ‘influence’ of the OMC, it is necessary to move away from top-down theoretical ideas of its functioning

towards contextualised analyses of how it is used in the domestic context. For the EU-15 research is abundant for the OMC/inclusion (esp. cases of Ireland, Sweden, UK, Denmark), but more research is needed on the new member states. Furthermore, in any research on the OMC, it is necessary which aspect of the OMC actors are interested in, why and how they use it or intend to use it.

Conclusions

A reading of the recent literature on the OMC has led to various conclusions about what is well developed, but also what could be developed more in the future. First, it is quite striking that the analyses that have a mainly theoretical ambition are not always those which are best operationalised and analysed (empirically). What is missing in such analyses is the explicit reference to the mechanism of change and the indicators to detect change. The analyses vary considerably in terms of the extent of the research. The studies which have been commissioned by the European Commission, while sometimes not theory-driven in the academic sense, in many cases provide a more nuanced picture in that they have more comprehensive analytical frameworks and more in-depth research (qualitative). Most of the analyses implicitly if not explicitly use theoretical concepts from the literature on Europeanisation and institutionalization. This is, indeed, useful, although it is not the fit/ misfit presumption itself that identifies conditions of potential impact, but instead, whether and if so, how, actors consider that it can be used (for agenda-setting, conflict resolution, maintaining focus on a policy issue, developing a policy dialogue, etc).

Secondly, all analyses concur (although in different ways) that actor awareness of the OMC as a (useful) instrument is a pre-condition for it to have an impact. Therefore, the focus on how actors conceive of and use the OMC is essential in any analysis on the OMC. Frazer and Marlier find that NGOs identify the OMC as an important policy resource, to develop more effective policies and procedures for social inclusion, whereas government officials only consider the OMC useful as a means for learning and the exchange of good practice, but not to develop policy.¹³⁴ Another point is that actors can use the OMC process and/or specific aspects of OMC policy as leverage, or rather they can creatively appropriate it in different ways. There is considerable literature on horizontal involvement and to a lesser extent on vertical engagement, but both are obviously a key to successful integration of the OMC domestically. The work by Brandsten et al. as well as the ESN and CARITAS are notable in this respect. Also the work by Armstrong and Johansson and Jacobsson are notable.

For actor awareness, visibility and awareness are very important. As discussed in this report, it is useful to distinguish between *institutional visibility and awareness* and *public visibility and awareness* as discussed above, where institutional visibility refers to the visibility among the main governmental actors (at EU, national, regional and local levels of governance), but also the visibility among the main stakeholders (this may be NGOs for the social inclusion OMC, but it may also be insurance organisations in the pensions OMC, or actors that provide services in the health care OMC,

parliaments). However, because of the variety of actors concerned by the OMC and because actor ownership of the OMC (whether for policy development or learning) is so crucial, it may be useful to distinguish between *institutional visibility* (governmental actors), *stakeholder visibility* (social partners, NGOs and other actors), *academic visibility* (among academics, especially when they prepare policy analyses for governments), and perhaps even *statistical visibility* (visibility of EU statistical data nationally).

Third, this review has found that there *is* data on policy problems which the OMC seeks to tackle, there *is* knowledge of problems among those involved in the OMC and learning does take place. In other words, there is policy diffusion via the EU frame of reference. However, the linkage between knowledge of an issue/problem and direct use of the OMC for policy change is weak. Related to this, from 2005, the integrated Lisbon Strategy did not sufficiently take account of the social OMCs. However, in the revised strategy, now labelled EU2020, the process will improve in the sense that the National Reform Programmes more explicitly have to address the issue of poverty, highlighted as a key problem.

Fourth, regarding issues about researching the OMC, the methodological tool of data-points is useful as it covers different types of first-hand information which can be covered in field research. In addition, all analyses of the OMC should be longitudinal, as integration in member states is likely to change over time. For specific aspects of learning, thematic groups are a useful methodological device, but they obviously present but a snap-shot of the dynamics of learning.

¹ This paper is based on the more detailed analysis that was carried out in European Commission (2010), "State of the Art: Overview of concepts, indicators and Methodologies used for analyzing the social OMCs", Deliverable 1, European Commission project (lead partner PPMI) Assessing the effectiveness and the impact of the Social OMC in preparation of the new cycle, July, 86 pp. I would like to thank Bart Vanhercke, for the collaborative research efforts which provided part of the information basis of this paper. I would also like to thank Egidjus Barcevicus, Joanathan Zeitlin and two reviewers from the European Commission for constructive comments to this research. Last but not least, this research benefitted from the invaluable assistance of Margherita Bussi.

² Greer, S., and Vanhercke, B., forthcoming March 2010. "Governing Health Care through EU Soft Law". In Mossialos, E., Hervey, T., Baeten, R., (eds.) Health System Governance in Europe: The Role of EU Law and Policy, Cambridge University Press.

³ A quarter of the texts are from 2009 and 2010. One third of the texts are from 2004 and 2005.

⁴ Norris, Jesse, 2007. "Searching for Synergy: Governance, Welfare, and Law in Two EU Member States", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

⁵ The main conceptual-theoretical issues addressed in the literature were identified, including the mechanisms (for change) associated with these. These are: Policy diffusion (including mechanisms such as learning, benchmarking or peer pressure); Learning (from past experiences, with and from others); Deliberation (challenges pre-conceived notions) and Diagnostic monitoring (adequacy of common indicators, patterns of their usage); Socialization (legitimation, peer pressure, self-reinforcement, logic of appropriateness...); Framing (agenda setting, empowerment of actors, limiting courses of action, identification of "good" and "bad" policy...); Creative appropriation (leverage); Mutual reinforcement/ feeding in and feeding out between Social OMC and other EU

policy areas; Institutional change (changing actor configurations and policy-making practices in domestic or EU policy making).

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Appendix – Abbreviations

COUNTRIES

AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EN	England
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
GR	Greece
IRE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LUX	Luxembourg
MAL	Malta
MSt	Member State
NI	Northern Ireland
NL	The Netherlands
NO	Norway
PO	Poland
RO	Romania
SC	Scotland
SE	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
SW	Sweden
UK	United Kingdom
WL	Wales

MECHANISMS

BM	Benchmarking
ML	Mutual Learning
MLP	Mutual Learning Programme
NS(F)	Naming, shaming, faming
PR	Peer review

OMC PROCESS

MS	Mainstreaming
LS	Lisbon Strategy
OMCincl.	The Open Method of Co-ordination on social inclusion policy
EES	European Employment Strategy
NGOs	Non Governmental organizations
NSR	National Strategy Report
NAPincl.	National Action Plans on Social Inclusion
PEP	People Experiencing Poverty
EAPN	European Anti-Poverty Network
ESM	European Social Model
SPSI	Social Protection Social Inclusion
OMC/HC	OMC health care

OTHER

SP	Social Partners
DWP	Department of work and pensions
Insee	Institut National de la Statistique et d'Etudes Economiques
ALMP	Active Labour Market Policies
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
NRP	National Reform Programme

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