

Eva Krick & Cathrine Holst: Governance by hybrid advisory committees – a hallmark of social democracy?

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Abstract

This study focuses on ad hoc policy advisory committees that bring together experts and stakeholders to propose public policies on the basis of consensus. These kinds of committees are often considered to be a typical governance mechanism of the social democratic model of regulation and policy-making known from the Nordic countries. We challenge this view by comparing the Norwegian system of committee governance with those of Germany and the European Union and point out the central role of coordination and consensus in all three systems. Relying on existing and original research, and contrary to the assumption of a *distinct* Nordic regime, we find significant similarities between the three committee governance systems when it comes to organisational features, the kind of expertise produced and the committees' governance functions. Most remarkable is the prevalence of hybrid, tripartite committees that draw together interest groups, civil servants and researchers in all three systems. We show that these kinds of ad hoc advisory committees tend to generate a kind of coordinated, *negotiated expertise* where notions of validity and objectivity are connected not only to cognitive quality, but also to the breadth of viewpoints that are integrated. Moreover, the Nordic committee system of Norway stands out with only few distinctive qualities, and it is not obvious how the notion of 'social democracy' helps illuminating these features. To help shed light on the striking resemblances we find across systems, we develop a notion of *consensus-oriented political and epistemological systems*, which may be a useful complement to the notion of Nordic social democracy.

Keywords: Policy advisory committee, policy-making, Nordic model, governance, negotiated expertise, consensus

The focus of this article is on temporary (or ‘ad hoc’) *policy advisory committees* that bring together experts and affected parties to deliberate and reach agreement on new public policies. Such consensus-oriented, multi-partite and policy-preparing committees have often been pinpointed as a typical governance mechanism of the social democratic model of regulation and policy-making known from the Nordic countries (e.g. Arter, 2008; Brandal, Bratberg & Thorsen, 2013; Brochmann, 2019; Witoszek & Midttun, 2018).

We scrutinise this assumption with our study that looks beyond the Scandinavian context, asking: Are hybrid, consensus-oriented policy advisory committees a hallmark of the social democratic ‘Nordic model’ of governance or do they in fact also play a similar role in other, non-Nordic political systems? If they do characterise other systems to a comparable extent, what does this mean for the conceptual clarity and explanatory power of the notion of a social democratic Nordic model?

We approach these questions relying on a comparison of the Norwegian system of committee governance – as an example of the social democratic, Nordic regime type – with the ad hoc committee systems in Germany and the European Union (EU), and identify *the dominant type* of temporary advisory committees in the three systems, *the kind of expertise* produced, and the committees’ *governance functions*.

Relying on existing and original research, and contrary to an assumption of a distinct Nordic regime, we find significant similarities in the committee governance systems of the three polities. Most remarkable is the prevalence of hybrid, tripartite committees that interest groups, civil servants and researchers in all three systems. We also show that these kinds of ad hoc committees tend to generate a kind of *negotiated expertise* where notions of validity and objectivity are connected not only to cognitive quality, but also to the variety of viewpoints that are integrated. Moreover, the Nordic committee system of Norway stands out with only few distinct qualities, and it is not obvious how the notion of ‘social democracy’ helps illuminating these features.

We therefore follow an alternative path and focus on the many similarities across the Nordic and non-Nordic contexts in focus here. We connect the notable similarities across our cases and across established distinctions of regime-types in the literature on policy-making. On these grounds and by interconnecting the hitherto separate theoretical discussions about democratic

and epistemological systems (see Lijphart, 2012; Campbell & Pedersen, 2014; Jasanoff, 2005; Maasen & Weingart, 2005), we develop an integrated notion of *consensus-oriented political and epistemological systems* that sheds light on the striking resemblances we find across systems and that may be a useful complement to the notion of Nordic social democracy.

Our study responds to a lack of comparative knowledge of advisory mechanisms and regimes, generally, and more specifically to a lack of perspectives that look beyond more conventional (comparative) systems analyses which would tend to compare similarities and differences within the Nordic region or contribute more exclusively to EU studies. In conceptual terms, we contribute on three fronts:

First, this article develops the notion of ‘negotiated expertise’ further (see Krick, 2015) and thereby addresses a persisting bias towards the role of ‘science’ in knowledge studies. During the last decades, social studies of knowledge have advanced our understanding of the role of expertise in policy advice by questioning ‘purity notions’ of a value-free science and simple expectations of ‘science speaking truth to power’ (see e.g. Douglas, 2009; Jasanoff, 2005). Studies in the field have shown a keen eye for ‘boundary organisations’ that translate and mediate between science and politics (Guston, 2001) and where it is not ‘science proper’ (Lentsch & Weingart, 2011, p. 353) that takes centre stage, but a certain kind of ‘policy-relevant’ (Jasanoff, 2011), or ‘regulatory’ science (Irwin et al., 1997) that is ‘usable’ and speaks to a variety of audiences (Haas, 2004). Research on the knowledge-policy-nexus has also analysed the use of expert knowledge in the policy realm and pointed to the often close interconnections of the political and epistemic functions of expertise (Bouwen, 2004; Boswell, 2009; Krick & Holst, 2018). Yet, the standard perspective on policy advice and expert knowledge in the policy context still tends to focus on research-based expertise and academics in the role of experts and does not sufficiently and systematically consider the diversity of policy-relevant knowledge. In this chapter, we attend explicitly to expert advisory institutions that cross social boundaries, e.g. by way of involving different actors types and by being located at the intersection of several societal realms (such as research, business and politics).

Secondly, we add with our analysis an epistemic dimension to the concept of ‘consensus democracy’, and a political regime dimension to discussions of knowledge production, building on and developing comparative analyses of democratic and epistemological systems. So far, democratic theory has advanced our understanding of the characteristics of ‘consensus

democracies' compared to 'majoritarian democracies' (Lijphart, 2012), while scholars of knowledge production have developed ideas of consensus-oriented 'knowledge regimes' (Campbell & Pedersen, 2014) and 'civic epistemologies' (Jasanoff, 2005). This article integrates these two strands of conceptual development to shed light on our findings.

Thirdly, we contribute to discussions of social democracy. The notion of 'social democracy' has been given different meanings, ranging from the closely specified to the wide and generic. While often connected to the agenda of social democratic parties and movements, social democracy can also be presented as a variant of a 'coordinated market economy' (Hall & Soskice, 2001), or as a particular 'welfare regime', distinguishable from more 'liberal' or 'conservative' regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Importantly, social democracy can refer to a more comprehensive political and societal model, characterised by 'social' democracy and ideas of citizenship (e.g. Hernes, 1987; Nussbaum, 1990; Walzer, 1998), and the corresponding governance mechanisms and institutions that allow for the broad inclusion of affected interests. This is the perspective we take here. On this systems level, interrogations of 'social democracy' are not seldom connected to analyses of the social organisation, policies and governance of the Nordic countries, and to discussions of a 'Nordic model', on the assumption that Nordic polities and societies exemplify social democracy in its core or most developed, version. However, our study indicates that we should be cautious when stretching the concept of social democracy to include governance mechanisms and to assume that institutions known from Nordic countries are exclusive to that region and a hallmark of social democracy. Our findings indicate, on the contrary, that committee systems of a kind that is often associated with a Nordic style social democracy extend to regimes where social democratic parties have played a limited role, and which do not qualify as social democratic welfare regimes or coordinated market economies.

After a presentation of the research design and an overview of the variables that the analysis is based on (section 1), organisational parameters of the three advisory committee systems are described, one after the other, in sections 2-4. Section 5 discusses the findings from a comparative point of view, develops the perspective of consensus-oriented political and epistemological cultures and takes a concluding view on the study's limitations and future research trajectories. Particular attention is given to implications of our study for discussions of social democracy and the Nordic model.

1. Approach

In the following, we will argue for our case selection, elaborate on the data base of our analysis and describe our analytical framework.

By focusing on Germany, Norway and the EU, our case selection strategy cuts across traditional research designs in a way we believe enriches our understanding of governance styles, knowledge regimes and committee systems more specifically. Conventionally, distinctions in comparative political research are drawn between EU- and non-EU-countries, between EU studies and national governance studies, or between Nordic and other European countries. Our cross-cutting design enables us to analyse whether a committee system that is embedded in a Nordic social democracy has outstanding characteristics compared to Germany – conventionally described as a conservative welfare regime – and the EU, which is often depicted as ‘neo-liberal’. Another reason for our selection strategy is that in all three systems ad hoc advisory committees have been described as forming important auxiliary governance structures, through which information and societal viewpoints are channelled into the early stages of policy-making (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2008; Krick, 2013; Metz, 2015; Ryymin, 2017; Siefken, 2007; Tellmann, 2016). We have, however, so far little knowledge of how these committee regimes compare to each other, and whether and in what ways a social democratic type stands out against the non-Nordic systems. One could assume, for example, that the EU system of ‘expert groups’ relies more strongly on experts, or that the two non-Nordic systems have less integrating, mediating functions, and lean more towards scientific expertise production, whereas the Norwegian system would have a stronger focus on stakeholder participation in line with social democratic traditions of broad inclusion of societal interests. Finally, our unusual design allows for a distinctive focus on those features that all three regimes share. As we will see, our comparative approach traces major similarities in these three systems’ policy advice regimes and epistemological cultures that have so far been undetected in research. Moreover, it highlights the interconnectedness of consensus-oriented political systems and consensus-oriented collective epistemologies.

The systems analyses draw on existing and original data about the three policy advisory regimes, and the committee systems more specifically, and build to a considerable extent, but not exclusively, on studies conducted by the authors. For the EU and Norway, quantitative studies of the committee system and its participation patterns exist (and are built on here). Because the German system lacks a register of temporary committees, there are no systematic

studies of the whole population of committees, and our analysis here therefore mainly relies on comparative, medium-n-studies and the overviews given by the government in parliamentary interpellation procedures.

The criteria we analyse in all three committee regimes are the degree of formalisation and transparency of the committee regime, the committees’ autonomy from the government, the respective participation patterns (or composition) of the committees and the typical decision rules they follow (see table 1). On the basis of this systematic description of organisational features, we draw conclusions about the *main governance functions* and the *kind of expertise generated* in these committees. We distinguish between the two main instrumental governance functions described in knowledge utilisation research, the interest mediation and the information and guidance function of knowledge (Boswell, 2009; Krick, 2015; Metz, 2015; Weiss, 1989). In terms of the expertise developed, we conceptualise a certain kind of policy advice that is consensually agreed upon by a diversity of advisors as ‘negotiated expertise’ (Krick 2015), which can be distinguished from scientific advice or ‘regulatory science’, provided by academics for policy-making.

Table 1: Organisational criteria and analytical conclusions

Organisational criteria	Analytical conclusions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree of formalisation and transparency of the committee regime • Degree of committees’ autonomy from the government • Committee composition in terms of members’ background (e.g. interest groups, academics, party politicians, ‘ordinary citizens’ etc.) • Decision rules (consensus or majority voting) 	<p>→ Instrumental governance functions (interest mediation and conflict solution vs. guidance and information function)</p> <p>→ Type of expertise developed (regulatory science vs. negotiated, coordinated expertise)</p>

2. The NOU system - Norwegian official reports

In Norway, most ad hoc commissions are part of the system of ‘Norges offentlige utredninger’ (NOU), which was established in 1972 and produces ‘Norwegian official reports’. There are relatively general guidelines for the establishment and organisation of temporary advisory committees, the conduct in committees and consultation procedures.¹ The reports are supposed

¹ <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/fb9f8af4b54844f2821589b3d73b821e/utredningsinstruksen.pdf>, <https://dfo.no/filer/Fagområder/Utredninger/Veileder-til-utredningsinstruksen.pdf>, See also https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/fad/vedlegg/statsforvaltning/veileder_utvalgsarbeid_2007_fad.pdf, for the most important guidelines.

to follow a standard template, respond to the mandate, base their recommendations on adequate knowledge, systematic assessment and relevant arguments, and elaborate on financial and administrative consequences. The Gender Equality Act furthermore requires gender balance in public committees and boards, and encourages the inclusion of different interests and competences in ways that fit with the committees' purpose and mandates. The reports, mandates and composition are publicly available on the government's websites² and a public hearing during which any individual or organisation can submit a statement on the NOU report is mandatory after submission of the report.³

Whenever possible, NOUs are bound to deliver consensual reports. The Commission chair holds the main responsibility for achieving consensus and voting serves as a last resort (Tellmann, 2016). There are furthermore considerable links between the government and the committee (Christensen & Holst, 2017; Lindvall & Rothstein, 2006; Nordby, 1999), even if there is less of direct government control of the content of the report. NOU committees are set up by the government or one of its ministries. The sponsor formulates the committee's mandate and selects members, sometimes in consultation with other affected ministries. Civil servants constitute secretariats, hold a considerable share of seats in the committees and they come second when it comes to chairing committees (Christensen & Hesstvedt, 2018). However, research so far indicates that secretariats are primarily loyal to the commission chair (Brochmann, 2019) and the number of civil servants amongst committee members has dropped. Yet, this group still constitutes the largest member category in NOUs, followed by researchers and interest group representatives (Christensen & Hesstvedt, 2018) and civil servants in the secretariats can be expected to hold at least secondary loyalties to their principal, the department leadership.

In accordance with corporatist traditions, interest groups' representation is substantive in several policy areas, and some interest groups have the right to appoint NOU members (Christiansen et al., 2010, p. 29; Rommetvedt et al., 2012). Even if the share of committee members with an interest group background has declined since the 1970s, the tripartite committee that consists of civil servants, interest groups and researchers remains the dominant type, followed by constellations of researchers and civil servants. Yet, the system is dynamic

² The National Library of Norway (www.nb.no) and the Norwegian government (www.regjeringen.no)

³ There are detailed guidelines for consultation and hearing among affected ministries and other public units, including a public council for business sector interests (*Regelrådet fro næringslivet* organised under the Ministry of Finance).

and some shifts have been observed in recent studies. For instance, the position of researchers has overall grown at the expense of civil servants (Christensen & Hesstvedt, 2018; Christiansen et al., 2010). Researchers' share of members and chairs, as well as the amount of academic references in the reports, have increased significantly (Christensen & Holst, 2017). A tendency towards setting up 'technical' committees that leave out interest groups has also been described for some policy fields (Öberg et al., 2011).

In mixed NOUs, different member categories contribute and negotiate different kinds of expertise. The sectoral and local expertise of interest groups and politicians supplements the scientific knowledge of professors and the regulatory knowledge of law-makers and their claims are deliberated and integrated into a consensual policy package. In those policy fields where interest groups dominate (e.g. labour and welfare policy), this kind of expertise qualifies well for interest mediation and coordination. Yet, NOUs are increasingly required to base their recommendations more explicitly on scientific evidence and pursue cost/benefit analyses.⁴ These regulations, together with the strengthened position of researchers within NOUs may pull the system towards research- and evidence-based knowledge and emphasis on 'scientific independence' and academic validity criteria. Overall, committee reports may better qualify for information and guidance than for interest mediation and coordination.

3. The German system of ad hoc advisory committees

Ad hoc advisory committees on the German federal level are usually set up for a period of one to five years to provide policy recommendations on one specific issue, typically in response to a public debate about a specific event or scandal, a regulatory loophole or public calls for reform. They are usually based on a simple ministerial decision and present a single joint report at the end, on which the group is expected to agree consensually (albeit with the latitude to publish dissenting opinions on individual points) (Färber, 2005, p. 141; Weingart & Lentsch, 2008). Decisions are taken when nobody opposes openly and voting is usually avoided (Krick, 2013).

⁴ See also <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/om-forholdet-mellom-politisk-ledelse-og-embetsverk/id2626841/>

The degree of disclosure on the German ad hoc committee system is exceptionally low. There are no horizontal administrative rules governing setup and operation of ad hoc committees and there is no public register of committees.⁵

The degree of organisational autonomy and formalisation varies between two subtypes of ad hoc committees. There are, first, slightly more formalised ad hoc committees that are often called ‘expert commissions’. While providing for various transmission channels between the committee and the sponsor, these committees can develop a life of their own and cannot be completely steered by the responsible ministry (Färber, 2007, p. 151f.; Krick, 2013; Hustedt et al., 2013, p. 17; Weingart & Lentsch, 2008). They are usually chaired by independent personalities, not by civil servants, and based on their own by-laws.

The recently accumulating informal ‘consultation rounds’ or ‘dialogues’ (Brown et al., 2005; Bundestag Official Printed Papers (BOPP), 14/7722; Czada, 2014, Gohl, 2004; Heinze, 2013; Krick, 2010; 2018; Siefken, 2009), by contrast, which can also be seen as ad hoc advisory committees, are more closely linked with the appointing authority. They tend to have governmental departments chairing the sessions and a more fluid membership structure that follows from invitation rather than appointment of participants, for instance. The pronounced involvement of the public administration into these committees is conducive to a smooth transmission of recommendations, and adds to their policy impact, but it also makes these arenas more vulnerable to political steering (Färber, 2007, 157; Krick, 2019).

As far as comparative studies exist, we can see that a broad composition of special interest representatives, researchers, civil servants, and sometimes MPs, is the general rule in German ad hoc committees (BOPP, 12/8378; Krick, 2010; 2015; 2018; Weingart & Lentsch, 2008; Murswieck, 1994; Siefken, 2007; 2009). Existing studies suggest that interest groups make up the largest share among committee members, followed by civil servants and researchers (Siefken, 2009; Krick, 2018). Although researchers are typically among the members, they neither dominate these settings numerically, nor culturally (BOPP, 12/8378; Krick, 2010; 2018; Weingart & Lentsch, 2008). Many members of ad hoc committees fulfil the double role of an expert and of a societal representative, irrespective of their background (cf. BOPP, 14/7722, 1;

⁵ The document that comes closest to a public register are the reports required by the Federal Act on the Appointment to Bodies (‘Bundesgremienbesetzungsbericht’). This report is published once in a legislative period but it only lists those advisory committees that the responsible ministry considers ‘essential’ – and this generally does not cover even the most formalized and influential ad hoc committees.

Krick, 2015; Weingart & Lentsch, 2008, p. 123). The policy-experienced, pragmatic researcher with cross-cutting knowledge is given preference over the ‘pure professor’ and stakeholders are often addressed ‘in a personal capacity’ (Färber, 2007, p. 140, 152ff.; Weingart & Lentsch, 2008, p. 124). The ‘neutral voice of science’ (Grossekkettler, 2005) is used to help solve societal conflicts and to create the impression of scientifically approved, trustworthy solutions (Weingart & Lentsch, 2008, p. 131), but academic practices and analyses carry limited weight in hybrid ad hoc committees (Färber, 2007; Krick, 2010).

These features qualify the committees particularly for interest mediation, coordination and consensus-building as well as for (multilateral) bargaining and cooperative law-making (Czada, 2014, p. 117; Gohl, 2004; Krick, 2010; 2018). Alongside these instrumental purposes, individual cases are of course also used for strategic political purposes, i.e. to restrain political competitors, to (re)gain the capacity to act, to shift responsibility or postpone decision-making (Brohm 1987; BOPP 14/7722, 1; Czada 2014; Färber 2007, 137ff.; Hustedt et al. 2013, 16; Lamping 2006; Siefken 2007; von Blumenthal 2002; Weingart/Lentsch 2008, 119ff.). Yet, the ‘purely symbolic’ use has been described as uncommon (Färber, 2005; Siefken, 2007).

The policy advice produced spans different social realms and realities and represents (in the ideal case) a particularly policy-relevant body of expertise (Färber, 2007, p. 142; Haas, 2004). In accordance with this, Jasanoff (2005) describes German ad hoc advisory committees to be “constituted as microcosms of the potentially interested segment of society; judgements produced by such settings are seen as unbiased not only by virtue of the participants’ individual qualifications, but even more so by the incorporation of all relevant viewpoints into the collective output” (p. 220).

4. The EU Commission’s expert groups

The degree of regulation and formalisation of the Commission’s ‘expert group’ system is relatively high and growing, though not governed by law like in the United States, for instance. There are administrative rules for committee operation and setup, a public register of expert groups that provides a growing spectrum of information on the committees, organisational by-laws for most committees, and codes of conduct for committee members that detail in particular the amount of disclosure expected of them.⁶

⁶ See for this data the Commission’s register and ‘Groups and members of the register of expert groups and other similar entities’ URL: <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=transparency.showList>.

Most expert groups are set up temporarily and do not require a formal Commission decision. The by-laws and the status of participants (they are members, not invitees) provide for a certain organisational autonomy of expert groups, although they are, in terms of staff for instance, also institutionally coupled with the Commission. Several transmission channels and possible feedback loops exist: For instance, the responsible Directorate General usually staffs a committee secretariat with civil servants and it is not unusual for Commission officials to attend expert group meetings (Metz, 2015, p. 58, 105). A recent medium-n-study additionally indicates that chair positions tend to be held by EU Commission officials (Krick & Gornitzka, 2019).

A public register on expert groups provides ever more information and administrative rules are getting increasingly detailed. Collective decision-making within expert groups follows consensus procedures, with a majority voting fall-back option that is codified in the standard by-laws (European Commission, 2016a, p. 11) and the committees usually reach the goal of consensus (European Commission 2016b). The composition of expert groups varies considerably across cases. The actor type that makes up the largest share of members are interest representatives (77.5%), followed by member state representatives who are present in 70% of expert groups (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2014). The most prevalent constellation are expert groups that are exclusively composed of member state representatives, followed by tripartite groups that joint together researchers, member state representatives and interest groups (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2014; Metz, 2015). As Metz (2015, p. 185f.) shows, the Commission often consults a mixed stakeholder group alongside a member state group on the same issue. All members are attributed the status of an *expert*, a bearer of specialised knowledge, irrespective of their organisational affiliation, professional background or academic track record. This encompassing expert status, which is by no means confined to the scientist, is reflected by the official name of these committees ('expert group'), the horizontal rules governing expert groups and the Commission's descriptions of its committee system.⁷ To this extent, this is unique to the EU. It is not unusual for policy advisory systems to try to distinguish between the status of an independent expert on the one hand and an interest representative on the other and this is something that civil society groups push for in the case of the EU's committee system.⁸ On the EU level, the two roles blur to a considerable extent and this is

⁷ See European Commission (2016a) as well as the Commission's definition of an expert group and of the purpose of the register: <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=faq.faq&aide=2>.

⁸ Cf. for instance the US system, codified in the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), and the assessment of the most recent expert group reform by Corporate Europe Observatory (2016): The Commission's new rules on

constitutive to the Commission's embracing approach to external sectoral and regional input. It can be linked to the Commission's exceptional need for intra-national coordination, and also to the often cited, yet contested, limited in-house resources of the Commission, as compared with national administrations (Metz, 2015; Moodie, 2016). In its relationship with these experts, the Commission stresses its need for the 'technical information' that stakeholders of different economic sectors and regions can provide in order to develop efficient policy solutions (European Commission, 2016b; Mazey & Richardson, 2001). EU-level stakeholders adapt to this by using information as "access goods", i.e. providing the necessarily sectoral information in exchange for participation and influence (Bouwen, 2004, p. 340; Broscheid & Coen, 2007). The notion of reliable expertise that this approach radiates is a broad one that spans all kinds of knowledge, experience, skill and information as legitimate sources (Metz, 2015; Moodie, 2016). Such expertise is likely to be very policy-relevant and usable but, given the lack of emphasis by the Commission on either independence of the individual experts, nor balance of viewpoints between them, it is less evidence-based and impartial.

As in other advisory systems, expert groups are used for strategic purposes as well as for instrumental, problem-solving purposes, and this often simultaneously (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2008; 2015; see also Holst & Molander 2018). Although in the Commission's communication, the main instrumental function of the system is the provision of 'technical' information (European Commission, 2016a, b; see also Rimkute & Haverland, 2015), expert groups are just as regularly, and often concurrently, used for coordination and interest mediation (Metz, 2015; Tørnblad, 2018). In addition, expert groups reflect mutual dependencies of the involved actor groups and are used for resource exchange between them (Broscheid & Coen, 2007; Metz, 2015; Robert, 2010; (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2015).

5. Social democracy and beyond: Consensus-oriented political and epistemological systems

Allowing for some variation, the three ad hoc committee systems analysed are strikingly similar when it comes to central aspects of the composition of committees, their coupling with the parent body and their internal decision rules, as well as their governance functions, political roles and the type of expertise generated. The tripartite committee that consists of researchers,

Expert Groups: the good, the bad, the ugly and the even uglier. Commission reforms fall far short of civil society, Parliament and Ombudsman expectations, UR: <https://corporateeurope.org/expert-groups/2016/06/commissions-new-rules-expert-groups-good-bad-ugly-and-even-uglier>.

interest groups and civil servants is the dominant constellation in Germany and Norway and comes second in the EU. All three systems follow consensus rules, and more specifically, the rule of ‘tacit consent’ (Krick, 2017), whereby a decision is taken when nobody opposes openly, while voting is avoided. The committees are closely linked to the parent body and provide for numerous transmission channels, but there is no relationship of delegation and control because the committees are not part of the government apparatus in the narrower sense and the majority of members are not civil servants. The advice produced by these committees qualifies both for interest mediation and coordination, and for information, ‘enlightenment’ and guidance.

We should emphasise that these are by no means self-evident features of policy advice systems, or of advisory committee regimes more specifically. For instance, our findings contrast with the UK where the government explicitly discourages the consensus norm in policy advisory committees (UK Government office for science 2011; see also Mouffe, 2013 on the oppressive potential of consensus norms). The permanent advisory committees in Germany exemplify another interesting contrast to the ad hoc advisory regimes in focus here. Permanent advisory committees in Germany tend to be dominated by researchers and are much more detached from the sponsoring authority than the hybrid ad hoc committees in this study. By scholars, their status has been described as that of a ‘political conscience’ and an ‘honest broker’ who provides rational, uninterested solutions (Färber, 2005; Weingart & Lentsch, 2008).

Academics may also be granted a special role in the multipartite, hybrid committees in focus here, although the expert role is by no means confined to academics in these contexts, but can in fact be attributed to all members, irrespective of their background, by the sponsoring authority or by other actors in the political process. Moreover, one and the same participant can hold the double role of an expert or specialist on the one hand and a representative or stakeholder on the other (Brown, 2008; Krick, 2015; Maasen & Weingart, 2005). The expertise generated by such committees likely builds on a more diverse set of validity standards than policy advice produced by scientists alone. The hybrid advisory bodies of Germany, Norway and the EU generate a kind of *negotiated expertise*, the reliability of which relies considerably on the breadth of viewpoints it reflects and integrates, and the consensual closure it stands for. One could even consider it ‘objective’, i.e. unbiased towards certain interests or preferences, because of the scientists present, the variety of positions and perspectives involved and the inclusive decision-rules applied (Beck, 2012; Jasanoff, 2005). Its validity rests arguably just as much on the reconciliation of a plurality of different societal perspectives, on experience and

deliberation and on ‘bargaining’, as on numerical evidence, scientific methods, the ‘arguing’ mode of communication and academic independence. It radiates the ‘double authority’ of technical know-how *and* social representation, of expertise *and* democratic participation (Jasanoff, 2005; see also Dyson, 2005; Krick, 2015, 2019; Weingart & Lentsch, 2008; Holst & Molander, 2017) and is thus – in the ideal case – particularly ‘socially robust’, ‘usable’ and ‘policy-relevant’ expertise (Färber, 2005; Haas, 2004; Jasanoff, 2005; Weingart & Lentsch, 2008, p. 120, 131). This ‘negotiated expertise’ that is generated within hybrid committees thus not only has epistemic value as a well-informed, expert-approved solution to a problem, it also has political value. It has been agreed upon not only by experts, but also by those concerned by the policy issue in question, and the conflict resolution it stands for likely provides for smooth legislation and stakeholder compliance.

Negotiated expertise – this hybrid of a package deal and a knowledge-based solution – is arguably particularly valuable in ‘consensus democracies’, where power is institutionally dispersed in many ways and where policy-making thus relies strongly on broad inclusion, proportionality, compromise-building and agreement between different societal and political viewpoints (Lijphart, 2012; see Mansbridge, 1980; Olsen, 1972; Steiner, 1971 for similar systems analyses). The consensus-oriented model of democracy is typical for the North of Europe and contrasts with the majoritarian, Westminster type that has spread from the UK to Commonwealth countries. “Its rules and institutions aim at broad participation in government and broad agreement on policies that government should pursue” (Lijphart, 2012, p. 2). While there are non-trivial differences between the cases, the EU, Germany and Norway all clearly belong to the consensus-oriented type of political regime on Lijphart’s executive-parliament-dimension, referring to whether power is either centralised or shared and distributed between key actors within the respective party systems, electoral systems, government formations, legislative-executive relations and interest group regimes. Proportional representation, multiparty parliaments and political leaderships as well as (semi-)corporatist interest group relations characterise all three systems. They additionally disperse power geographically to a considerable extent, with the EU and Germany as federal systems and Norway being characterised by strong regional identities, differences and corresponding political liabilities. All three systems accordingly comprise a large number of (potential veto-) players, forge supermajorities in the legislative process and developed policy-making styles that are characterised by “inclusiveness, bargaining, and compromise” (Lijphart, 2012, p. 2).

The negotiated expertise generated by hybrid advisory committees does not only facilitate political decision-making under institutional conditions that restrict majority rule, it also speaks to a certain agreement- and inclusion-oriented form of collective *epistemology*. Consensual agreement and broad involvement in these settings not only seems to enable binding and stable political decisions, it also provides a more reliable basis for understanding the world, finding closure and developing valid solutions to problems. The key epistemological role of consensus has also been pointed out in selected comparative studies of knowledge organisation and public sense-making. While the literature on ‘policy advisory committees’ has focused on the Westminster model, contributions such as Jasanoff’s studies on ‘national civic epistemologies’ (2005) and Campbell and Pedersen’s (2014) studies of ‘knowledge regimes’ have been cross-cutting, broader approaches, and included examples of consensus democracies that we can extrapolate from. Both analysed the German mode of expertise production and Campbell and Petersen additionally analysed Denmark, also a consensus democracy in Lijphart’s terms. They demonstrate that these countries’ culturally specific ways of knowing and public sense-making (‘civic epistemologies’) as well as the respective policy research organisations and the institutions that govern them (‘knowledge regimes’) tend to orient themselves towards consensus, compromise and coordination of a variety of different viewpoints, while the US-American epistemology, for instance, is more oriented towards competition and quantitative evidence.

Against the background of our observations and the comparative studies of democracy and collective epistemology referred to, we assume that political decision-making and cultures of expertise production as well as the corresponding notions of political legitimacy and knowledge validity are related. Interlinkages of political and epistemological cultures – and of the need for consensus, compromise and inclusion within both realms under certain institutional and cultural circumstances – are particularly obvious when we look at boundary institutions at the policy-knowledge-nexus that have both epistemological and political functions, such as the advisory committees we focus on here.

Consequently, our study does not debunk, but problematises the idea of a Nordic social democratic governance model. Hybrid advisory committees clearly do constitute an important pillar in Nordic governance – as earlier research has suggested and our study confirms. However, we find that similar committee systems are equally central and have overlapping features in our two cases that are have not typically been considered social democratic welfare

and production regimes, or indeed classic ‘social’ democracies. We believe these results speak to deeper issues in the scholarly discourse on social democracy and the Nordic systems that have yet to be properly addressed.

First, since ‘social democracy’ has different dimensions and a range of quite different meanings, discussions should be clearer about the more specific underlying understandings and references. Obviously, political systems may have overlapping welfare policies, without sharing an overall governance model, for instance. It partly follows from this, second, that there is an ongoing need to refine regime typologies and thus take account of societal changes, consider finer distinctions, and admit a fresh look on how different polities are categorised. Recent studies have pointed to considerable shifts in welfare regimes since the publication of Esping-Andersen’s pathbreaking typology in 1990. Whether the German welfare regime still qualifies as conservative, for instance, despite the dramatic shifts of the last decades, is at least contested (see Seeleib-Kaiser 2016). Such efforts at refinement promise to clarify what unites political and epistemological systems across the Nordic/non-Nordic divide, but also likely tease out the more exclusive features of polities that can substantiate the notion of Nordic social democracy. They may also protect against a tendency to favour similarities over differences when studying the Nordic model, and so control for a potential ‘congruence bias’. Third, this suggests a need for more unconventional comparative designs in attempts to clarify the meaning and explanatory power of ‘social democracy’, and indeed the Nordic model. In particular, there is need for more studies across the Nordic/non-Nordic divide. This will safeguard, fourth, against a tendency to assume that resemblances between the Nordic countries are at the same time features that distinguish Nordic social democracy from the rest of the world.

Finally, our study has reminded us of the need to distinguish between ‘social’ democracy as an inclusive ideal of participation and citizenship and the features of real world regimes, for example in the Nordic region, that are often characterised as social democracies. Here, our finding of an increasing role of academics relative to affected groups in the Norwegian committee system stands out against the other two systems, and is particularly thought-provoking, as it shows how ambitious social ideals of democracy may be combined with substantive and increasing amounts of ‘elitism’ in practice.

This study has several limitations, which can be taken as indicators for future research trajectories. First, this study has focused on three selected consensus-oriented systems. Yet,

there is reason to believe that other consensus systems would rely similarly on such coordination mechanisms. An extension of the analysis to the other European political systems described as ‘consensus democracies’ (i.e. the Low countries, other Nordic or German-speaking countries; see Lijphart, 2012), promises further insights into forms and characteristics of consensual decision-making. Second, our study has focused on the status quo and has not traced shifts and dynamics within the systems in any systematic way. Recent findings on scientisation tendencies in the Norwegian committee system suggest that longitudinal comparative studies are another interesting line to explore. Third, ad hoc committees are only one part of a countries’ knowledge regime and advisory system and they are not the only structure where policy coordination takes place. Other important sources of expertise in the policy realm that complement these structures in all three systems are executive agencies and commissioned research, for instance. Examples of other policy coordination arenas are the German conciliation committee or the EU’ inter-institutional trilogies. Since ad hoc policy advisory committees represent just one little piece within larger systems of policy- and sense-making they need to be embedded into these contexts for a more complete picture of the respective political cultures and civic epistemologies. In line with this, and finally, this study of course has no bearing on robust findings of differences in, for example, welfare regimes, wage bargaining systems and citizenship ideals that may substantiate the idea of a Nordic style social democracy, and we cannot rule out that future studies tease out patterns of policy-making and knowledge production that speak more clearly to the notion of a Nordic social democratic governance model. To be sure, this is an empirical question that needs to be further investigated, but as our study has shown, the picture is more complex than conventionally conceived.

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