Social OMC Lab
Brussels, 19 May 2010

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

Bart Vanherckke,
European Social Observatory
Outline of the talk

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

15’!
Preamble

Inspiration drawn from 3 deliverables by:

Caroline de la Porte
Timo Weishaupt
Bart Vanhercke
1. How did we go about it?

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

www.ose.be
How did we go about it?

• Necessarily selective: representative sample of English language publications
  • From 2005 onwards (mostly 2007 or more recent)

• Including:
  • Academic texts, Joint Reports and SPC publications, Reports from stakeholders, Communications from the Commission, Reports from other experts
2. Social OMC literature: some general findings

• While two-thirds of the reviewed literature was published in 2007 or more recently, the lion’s share covers time-span prior to streamlining (2006)

  - Sometimes not clear about which period is actually covered
Some general findings (II)

• Even more recent publications do not always take into account changes in the OMC process
  • E.g. completion of the portfolio of indicators, enhancement of ML

• Some issues are barely covered:
  • The effective take up of EU recommended policies (Impact)
  • Adequacy of NSR, effectiveness of guidance notes; reporting cycle; visibility and awareness (Effectiveness)
Some general findings (III)

- Most research covers the EU-15
  - Fewer studies for the New Member States

- Very strong representation of the Nordic Member States (DK, SW, FI)

- Germany, France and UK well covered.

- Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain addressed in five to seven studies. (other old Member States are covered even less often)
3. Assessing methodologies

• Which concepts, indicators and methods have been used (Deliverables 1 and 4)

• Reveal some important methodological caveats
Assessing methodologies (II)

• Wide array of concepts used
• Often imprecise about definitions

  • E.g. distinguish ‘policy diffusion’ from ‘policy transfer’ and ‘policy convergence’

  • ‘Policy learning’ (most cited concept) with wide variety of understandings
Assessing methodologies (III)

• Only few scholars rely on clearly operationalized indicators
  • OMC often only one among many possible influences

• Almost all researchers rely on a qualitative methodology
  • Often no insight in interview material or even questionnaires
Assessing methodologies (IV)

- Relatively few studies on OMC’s effectiveness (often focus on ‘early years’)

- Questions with regard to the technical, procedural dimensions have been omitted (eg EC guidelines)

- New context (streamlining, Integrated Guidelines)?
Assessing evaluation results

- Few clearly specified hypotheses about the impact/effectiveness of OMC

- ‘Selection bias’ in OMC studies (looking for *any evidence*) suggesting OMC had an impact

- One-shot studies: not really comparable over time
Assessing evaluation results (II)

In substantive terms:

• Increased the salience of efforts to tackle long-recognized national problems
  - e.g. early exit from the labour market, childcare provision, gender segregation, and the integration of immigrants

• In several countries the EU commitment to eradicate poverty pushed the fight against poverty and the activation issue higher on the domestic inclusion agenda
Assessing evaluation results (III)

- Social OMC put new issues on the domestic political agenda:
  - In a variety of countries (old and new Member States)
  - On a variety of topics (including activation, social exclusion, child poverty and the marginalization of different ethnic groups)

- OMC’s concepts, indicators and categories penetrated in domestic policy making.
  - E.g. European risk-of-poverty norm acquired a broader mobilizing character, at least in some countries
Assessing evaluation results (IV)

In *procedural* terms:

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

- OMC led to a more **strategic approach** in social policymaking
  - Planning, targeting, resources assigned, policy analysis
  - For many countries “governance by objectives” was an entirely new feature in social policymaking

- EES and Social OMC promoted **evidence-based policymaking**
  - Monitoring and evaluation, use of indicators, data sources and analytical capacity
Conclusions

• Main finding → considerable impact on Member States’ policies and politics (striking)
  – this impact varies between countries, strands and types of impact
  – Variations in involvement depends on the outcome
  – More impact if looking “on the ground”

• Which direction and scope?
  – Beneficial effects (raising awareness, increasing involvement, improving coordination )
  – Undesirable effects (liberalization discourses neoliberal solutions )
Conclusion (II)

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

• Including shaping of discourses and deliberation

• Providing legitimacy for economic actors to further bring social protection and social inclusions under their influence

• The EU together with Member States and anti-poverty organizations developed the discourses and policy analyses that are at the heart of the OMC procedure
Conclusion (III)

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

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

• **New findings** from the analysis (including):
  – Not clear-cut distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ modes of governance
  – Lack of impact of ‘harder’ policy coordination mechanisms (BEPC, EES)
  – The ECJ’s actual use of soft law mechanisms
  – Effects and link of the OMC on/with the ESF

• **Theoretical analyses** → over or under-estimate

• **Empirical analyses** → rich empirical data, more nuanced picture
  (institutionalization and Europeanisation concepts)

  → Fit/misfit presumption less indicative of OMC impact
  → More useful analysis: how actors consider and use OMC
    (for agenda-setting, conflict resolution, maintaining focus on a policy
    issue, developing a policy dialogue, etc)