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The European Multi-level Welfare System: Methods of Open Coordination, Public Parliamentary

Activities and media coverage

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Abstract

This study answers the questions which EU level characteristics of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and which OMCs are most likely to result in pressure on the national executive – caused by parliamentary activities and media coverage – to change its policies in line with OMC recommendations. On the basis of interviews with European Commission officials and an analysis of parliamentary debates and newspaper coverage on six OMCs in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands in the period 1996-2009, three characteristics are selected and their empirical relevance assessed. The findings indicate that when an OMC is adopted on a policy field without any other type of EU activity already present, the OMC will neither increase the public pressure on a national government, nor be democratically accountable.

Keywords: European Union, open method of coordination, national parliaments, media coverage, democratic accountability

Introduction

Scholarly attention for the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) fluctuated considerably in the last 10 years, with peaks in the first years of the new millennium, a subsequent phase of OMC fatigue, and a recent re-emergence of attention after more than a decade of experience with OMCs. With the passing of time possibilities opened up for analysing longitudinal data with quantitative research techniques. This article makes use of these possibilities to answer the questions which EU level characteristics of OMCs and which OMCs are most likely to result in a policy impact at the domestic level through OMC related parliamentary activities and media coverage. From these research questions it is obvious that this study does not adopt the classical administrative perspective on OMCs. Many studies focused on how country specific information from OMC reports on employment and social inclusion policies is used by members of national governments and public officials of national ministries for agenda-setting, problem definition and policy formulation at the domestic level (see for overviews of this literature Kröger, 2009; Heidenreich and Zeitlin, 2009). In contrast, this study is interested in a topic which received far less attention by scholars, i.e. the public awareness of OMCs at the domestic level (De La Porte, 2010) as mirrored in OMC related parliamentary activities and media coverage. Moreover, next to the different characteristics of the employment and social inclusion OMCs, also differences between OMCs that are less often researched are included, such as OMCs adopted on the education, R&D, internet and pension policy fields.

With the interest in the public awareness of OMCs this study aims to contribute to discussions on the democratic accountability of New Modes of Governance (NMGs), of which the OMC is a prominent example. In these discussions three central features for democratic accountability in multi-level governance settings are identified: i) control by elected, party-based, democratically accountable representatives over governing functions, ii) a functional mode of representation of stakeholders in the decision making process, and iii) the media-based critical public debate of the operation and outcomes of the NMGs (Héritier and Lehmkuhl, 2011; Føllesdal, 2011). Borrás and Ejrnaes (2011) recently addressed with a mix of qualitative and quantitative research techniques the second element of democratic accountability in the context of OMCs. This article aims to shed light on the first and third feature.

In the next section the literature on parliamentary involvement and media coverage in the context of OMCs is reviewed. Subsequently, the EU level characteristics of OMCs which are most likely to result in a policy impact at the domestic level through parliamentary activity and media coverage are identified inductively. In a first step three EU level characteristics of OMCs are selected on the basis of semi-structured interviews with Commission officials. Second, the link between these characteristics and the potential policy impact of OMCs at the domestic level is assessed through a quantitative study of parliamentary debates and media coverage on six OMCs in the United Kingdom (UK) and the Netherlands in the period 1996-2009. The concluding section discusses the findings in light of the literature on the democratic accountability of NMGs.

The open method of coordination: parliamentary involvement and media coverage

Although OMCs are non-binding for Member States, these type of multilateral surveillance tools can through their cross-national policy comparisons affect domestic policy making processes. An OMC

can define a policy situation at the domestic level as problematic and persuade policy-makers to construct their proposals for new policies within the framework set by the OMC (Lopez-Santana, 2006; Tsakatika, 2007: 550; Kröger, 2007: 658; Buchs, 2008a; Buchs, 2008b; Heidenreich and Bischoff, 2008). To ensure the input legitimacy of these processes, openness was made one of the defining elements of OMCs, resulting in a promise to involve stakeholders, sub-state authorities and national parliaments (Buchs, 2008b; Smismans, 2008; Zeitlin, 2008; MacPhail, 2010; Senden, 2010).

Without the use by MPs of information from OMCs to assess the performance of national policies, there are no actors that can *formally* hold the executive accountable at the domestic level for the underperformance of national policies in OMCs (De Ruiter, 2010). When this is accompanied by little media coverage, it is unlikely that a national government is held accountable at all for the bad performance of its policies in OMCs (Weale, 2011; Føllesdal, 2011; Héritier and Lehmkuhl, 2011). In this context it is claimed that the OMC leads at best to 'peer accountability' with public officials of national ministries meeting up in Brussels to exchange best practices, at the expense of 'accountability at home' through the electoral circuit of representative democracy (Papadopoulos, 2010).

Whether this shift towards 'peer accountability' actually takes place in practice is an empirical question, which has remained largely unaddressed in the literature because of the marginal attention for the domestic public awareness of OMCs. Many studies identify a policy impact of OMCs via the administrative channel, but only one study looks at the lower media coverage for the OMC employment in comparison to the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (Meyer, 2005). Somewhat more scholarly attention is paid to the involvement of national parliaments in OMCs. It is claimed that, first, MPs are not interested in following OMC processes because judge their impact on the national policy making process as marginal (Duina and Raunio, 2007: 298-299). Second, MPs have difficulties scrutinizing OMCs. Unlike normal EU legislation, the OMC does not have a clear beginning or end, or rules guiding the behaviour of actors. This makes the OMC hard to follow for MPs at the domestic

level when they are not yet used to the method (Armstrong, 2005; Raunio, 2006). Third, because representatives of national governments are involved in drawing up National Action Plans (NAPs) and joint reports of the Commission and the Council, information on the performance of policies in the OMC policy comparisons becomes concentrated in the executive branch, outside of the control of the legislature (Jacobsson, 2005: 123; Visser, 2005: 199-200; Raunio, 2006; Benz, 2007; Tsakatika, 2007; Papadopoulos, 2010; Føllesdal, 2011).

In sum, scholars assessed the involvement of MPs in OMCs rather negatively, leading some to define it as 'a principle' that decision-making under NMGs escapes direct democratic control (Weale, 2011). However, these claims are often based on theoretical accounts of NMGs or analyse empirical findings on one or two OMCs. Hence, there is a need for an empirical comparative study of a wide range of OMCs with regard to the awareness of MPs and journalists for this type of NMG.

A disclosure effect of OMCs: shaming by MPs and newspaper coverage

The dependent variable of this study is the change in national policies as a response to OMC related parliamentary activities and media coverage at the domestic level. This variable is hard to measure due to the problem of isolating the influence of third variables. Scholars researching the link between policy change at the domestic level and the country specific information published in the context of OMCs often reported on a correlation between these variables because policymakers act *in line with* OMC recommendations and best practices. However, it is unclear to what extent they act *because of* this OMC output (Kröger, 2009; Weishaupt, 2009). The problem of determining causality is circumvented in this study by focusing on the OMC influence which can be grasped (Hartlapp, 2009), i.e. the *potential* policy impact of OMCs at the domestic level through parliamentary activities and media coverage. It is assumed that when country specific information from OMCs on the bad

performance of national policies gains presence *at the same time* in the parliamentary and media arenas, the public pressure on a national government to respond to the identified underperformance of national policies increases. In other words, the parallel presence of OMC output in parliamentary activities and media coverage strengthens the potential policy impact of OMCs through the public channel (see figure 1).

Figure 1

This study is interested in the questions which EU level characteristics of OMCs and which OMCs are most likely to result in a policy impact at the domestic level through two types of parliamentary and media activities leading to the disclosure of priorities and interests (Tholoniati, 2010) of the executive: i) the use of country specific information from OMCs by MPs of opposition parties to 'shame' the performance of policies of the incumbent government, and ii) newspaper journalists providing information on EU affairs to their readers by reporting on the country specific information published in the context of OMCs. Three characteristics of OMCs are selected on the basis of semi-structured interviews with Commission officials on the development of OMCs at the EU level (see annex). Subsequently, the empirical relevance of these characteristics is assessed through a quantitative study of parliamentary debates and media coverage on six OMCs in the UK and the Netherlands in the period 1996-2009. Finally, the potential policy impact of OMCs which possess the empirical relevant EU level characteristics is determined by calculating the correlation between the presence of the output of an OMC in parliamentary debates and media coverage. In the remaining part of this section the three EU level characteristics of OMCs identified on the basis of the interviews with Commission officials are introduced.

The first characteristic identified is related with the infrastructure of OMCs. The presence at the EU level of guidelines/objectives, indicators, benchmarks, NAPs, and joint reports, allows actors at the domestic level to acquire information on the performance of national policies (Interviews I, II, V; Duina and Oliver, 2005: 498; Benz, 2007: 518). These constitutive elements of the OMC were not present from the start in all the OMC processes under study in this article and even took a couple of years to develop in some OMCs (Interviews III, IV, VI; Tholoniati, 2010). It can be expected that when the mentioned elements are present in an OMC, it can generate information on best and worst policy practices which gives MPs and journalists opportunities to use information from OMCs to, respectively, shame or report on the performance of national policies.

Second, several OMCs are adopted on policy fields on which there was already activity at the EU level before the launch of the OMC. Examples are the Framework Programmes on the R&D field, the Erasmus programme on the education field, provisions with regard to working conditions on the employment field, and the liberalization of the European telecommunication sector in the e-Europe domain¹ (Interviews I, II, III, V, VI). When an OMC is adopted on a policy field on which there was already EU level activity, MPs and journalists at the domestic level are likely to gain knowledge on the existence and functioning of related OMCs through scrutinizing or reporting on the EU level activities already in place. Hence, the EU level activities on a policy field previous to the adoption of an OMC are expected to have a positive effect on the subsequent use of information from OMCs in parliamentary shaming strategies and reporting by journalists.

A third EU level characteristic of OMCs likely to result in a variable potential policy impact at the domestic level is related with the EU treaty. The legal foundation for EU level activities lies in the EU Treaty, which forms part of the basis for members of government and parliament to judge whether EU level action is legitimate. Because of this important role of the Treaty, and the fact that there is variation at the EU level between OMCs with regard to their Treaty base (Interview I, IV, V; Senden, 2010), it can be expected that an OMC with an explicit reference in one of the EU treaties is

more visible at the domestic level for both MPs and journalists. Hence, MPs of opposition parties are likely to use more information from an OMC with a treaty base to shame the performance of policies of the incumbent government than from an OMC without a treaty base. Moreover, references in newspaper articles to the output of OMCs are more likely for OMCs with a treaty base.

Data collection and analysis

The OMCs studied in this article are explicitly labeled as OMCs by the European Commission and the Council. Multilateral surveillance tools adopted at the EU level that were in practice never developed as OMCs or only very recently introduced, were not included in the analysis. These criteria resulted in the selection of the following OMCs: employment, social inclusion, pensions, education, R&D, and e-Europe/i2010 (internet). The period under study for the OMC employment runs from 1996 till 2009. Because of the later starting date of the other five OMCs the period studied runs from 1999 till 2009 for these OMCs. The end date of December 2009 is chosen because of the EU2020 strategy launched at the beginning of 2010, which led to a considerable restructuring of the patchwork of OMCs developed in the period 1996-2009.

To assess the empirical relevance of the three EU level characteristics of OMCs the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are chosen as country studies. Because of reasons of scope no expectations are formulated on the differences between member states (see on this De Ruiter, 2010). However, including these countries in this study increases its external validity. The UK is a majoritarian democracy with a liberal media system, whereas the Netherlands is a consensus democracy with a democratic corporatist media system (Lijphart, 1999; Hallin and Mancini, 2000). When the EU level characteristics of OMCs show up as significant in the analyses it means that the

characteristics are important in different settings, which would strengthen the generalizability of the findings.

The use of information from OMCs by MPs of opposition parties is measured through coding official parliamentary documents such as letters of ministers to parliament, minutes of public committee meetings, plenary debates and public hearings, and questions of MPs and answers of the ministers. Documents for coding were selected through the use of search strings consisting of references to the European Union and the policy field on which the OMC is adopted. The documents were obtained from the databases *parlando* (parlando.sdu.nl/cgi/login/anonymous) and <http://www.parliament.uk>, which provide access to all documents related with the plenary and public committee debates of the Dutch and British Upper and Lower House. The parliamentary documents collected were sifted for relevance, analysed in detail and subsequently coded along the lines of two categories: i) the information on the substance of OMCs provided to/collected by MPs (see this section for an explanation of this variable) and ii) the shaming by MPs of opposition parties of policies of the incumbent government with the use of information from OMCs. Each category is measured by the number of statements made per six months (January-June; July-December) by members of the government or MPs of opposition parties.

The media coverage was measured through an in-depth content analysis of national newspapers included in the *Lexis-Nexus* database. For the Netherlands this resulted in a study of articles occurring in the following newspapers: *Algemeen Dagblad*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *de Volkskrant*, *Trouw*, *Het Parool*. In the case of the UK the following newspapers were studied: *The Independent*, *The Times/Sunday Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror/Sunday Mirror*. The articles were collected with similar search strings as used in the case of the parliamentary databases.

The coding results were used to construct a pooled time-series dataset with the OMCs as the units and time periods of six months. Table 1 provides an overview of the aggregate coding results

with between brackets the statements/articles on the OMC as a percentage of the total of statements/articles on the related policy field.

Table 1

Through the study of Commission and Council documents insights are obtained on the differences between OMCs with regard to the three EU level characteristics during the time period 1996-2009. The development of the infrastructure of OMCs is measured by assigning a point for each half year in which guidelines, indicators, benchmarks, reporting requirements, or peer learning activities were adopted in an OMC at the EU level. Dummy variables are created to measure the presence (1) or absence (0) of a treaty base for an OMC, and previous EU level activity on a policy field. Table 2 gives an overview of the six OMCs and the extent to which they possess the three EU level characteristics. Two time points were chosen, at the beginning of the OMC processes and at a later stage of development. One directly notes that not all OMCs fulfill the characteristics. However, it does not become clear from the table whether the characteristics identified on the basis of interviews with Commission officials actually matter in practice at the member state level for the OMC related parliamentary activities and media coverage. This question is addressed in the remaining part of this article.

Table 2

A range of control variables are included in the regression analyses for determining to what extent the three EU level characteristics of OMCs matter in practice for the use of information from OMCs

by MPs from opposition parties and newspaper journalists. First, the political orientation of the minister responsible for the policy field on which an OMC is adopted (0 = left (NL: PVDA; UK: Labour); 1 = centre (NL: CDA, D'66); 2 = right (NL: VVD; UK: Conservatives) is included as a variable in the analysis. A second control variable measures the change in government in a six months period (0 = no change; 1 = change). Third, other period effects were controlled for by including a dummy variable for the publication by the Commission and the Council of joint reports. Moreover, the total number of parliamentary statements and newspaper articles on policy fields on which an OMC is adopted, is included in the analysis in order to control for fluctuations that cannot be attributed to the OMC. Fifth, the dependent variable with a time-lag of half a year controls for the influence of the series past. Sixth, it can be expected that MPs and journalists are likely to be more interested to follow the performance of national policies in OMCs that are touching upon the main concerns of citizens at the domestic level, e.g. employment, social and education policies. For measuring this saliency of policy fields Eurobarometer data (59-67) on the most important issues in the eyes of the Dutch and British public are used. Issues that are mentioned by Dutch and British respondents as important were assigned a 1, other policy fields a 0. Seventh, the data are analysed on the aggregate country level. In order to control for fluctuations in shaming and media coverage due to country effects a country dummy is included in the analysis. Finally, it is claimed in the literature that information on the performance of policies in the OMC policy comparisons becomes concentrated in the executive branch because of the involvement of government representatives in drawing up NAPs and joint reports, and their participation in peer learning groups at the EU level. When MPs *do* obtain information on the substance of OMCs - either through parliamentary hearings/questions or through information provision by the government - this is likely to have an increasing effect on the shaming of government policies by MPs from opposition parties (De Ruiter, 2010). Hence, a variable measuring the amount of information in public parliamentary discussions on the substance of OMCs is included as a control in the analysis of the OMC related parliamentary shaming strategies.

Ordinary Least Square regression models were estimated with panel corrected standard errors calculated in order to correct for the problems of autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity (Beck and Katz, 1995). To determine the potential policy impact of the OMCs with EU level characteristics which result in – according to the OLS regression analyses – more parliamentary activity and media coverage, bivariate correlation coefficients were calculated between the amount of parliamentary shaming and the media coverage on OMCs. It is assumed in this study that when country specific information from OMCs on the bad performance of national policies gains presence *at the same time* in the parliamentary and media arenas, the public pressure on a national government to respond to the identified underperformance of national policies increases. This in turn strengthens the potential policy impact of OMCs through the public channel, defined in this study as the combination of parliamentary activity and media coverage (see figure 1).

Results

The performance of Dutch and British policies according to OMC reports

The OMC reports published at the EU level on Dutch and British national policies contain information that can be used at the domestic level in the assessment of the underperformance of national policies. Negative aspects of Dutch employment policies mentioned by the Commission and Council in the context of the OMC employment are the lower participation rates by women measured in hours, partially ineffective back to work schemes, differences in earning power between men and women, and the higher unemployment rates among ethnic minorities. In the context of the OMC social inclusion critical remarks were made with regard to inefficient integration courses for ethnic minorities, insufficient attention for gender imbalances in anti-poverty measures, and shortages in childcare. In the joint reports on social protection some concerns are raised with regard to the

financial sustainability of the Dutch pension system due to its reliance on the stock market. In the context of the OMC education the Commission and Council are critical with regard to the percentage of early school leavers, and the number of women studying mathematics, science and technology. Criticism is voiced at the EU level through the OMC R&D on the low public and private investment in R&D policies in the Netherlands and the low number of public-private partnerships. In the context of the OMC e-Europe/i2010 the Commission indicates that Dutch government services became only recently available online, which results in a low use of these online-services by the Dutch population.

According to joint employment reports published in the context of the OMC employment too few policy efforts are made to fight the long term unemployment in the UK, which is especially high among people with poor basic skills. Moreover, the UK has according to the OMC reports a large gender pay gap, low quality child care provisions and less active labour market policies than presented by the British government. The joint reports on social protection and social exclusion make general statements on the need for the UK to reduce persistent inequalities, such as those in income, health, skills and life chances. The social protection joint reports are more critical towards the adequacy of pensions in the UK and the decline in active participation in private pensions, causing a high risk-on-poverty among pensioners, particularly for those on low incomes. In joint reports published in the context of the OMC education, the Council and the Commission mention the relatively high percentage of early school leavers in the UK. The reports published in the OMC R&D express concern about the relatively low UK government spending on R&D and the absence of a national target in line with the EU 3 per cent R&D investment target. In the e-Europe/i2010 benchmarking reports it is noticed that the take-up of eGovernment services by British citizens and enterprises slumped recently and the UK scores below average on ICT R&D intensity.

Shaming by MPs

The Dutch governments were criticised by MPs from (center) left-wing opposition parties (PvdA, SP, Groen Links) with the use of information from the OMC employment with regard to the low participation on the labour market (measured in hours), inefficient back to work schemes and differences in earning power between men and women. MPs of opposition parties – from left to right – criticised the Dutch executive with regard to the poor performance of Dutch policies on the benchmarks in the OMC education with regard to early school leavers and the low number of students in technical studies. Also the lower private investments on R&D in the Netherlands vis-à-vis other EU member states were criticized with the help of information from the OMC R&D. The shaming statements per six months in the case of the UK are often not higher than 2 every half year, and are – just as in the Netherlands – restricted to public parliamentary committee debates. The shaming statements in the case of the UK are highest for the OMC R&D, touching upon the low investment of the government and companies in innovation and ICT.

All three EU level characteristics of OMCs reach significance in the regression models estimated, although not all in the expected direction (see table 3). First, the presence of a treaty base for an OMC is negatively related with the use of information from OMCs by MPs in opposition parties. MPs make on average one shaming statement less every year with the use of information from an OMC with a treaty base (i.e. the OMC employment) than from OMCs without a treaty base.

Table 3

The other two EU level OMC characteristics have positive effects on the number of shaming statements made by MPs. The regression models estimated indicate that the more developed the infrastructure of an OMC is the more MPs of opposition parties use information from OMCs to criticize the performance of national policies. However, the coefficient barely reaches significance

and the effect is small. The third EU level characteristic of OMCs that reaches significance is positively related with the shaming of national policies by MPs in opposition parties. The estimated regression models indicate that MPs use on average every 1.5 years about twice as much information from OMCs adopted on policy fields on which there was already policy activity at the EU level than from other OMCs.

In sum, the previous EU level activity on a policy field and – to a lesser extent – the development of the infrastructure of OMCs lead to more public parliamentary activities at the domestic level. The OMCs that possess these characteristics are the OMC R&D and the OMC education. The OMC employment (treaty base), the OMC e-Europe (underdeveloped infrastructure), the OMC social inclusion (no previous EU level activities) and OMC pensions (no previous EU level activities) do not possess all EU level characteristics that positively influence the use of information from OMCs by MPs.

Media coverage and OMCs

The media coverage on OMCs has a neutral character in both countries under study. This finding goes against the expectation formulated at the beginning of this study that journalist would report on the country-specific information published in the context of OMCs. In the Dutch newspapers the role of the Dutch Council presidency in the negotiations leading up to the adoption of an article for the OMC employment in the Amsterdam Treaty received attention, whereas the British newspapers reported more on the introduction of a New Labour outlook for the EU through the Lisbon agenda and its OMCs. The regression models estimated with the neutral media coverage on OMCs as the dependent variable indicate that the more developed the infrastructure of an OMC is, the less newspaper articles are published on an OMC. When two elements are added to the infrastructure of an OMC at the EU level, newspapers publish on average one article on OMCs less every half year. This unexpected finding indicates that journalists reported more on EU level events in the *run-up* to the

development of the infrastructure of OMCs at the EU level, than on the *output* of OMCs with a developed infrastructure.

Table 4

A second indication that journalists are more interested in the institutional developments related with OMCs than with their information output, is the finding from the regression analyses that newspapers publish on average two more articles every half year on an OMC with a treaty base (the OMC employment) than on OMCs without a treaty base. This finding can be accounted for by the attention paid by journalists at the end of the 1990s to the Luxembourg Jobs summit and the adoption of an employment chapter in the Amsterdam Treaty.

In sum, newspaper journalists do not make use of OMCs as an information source to reflect on the performance of policies of the incumbent government. From the regression models estimated it shows that the adoption of a treaty article and events leading up to the adoption of guidelines, indicators, benchmarks, and reporting requirements, raise attention for OMCs by journalists. This dynamic is present in all OMCs under study in this article, and hints at the importance of continuous policy activism at the EU level in the context of OMCs in order to attract the attention of journalists at the domestic level (Tholoniati, 2010).

The potential policy impact of OMCs through the public channel

From the regression analyses it follows that MPs use more information from OMCs to criticize the policies of the incumbent government, when an OMC has a developed infrastructure at the EU level and is adopted on a policy field on which there was already policy activity. The OMCs which are most

in line with these characteristics are adopted on the R&D, education and, to a lesser extent, employment fields (see table 2). The OMC e-Europe has a somewhat underdeveloped infrastructure, especially with regard to its reporting and overall cohesion. The OMC social inclusion and OMC pensions were adopted on policy fields on which there was no previous EU level activity.

Journalists of the studied newspapers did not use the OMCs as an information source to criticize the policies of the incumbent government. Instead, newspaper articles were published on EU level events such as the adoption of a Treaty article for the OMC employment and decisions of the Council of Ministers to develop the infrastructure of OMCs. This neutral nature of the newspaper reporting on OMCs is one of the unexpected findings of this study and slightly changes how the potential policy impact of OMCs through parliamentary activities and media coverage is determined. It was assumed that when country specific information from an OMC on the bad performance of national policies gains presence in the same half year in the parliamentary and media arenas, the public pressure on a national government to respond to the identified underperformance increases. Although the media coverage found did not have this critical character, the correlation between the neutral media attention for OMCs and the use of information from OMCs by MPs in their shaming strategies still sheds light on the amount of public pressure on national governments. OMCs have a higher potential policy impact through the public channel when a positive correlation is found between the OMC related parliamentary shaming and neutral media coverage in the same half year. A negative correlation coefficient would indicate that the discussions on OMCs in the parliamentary and media arenas are isolated from each other. This decreases the likelihood that OMCs can have an influence on policy change at the domestic level through the public channel, defined in this study as the combination of parliamentary activities and media coverage (see figure 1).

The bivariate correlation analyses for the OMCs employment, R&D and education – the OMCs with EU level characteristics which increase the use of information from OMCs by MPs in opposition parties – indicate that the link between the neutral media coverage and parliamentary

shaming is both positive for the OMC education and OMC R&D. The correlation coefficient only reaches significance for the OMC education (see table 5).

Table 5

In sum, of the OMCs that possess EU level characteristics which increase the use of information from OMCs by MPs in opposition parties at the domestic level, the OMC education and – to a lesser extent – OMC R&D are most likely to result in a policy impact at the domestic level via the public channel.

Conclusion

This study showed that OMCs vary with regard to their potential policy impact through the public channel, defined in this study as the combination of parliamentary activities and media coverage at the domestic level. Two EU level characteristics of OMCs play a role in explaining this variation. EU level activity previous to the adoption of an OMC on a policy field and – to a lesser extent – the development of the infrastructure of an OMC positively influence the use of information from OMCs by MPs from opposition parties in their shaming strategies vis-à-vis the incumbent government. These findings qualify the claim by Papadopoulos (2010) who stated that NMGs increase ‘peer accountability’ at the EU level at the expense of ‘accountability at home’. The occurrence of shaming

of the performance of national policies by MPs of opposition parties with the use of information from OMCs shows that the electoral circuit of representative democracy *is* used in the case of this NMG. This study did not find any evidence for an increase of the democratic accountability of NMGs through an OMC related media-based critical public debate.

In the subsequent phase of the analysis of the empirical findings, evidence was found for a higher likelihood of a policy impact at the domestic level through the public channel in the case of the OMC education and the OMC R&D. In these OMCs the public pressure on a national government to respond to the identified underperformance of national policies was higher because of the positive correlation found between parliamentary shaming activities and neutral media coverage in the same half year. In other words, the OMCs R&D and education contributed to the disclosure of priorities and interests of the national executive, albeit to a limited extent.

The finding that the EU level activity previous to the adoption of an OMC on a policy field has an effect on OMC related public parliamentary activities hints at the importance of the sequential adoption of hybrid modes of EU governance (Trubek et al, 2006; Pollack, 2008; Raunio, 2009: 322). When an OMC is adopted on a policy field without any other type of EU level activity already present, it is unlikely that the OMC will have an effect on national policies through the public channel. This claim on the importance of sequential hybridity is a variation on the 'dilemma of European governance' as formulated by Börzel (2010) and Héritier and Lehmkuhl (2011). These authors claim that soft forms of governance need a shadow of supranational hierarchy to achieve their policy aims. The empirical findings presented in this study indicate that a governance patchwork in which soft and hard(er) modes are functioning in sequence and parallel on the same policy field is a condition for the involvement of MPs in OMCs at the domestic level. Hence, the existence of such a patchwork is necessary for guaranteeing democratic control through the electoral circuit of representative democracy over this type of soft governance.

Notes

1 OMCs included in this study adopted on policy fields with no previous EU level activity are the OMC social inclusion and OMC Pensions. Although anti-poverty programmes were funded by the European Commission in previous decades, the social inclusion theme is broader than only the topic of poverty. The social inclusion theme as a whole was never addressed at the EU level before the adoption of the OMC social inclusion (Interview V).

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Annex: interviews European Commission officials

Education

Interview I: Commission official DG education, 9 November 2005, 14.00, Brussels.

Interview II: Commission official DG education, 16 November 2005, 14.00, Brussels.

R&D

Interview III: Commission official DG research, 10 November 2005, 11.00, Brussels.

Interview IV: Commission official DG research, 14 November 2005, 14.00, Brussels.

Social inclusion/Pensions/European Employment Strategy

Interview V: Commission official DG employment and social affairs, 9 November 2005, 12.00, Brussels.

e-Europe/i2010

Interview VI: Commission official DG information society, 15 November 2005, 11.00, Brussels.

Figure 1: Public and administrative channels of policy influence and OMCs

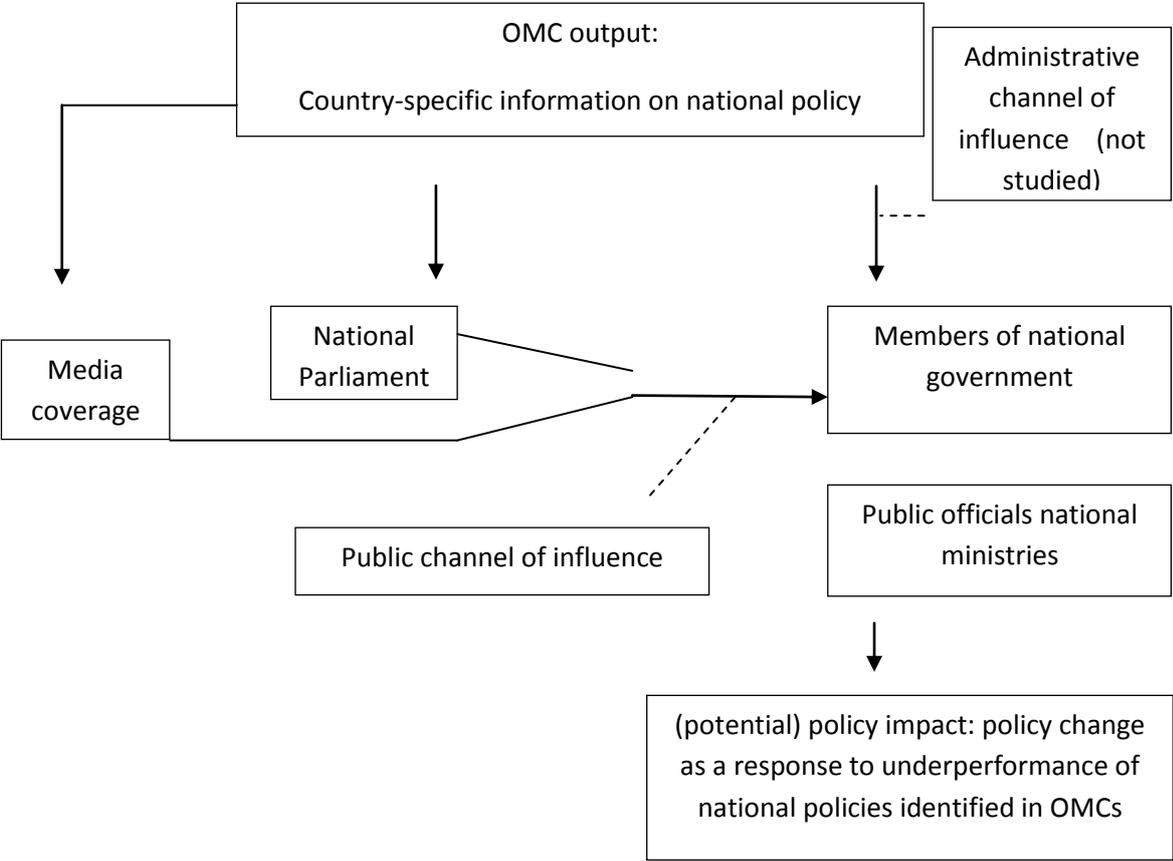


Table 1. Statements/articles on OMCs in the Dutch and British Upper and Lower House and in five national newspapers, 1996/1999-2009

	The Netherlands		United Kingdom	
	national parliament: shaming	media coverage: reporting	national parliament: shaming	media coverage: reporting
OMC employment	57 (0.35)	185 (1.25)	13 (.008)	57 (.29)
OMC social inclusion	11 (.20)	53 (.27)	6 (.017)	44 (.071)
OMC pensions	10 (.09)	57 (.45)	2 (.002)	41 (.09)
OMC education	43 (.40)	54 (.21)	5 (.004)	33 (.05)
OMC e-Europe/i2010	11 (.26)	57 (.14)	2 (.003)	47 (.072)
OMC R&D	66 (2.76)	46 (.52)	8 (.10)	71 (.72)

Source: parlando.sdu.nl/cgi/login/anonymous; <http://www.parliament.uk>; Lexis-Nexus

Table 3. Shaming by MPs of opposition parties

	Model I	Model II
1. Development infrastructure OMC	.102*	.086*
	(.059)	(.051)
2. Previous EU level activity	.840***	.668***
	(.207)	(.143)
3. Treaty base for OMC	-.647**	-.509*

	(.311)	(.262)
Right political orientation	-.831**	-.827**
	(.374)	(.363)
Left political orientation	-.636*	-.577***
	(.357)	(.201)
Change of government	.029	
	(.221)	
Publication joint report	-.190	
	(.198)	
Total statements on policy field	.000	
	(.000)	
Lagged variable shaming	.267***	.272***
	(.085)	(.084)
Saliency policy field	.282	
	(.196)	
Country dummy	.117	
	(.318)	
Obtaining information substance OMCs	.183***	.179***
	(.029)	(.026)
Constant	-.719	-.326
	(.484)	(.270)
N	264	264
F-test	22.06***	37.63***
Adjusted R-squared	.490	.494

*p<0.10, **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. OLS-regression models. Panel Corrected Standard Errors are shown in parentheses.

Source: parlando.sdu.nl/cgi/login/anonymous; <http://www.parliament.uk>; official documents of European Commission and European Council

Table 4. Media coverage related with OMCs

	Model I	Model II
1. Development infrastructure OMC	-0.573*** (.184)	-0.558*** (.179)
2. Previous EU level activity	-0.548** (.273)	-0.079 (.312)
3. Treaty base for OMC	2.290*** (.856)	1.577*** (.597)
Right political orientation	-0.834 (.735)	
Left political orientation	1.778** (.695)	1.757*** (.552)
Change of government	.564 (.652)	
Publication joint report	-0.521 (.549)	
Total newspaper coverage on policy field	.000*	.000*

	(.000)	(.000)
Lagged variable media coverage on OMCs	.299***	.305***
	(.065)	(.063)
Saliency policy field	-.808	
	(.571)	
Country	-2.526***	-2.295***
	(.678)	(.623)
Constant	5.916	4.857***
	(1.186)	(.928)
N	264	264
F-test	8.28***	12.53***
Adjusted R-squared	0.233	0.235

*p<0.10, **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. OLS-regression models. Panel Corrected Standard Errors are shown in parentheses. Model I and II include all OMCs.

Source: Lexis-Nexus; official documents of European Commission and European Council

Table 5. bivariate correlations between neutral media coverage on OMCs and OMC-related shaming statements by MPs

	OMC employment	OMC education	OMC R&D
	-0.216	0.284*	0.014
N	56	44	44

*p<0.10, **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Bivariate correlations (Pearson coefficients)

Source: parlando.sdu.nl/cgi/login/anonymous; <http://www.parliament.uk>; Lexis-Nexus

Table 2. Six OMCs and three EU level characteristics

	<i>OMC employment (EES)</i>		<i>OMC social inclusion</i>		<i>OMC pensions</i>		<i>OMC education</i>		
Time period	January- June 2002	July- December 2009	January- June 2002	July- December 2009	January- June 2002	July- December 2009	January- June 2002	July- December 2009	January- June 2002
Infrastructure development	Guidelines; indicators/benchmarks; reporting; peer learning activities (4)	Guidelines; indicators/benchmarks; reporting ^a ; peer learning activities (4)	Objectives; indicators/benchmarks; reporting; peer learning activities (4)	Objectives; indicators/benchmarks; reporting; peer learning activities (4)	Objectives; indicators/benchmarks (2)	Objectives; indicators/benchmarks; reporting ^b ; peer learning activities (4)	Objectives (1)	Objectives; indicators/benchmarks; reporting ^c ; peer learning activities (4)	Objectives (1)
EU level activity	Yes (1)	Yes (1)	No (0)	No (0)	No (0)	No (0)	Yes (1)	Yes (1)	Yes (1)
Treaty base	Yes (1)	Yes (1)	No (0)	No (0)	No (0)	No (0)	No (0)	No (0)	No (0)

^a In 2005 the national governments of the member states decided to restructure the reporting in the OMC employment. Reporting continued after 2005 but was integrated in the general reports based on the National Reform Programmes.

^b In 2005 the national governments of the member states decided to streamline the reporting in the OMC social inclusion and OMC pensions. Reporting continued after 2005 in a less elaborate way through the Social Protection reports.

^c The restructuring of reporting in 2005 did not have an effect on the independent reporting in the context of the OMC education.

^d Through the introduction in 2005 of National Reform Programmes, reporting was introduced for the OMC R&D and, to a lesser extent, the OMC e-Europe/i2010.

Source: official documents of European Commission and European Council